German Migrants in County Dublin. An Anthropological Investigation of Transnational Migration in Present-Day Ireland

According to a recent Human Development Report published by the UNESCO in 2009, the number of people immigrating into a country in which they haven’t been born increased on a global scale from circa 77.1 million to circa 213.9 million between 1960 and 2010. The continuing mobility of people was accompanied by an emergence of mostly interdisciplinary research projects studying the phenomenon of migration. At the beginning of the 21st century, a myriad of institutions spread over several countries carries out research on the subject matter. The different centres of Migration Studies look at migration processes from various angles1. As migration studies have always been an interdisciplinary enterprise, a good range of perspectives, terminologies, and methodological tools evolved throughout the last decades. Even though migration has become a significant topic in many disciplines, e.g. life and health science, four disciplines contribute constantly to the growth of knowledge on recent migration phenomena. A helpful characterisation of the field has been given by the anthropologist Stephen Vertovec. He describes Migration Studies as an interdisciplinary subject area that can transcend traditional classifications of the humanities or social sciences. The field of Migration Studies consists of four main disciplines, which are politics, sociology, geography and anthropology (Vertovec 2001: 576). In spite of common aims, scholars study the phenomenon differently. The different methods which they employ to the subject matter are seemingly a main difference between the four disciplines. After having briefly presented the interdisciplinary background of Migration Studies, I wish to outline an anthropological approach to migration and exhibit how it could contribute to the larger field of Migration Studies. To relate my approach to previous ethnographies of migration, a short historical review of anthropological research on migration is given. The study of migration has a long history in social and cultural anthropology. Barnard and Spencer (2010) as well as Kearney (1997) provide introductions into the anthropological contributions to the interdisciplinary domain. The origins of the anthropological interest in migration can be found in the late 19th century (Eades 1987). In the first decades of the 20th century, the research area was still in an early phase, most research was carried out on migration flows between

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1 The growing need for critical analyses of the recent evolutions of global migration flows is illustrated by the increasing number of research centres for Migration Studies. The ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS), the LSE Migration Studies Unit, the Migration Research Unit at UCL, the Irish Centre of Migration Studies in Cork, and the European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations (ERCOMER) in Utrecht are only a few examples of the trend.
rural and urban areas in the US caused by modern industrialisation and urbanisation. Classic studies on the dynamics of inter-group relations were carried out by Wirth, Redfield or other Chicago sociologists (Wirth 1948). Other works focused, however, on transatlantic migration. One of the major waves of migrants from Eastern and Southern Europe to North America, lasting from 1880 to 1910, was examined in ‘one of the most important ethnographic studies of migration’ by Thomas and Znaniecki between 1918 and 1920 (Kearney 1997: 323). These studies dealing with the Polish Peasant in North America and Europe are at the same time also the first accounts on migration processes based a systematically employed biographic method.

After the Second World War Barnes and Mitchell, British anthropologists of the Manchester School, stressed the significant role that social networks of families and friends play for migrants (e.g. Mitchell 1969). Their outcomes derived from fieldwork in the Copperbelt Province (Central Africa). A further ground-breaking study was accomplished by Meillassoux (1981) who focused on the indigenous domestic economy and migration in colonial West Africa. According to Kearney, one can distinguish four main theoretical perspectives of the anthropology of migration developing in the course of the second half of the last century. Firstly, modernisation theory delivered a theoretical perspective for lots of anthropological studies at the beginning of the 2nd half of the 20th century. Their lines of inquiries were criticised by scholars defending the dependence theory. A third theoretical perspective borrowed concepts from the articulation theory and looked at the different expressions of ideas and feelings in multi-cultural societies. Kearney further points out that identity formation processes became more and more important for anthropologists studying migration in the last decades (Kearney 1997: 324). Another tendency within the subject area anthropology of migration that emerged after 1950 studied ‘communities of migrants’ who came to the industrialised West in the early decades after the Second World War. Some elements of the history of anthropological inquiries into migration are still vital for my own project. Firstly, the biographic interview method is part of the research design of my project. Since the individualisation process (Beck 1992) took shape in many western societies, biographic research methods have been refined and enhanced over the last two decades or so. In the field of social networks, the increasing usage of social networking sites led to various re-conceptualisations of the classic concept of social networks (e.g. López-Rocha 2010). My research attempts to include those conceptualisations of social networks. Thirdly, a theoretical focus on identity construction is also given in my project.

The research design

In what follows, I will spell out the features of my research design, so that my research project can be located in the above sketched research landscape of Migration Studies. The piece of research I am going to present is one of the two case studies carried out throughout my project. The specific
phenomenon that is studied in my project is transnational migration. Transnational migration is a recently discovered and increasingly occurring type of migration. At first glance, it can be grasped as maintaining social relationships across borders of nation states. Scholars of the field of Migration Studies became more and more aware of this form of migration and recognise that

‘some migrants and their descendents remain strongly influenced by their continuing ties to their home country or by social networks that stretch across national borders’ (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1002).

The primary intent of my investigation will be to explore the experience of transnational migrants in the currently globalising world society (Appadurai 1996; Beck 1998; Wallerstein 2004) and to provide an emic account of the transnational German migrants in Dublin. According to the perspective on transnational migration established by Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004), transnational migration manifests itself in social fields that transcend national borders. It is assumed that the experience of the interviewee delivers insights into the transnational social field and can in that way reveal information on the emergence and evolution of the social field, its key social actors, the existing social networks as well as the existing power relations within the social field. Moreover, the narrative interviews exhibit the experience of the transnational migrants in the transnational social field. Therefore, the first objective will be to gather information on the transnational social field by means of the life story interview that exposes the personal experience of the migrants. The second objective will be to do fieldwork in the transnational social field. The reason of collecting data by both methods is to bring greater insight into the phenomenon of transnational migration. My strategy of inquiry is based on the decision that new knowledge in field of Migration Studies can be gathered by means of an in-depth study comprising two qualitative methods. Firstly, the life story interview has been chosen as the prime method since it can document the experience of the migrants and deliver insights into their everyday life by revealing their personal view on their lives (Breckner 2007: 116). This method can complement the existing surveys focusing more on the quantitative features of immigrated groups in Ireland. Secondly, yo-yo fieldwork (Wulff 2002) has been determined as a method of the project in order to support and test interim findings deriving from data collected with the interview. The request for yo-yo fieldwork is a response to epistemological debates in which scholars expressed the need for more flexible and dynamic modes of fieldwork in contemporary anthropology (Coleman 2006).

The Methods of the Investigation

Since its beginnings, the main method of anthropological research has been fieldwork. Already Malinowski who was engaged in the institutionalisation of anthropology at British universities in the 1st half of the 20th century conducted fieldwork and contributed significantly to the methodological literature on participant observation. In the wake of the writing culture debate (Clifford and Marcus
1986), many anthropologists looked for more flexible and mobile, multi-sited modes of fieldwork. The Swedish anthropologist Helena Wulff developed and established a new way of doing fieldwork. Her first study utilising this new type of fieldwork dealt with Irish dancing across the island of Ireland. Generally speaking, multi-local fieldwork includes places where ‘several local fields... are linked to each other in some kind of coherent structure’ (Hannerz 2001; quoted from Wulff 2002: 118). The field consists of a network of localities. Traditional fieldwork seems to be obsolete facing the mobility of cultures in the early 21st century. Whereas in the past anthropologists observed more or less uninterruptedly a social group in a village or an urban neighbourhood for one year or so, contemporary anthropologists choose more complex entities as a spatial unit for participant observation. Traditional urban fieldwork was done mostly within groups of close face-to-face relations and in places that were accessible ‘within walking distance’. As a consequence of the recent evolutions in the debates on participant observation, my fieldwork does not take place in a chosen quarter where German migrants would live according to previous research, but looks in interrupted series at particular socio-cultural events. An anthropological field in which fieldwork is done can also take the shape of a set of social networks if one takes the assertions of those into account that argue for a fundamental change for the notion of stable, localised cultures. The first phase of my research brought to light that a field consisting of transnational networks seemingly stretches between Ireland and Germany. The transnational networks consist of families, friends and further forms of close social relationships. The totality of the places observed can be grasped as a network; especially as the interviewees were often and friends or of other interviewees and often found as follow-up contacts during previous interviews. For the above mentioned reason, it was decided to continue doing yo-yo fieldwork throughout the following research phases in order to support the evidence gathered by the narrative interviews.

Over the last two decades, increasing usage of biographical techniques let to a revival of biographical research all across the social sciences. The life history research has been enhanced by new insights into mechanisms of current societies and by methodological innovations. As a result, its main tool, the biographical interview, has been refined. Each interview that has been conducted during the project, embarked upon a single question that guides more or less the entire narrative told by the interviewee.

Ethnographic data comprises often field notes and unstructured interviews. I decided that lightly-structured depth interviews fit best in my research design as this type of interview promises to provide rich descriptions of the interviewee's experiences. Lightly-structured depth interviews have been distinguished from structured and semi-structured interviews. Whereas the completely structured interview, the questionnaire, is usually used in the context of quantitative research and support finally the results of a survey, the semi-structured interview can support qualitative, ethnographic investigations. Unlike the semi-structured, the slightly structured one doesn't need an interview guide, but embarks upon a single question. In the course of the interview, the interviewer gives only short
prompts. The first question is the opening of the first section of the interview and reveals, if successful, a chain of associations tying together the main phases of a life story. Providing a useful system of classifications including many sorts of qualitative interviewing, Wengraf suggests the biographic-narrative-interpretive method (BNIM) approach as an appropriate tool to carry out social research, and characterises its conduct (Wengraf 2001: 142-4). The concrete course of an interview session is going to be roughly sketched in what follows. The first session of the interview is initiated by a single question. This first momentum of the narrative is always stimulated by the same question:

'I want you to tell me your life story,
all the events and experience which were important for you, up to now.
Start wherever you like.
Please take the time you need.
I'll listen first, I won't interrupt,
I'll just take some notes for after you've finished telling me about your experiences.'

(Wengraf 2001: 121).

Wengraf uses the abbreviation SQUIN (Single Question Aimed at Inducing Narrative) for this type of question and understands it as the 'completely open whole life story version' (Wengraf 2000: 121). This question can vary slightly from interview to interview, depending of course also on the behaviour of the interviewee. For migrants, who wish for instance to reflect merely on a specific phase of her or his life, the interviewer can also request for a partial biographic narrative (Wengraf 2001: 121).

According to Wengraf, it makes perfectly sense to split the conduct of the interview into three parts. He proposes thus to structure the interview in three sessions throughout which the behaviour of the interviewer changes slightly. The role of the interviewer is during that first session quite passive. The flow of the memories is only slightly influenced and further interventions are reduced to a minimum. As mentioned in the SQUIN, the interviewer takes notes during session one in regard with topics that he wishes to extend in the second session. Often a keyword like 'college' or 'New York' can be written down in order to have a reminder to ask later for further details about these life phases. The second session is dedicated to extract more story from the topics raised in the initial narrative (Wengraf 2001: 119). It should follow immediately after session one or, if circumstances permit, after a short break. It
is of paramount importance to ask the questions in strictly the same order as the topics emerged in the initial narrative. Moreover, Wengraf recommends using the language and wording of the interviewee (Wengraf 2001: 120). Questions that are posed can only ask for more story; only story-eliciting questions shall be used (ibid: 120). For the purpose of further follow-up questioning, notes shall be taken during session two as well. Whereas session one and two take usually place on the same day, the third one will be a separate interview that requires at least preliminary analyse of the material gathered in the two previous sessions. This session may include 'narrative-pointed “asking for story” questions' (ibid: 120). But, more important, this session can entail also structured question blocks what give the interview a more restricted flow. All topics that were not mentioned in the narrative, but seem to be supportive for the research design can be raised here. As my project is based on field-born knowledge and as the categories are going to be developed throughout coding procedures based on principles of the grounded theory, I will not ask theory driven questions that entail the key concepts of my research questions and overall research design. But it makes perfectly sense to me that the third session of the interview is an occasion in which I shall ask myself what outcome the interview has as regards my key concepts and to what extent it contributes to reasonable answers of the research questions as well as to an achievement of the research goals. If I thought that after session one and two the interview didn't communicate evidence for the research design of the project, I should raise questions focusing on these issues. Therefore, identity-focused questions like 'After all you lived and told me... How would you consider yourself?' will be asked in session three.

**Outlook for the presentation**

This working paper intended to locate my research in the broader field of Migration Studies. Moreover, it provides a first overview of the methods applied in my project and of its prime objectives. As a result of the data analysis after the end of the first research phase, a first working thesis with regard to the German migrants in Dublin emerged. Grounded in first evidence deriving from the data collected throughout that phase, it can be argued that the German migrants get involved in social networks that stretch over traditional national borders as they sustain social ties to their homeland (or other countries, e. g. the US). Evidence for the working thesis can mainly be found in the narrative interviews. The borrowing of terminologies of the social field perspective is justified by these pieces of evidences. This perspective will be spelled out in extenso throughout the presentation.
References:


