



**THE CIRCULATION OF PEOPLE  
UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF TRANSNATIONAL  
FORMATIONS AMONG ALBANIAN-SPEAKING MIGRANTS IN  
SWITZERLAND BY BRINGING IN THEORIES OF MOBILITY,  
SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND ETHNICITY.**

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## **Abstract:**

It is nowadays beyond controversy that transnational phenomena are part of migrants' reality and that the transnational perspective is indispensable to understand migration processes. However, I argue however that the potential of the transnational perspective could be better exploited by linking it to other social scientific theories contributing hereby to a more general theorization of migration processes. On behalf of an analysis of the different transnational formations that have emerged among Albanian-speaking migrants in Switzerland since the Second World War, I will show that insights from theories of mobility, of social inequality and of ethnicity help to understand these identified different forms of being transnational.

## **Keywords:**

Albanian speaking migrants,  
Transnational studies,  
Switzerland,  
Kosovo,  
Mobility,  
Ethnicity,  
Social inequality

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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Since the early 1990s, and following the seminal work of Nina Glick Schiller and her colleagues (1992), studies on the transnational practices and subjectivities of migrants have bloomed, and adopting a transnational perspective has become indispensable to understanding the contemporary practices that stretch across borders. The transnational perspective emerged from the realization that migrants simultaneously maintain ties with their countries of origin (or with a third country) and construct new relationships and forms of belonging, making home and host societies a single arena for social action by moving back and forth between different cultural, social, political and economic systems (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007 ; Vertovec 2009). A substantial number of studies provide examples of how migrants construct transnational social fields (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004), spaces (Faist 1999 ; Pries 2001), and belongings (Hannerz 1996).

I argue in the following that studies that apply a transnational perspective often still have an important theoretical shortcoming. While it is beyond controversy that transnational phenomena are part of migrants' reality, social scientists have yet to go beyond descriptive studies about transnational practices: they need to demonstrate how the transnational perspective can contribute to the theorization or conceptualization of migration processes, and how we can understand the emergence, maintenance or dissolution of different transnational formations. I argue that the potential of the transnational perspective could be better exploited by linking transnational studies to other social scientific theories. In an attempt to make this link, I first describe the different transnational formations that have emerged among Albanian-speaking migrants in Switzerland since the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> I maintain that we can understand these different forms of being transnational by linking the transnational perspective to theories of mobility, theories of social inequality and theories of ethnicity.

## 2. THREE VIGNETTES AND THEORETICAL LENSES

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In order to support and focus my arguments, I offer brief biographical sketches for three Albanian-speaking migrants in Switzerland. These narratives serve as a "read thread" to illustrate the arguments that I develop afterwards. These biographical sketches have been selected as case studies from my different research projects over the last few years.

Fitim Berisha arrived in Switzerland in the 1980s as one of the so-called *saisonniers* – temporary workers. He worked on a construction site and his objective – at least at the beginning – was to earn money in Switzerland and return home after a few years. However, confronted not only with

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<sup>1</sup> For our purposes, Albanians are defined as Albanian-speaking people from the former Yugoslavia, regardless of whether they originally came from Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia or Montenegro.

economic hardship but also with increasing political unrest at home, Fitim slowly abandoned his plans to return and decided instead to bring his wife to Switzerland. Today, they live in Zürich with their three children. Two years before the interview, Fitim lost his job; he is now unemployed and thinking about opening up an Albanian restaurant in Zürich with the help of family members living in Kosovo. The family's life is centered in Zürich, but they regularly send remittances to their parents and Fitim's wife's sister. They have a house in Kosovo and spend their holidays there. When Kosovo proclaimed its independence, the whole family took to the streets of Zürich to celebrate the event.

Teuta Bejrami was 33 years old at the time of the interview. She is an Albanian-speaking Macedonian who immigrated to Switzerland when she was 14 years old. Her parents had already lived in Switzerland for a few years, and Teuta grew up in Macedonia with her grandmother and her younger sister. She enrolled in school upon her arrival in Switzerland, subsequently trained as a nurse and today works as a charge nurse in a hospital. Until she got to her current position, however, she was confronted with strong discrimination in the labor market: she had a hard time finding a job after her apprenticeship, even though she speaks perfect German, Swiss-German and Albanian, and even though there is a shortage of nurses in Swiss hospitals. Until a few years ago, she spent her holidays in Macedonia, together with her family. She only went there, as she says, because of her grandmother. Since her grandmother's death, she has preferred to go to Istanbul with her friends for shopping or to some other place near the sea. Still, her parents would be most happy if she married somebody from "home," which she considers unlikely.

Amir Rifati was 20 years old at the time of the interview. He was born in Kosovo but came to Switzerland at three months of age, so he has spent his whole life in Switzerland. He is enrolled in a vocational education and training program and is doing an apprenticeship in print technologies. He feels Swiss, although he does not have a Swiss passport, and he says he cannot think about going "back" to Kosovo. He is considered a foreigner everywhere: when he goes to his home village in Kosovo for holidays, the local people call him "foreigner," and the same thing happens in Switzerland. Since childhood, he has often been involved in fights with colleagues, triggered by what he considers racist behavior: they call him "foreigner" or "Albanian" or "Yugo" – and recently also "Muslim." Religion came up in his interview: he identifies as Muslim, but he has an ambivalent way of dealing with his religion. He drinks alcohol and does not observe Ramadan, but he plans to do so next year for a few days, but not for the whole month. Nevertheless, he thinks that his future wife must be Albanian and Muslim – in order to have, as he argues, the same culture and therefore avoid conflict with regard to the education of the children.

These three short biographical sketches illustrate not only that transnational questions matter to these migrants, but also that these questions can take very diverse forms. Fitim's life is very much influenced by transnational relations, and he feels he belongs in two places: he has two households – one in Switzerland and one in Kosovo – and maintains strong links with his family members in Kosovo. He is an example of the "classical" transnational.

Teuta had strong emotional links to her grandmother in Macedonia and, as is often the case for second-generation migrants, she has to deal with her parents' marriage plans, which are strongly

shaped by this transnational field. At the same time, Teuta has cut her transnational ties with her parents' home village.

Amir, also a second-generation migrant, is also a carrier of a transnationality, although very differently. He is no longer personally connected with persons from his place of origin: his friends live in Switzerland and have various ethnic backgrounds. He is assimilated into local structures. Nonetheless, he belongs to what I would call a "transnationalized stigmatized category," Islam. The category of "Islam," which is transnationally diffused and connoted negatively, has a profound socializing impact on him. Islam is for him a kind of transnationalized "source culture" that has become part of his identity.

Starting from these vignettes, I demonstrate how different transnational formations among Albanian-speaking migrants in Switzerland have evolved since the Second World War. In the process, and for empirical purposes, I adopt particular lenses along which I describe these transnational formations.

First, I describe for each depicted transnational formation what I have called "locality" (Dahinden 2010). Transnational formations are not only the outcome of migration, but also of local contexts. Locality means being rooted or anchored – socially, economically or politically – in the country of immigration and/or in the sending country and developing a set of social relations in specific places. Although some scholars – Nadjé Al-Ali et al. (2001) and Itzigsohn and Gioguli Saucedo (2005), among others – have pointed out that transnational practices are not free from the constraints and opportunities imposed on these contexts, social scientists have not sufficiently incorporated locality into their analyses of transnational arrangements. In other words, cultural, socio-economic, discursive and political constraints block certain possibilities for transnational action and foster others and should be investigated systematically, at both ends of the transnational chain.

Second, I propose – to distinguish between network transnationalism and transnational subjectivity (Dahinden 2009a). Network transnationalism refers to the types of transnational social relations that are established by migrants, while transnational subjectivity refers to the cognitive classifications that are created in order to make sense of a person's membership and belonging in transnational space. The suggestion is that being transnational involves a mode of acting and performing (i.e. building up and maintaining transnational social relations) as much as it does thinking, feeling and belonging, and that taking both aspects of transnationalism into account allows us to identify a diverse range of transnational formations and detect their underlying mechanisms and effects.

Third, I propose to investigate the historical processes involved in the transnational formations of specific migrant groups, and to depict the factors that motivate these groups' transnational practices: is transnational action motivated, for instance, by collective representations based on ethnic or religious solidarity, by professional aspirations, by family obligations, or by other motives? Identifying these motivations allows us to identify the changing forms of transnational formations in migrants' life histories or in the migration history of a specific migrant group.

### **3. THE DYNAMICS OF TRANSNATIONAL FORMATIONS AMONG ALBANIAN-SPEAKING MIGRANTS**

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#### **3.1. Phase I: The beginning – the “transnationally mobile”**

In analyzing how and when Albanian-speaking migrants started to migrate to Central European countries after the Second World War, one soon realizes that the national migration policies of the former Yugoslavia, Switzerland and Germany influenced the developing transnational formations, in terms of locality, and that mobility was a key feature of the transnational formations that the migrants developed.

During the first two decades of socialist Yugoslavia's existence (1945-64), the country was, in terms of its migration policy, like other socialist countries in the Balkans, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union: it was closed to emigration. The Yugoslavian Federation's political decision to begin allowing emigration was associated with the launching of liberal national economic reforms in 1965 (Mesic 1992 ; Schierup 1995). This migration was considered by the Yugoslav state to be temporary, and a form of a “demographic management” that would make it possible to export the labor surplus and stabilize the economy through the inflow of money brought back by returnees (Baletic 1982). This emigration-management policy fit very well with the migration regimes of Switzerland and other European countries at the time: after the Second World War, European countries needed foreign labor, and in the 1960s Yugoslavia became, after Italy and Spain, a central German and Swiss recruitment region for so-called *Fremdarbeiter*, alien workers. Switzerland implemented an admission policy based on the idea of the so-called “rotation model.” On this basis, Switzerland issued a specific permit, called a “saisonnier permit,” which entitled migrants to work in Switzerland for nine months, after which they had to leave Switzerland for at least three months. Thus, Yugoslavia's policy of temporary migration and Switzerland's “rotation model” complemented each other quite well. Switzerland did not consider itself an immigration country, and Yugoslavia did not consider itself an emigration country.

Until the 1980s, the Albanian-speaking migrants who arrived in Switzerland were mostly young men. They came from rural and poor regions, worked mainly in unskilled jobs and often lived during their nine months in barracks with other foreign workers (Von Aarburg 2002). Such was the case for Fitim. His goal, like that of many other *Fremdarbeiter*, was to earn money and return to his family. The transnational space that was developed by Fitim Berisha and others was indeed highly marked by this mobility, which was linked to the Yugoslavian and Swiss migration regimes. Not only did the migrants receive only seasonal permits that forced them to circulate between Switzerland and their homeland; they often also worked in other countries as well. Fitim, for instance, spent two years in Germany, and he also worked in Slovenia, one of the then-Yugoslavia's northern republics. But migrants often did not behave in conformity with the “rotation model” in one key respect: they often came back to work for the same enterprise the following year. In practice, rotation did not mean a one-time circulation of different people, but a permanent rotation of the same people, and that is how mobility became an integral part of the migrant's life

strategy. Fitim did not leave home with the aim of settling in another country; he remained mobile in order to improve his quality of life at home, maintaining the epicenter of his life in Kosovo. In order to do so, Fitim needed a kind of what I call mobility capital: to be able to stay mobile without migrating permanently and without losing his roots in Kosovo, he had to develop networks with local actors within his circulatory spaces, and to create local footholds to some extent. He had to know where to find a job the following year in order to be able to circulate. At the same time, his wife and children stayed in Kosovo, resulting in what later came to be called – for instance, by Rachel Parrenas (2005) – “transnational families.” Teuta is one of the children who was left behind as a result of this phenomenon.

With regards to network transnationalism, the personal networks of these early Albanian-speaking migrants were mainly anchored in Kosovo, Montenegro or Serbia. These migrants frequently returned home, where they had their families, and their networks in Switzerland consisted mainly of other persons working on the same construction sites or in the same enterprises. Furthermore, these transnationally mobile people did not develop any kind of transnational membership: they felt that they belonged at “home” and did not identify with Switzerland. Transnational action was motivated mainly by family obligations and the desire to improve the economic situation of the family at home. Fitim wanted to bring home money in order to help his parents and siblings.

Interestingly, during this first phase of migration, no strong Albanian ethnic or national group formation could be identified. Nor were these workers referred to by the Swiss population as “Albanians.” They were seen by the Swiss simply as “Yugoslavs” – or they were “invisible workers” who lived separately from Swiss society. In other words, in regards to transnational membership, these migrants only marginally participated in ethnic and not at all in religious group formation. They were “workers,” and they were identified as such, and their transnational action was motivated by family and economic obligations.

### **3.2 Phase II: Settling down....**

However, the transnational formations of Albanian migrants soon started to change, and different developments can be depicted that have been paralleled by a diversification of transnational forms. Locality is again a crucial factor in understanding these newly appearing forms of transnationalism among Albanian-speaking migrants.

From the 1980s on, the political and economic situation in Yugoslavia in general, and specifically in Kosovo, deteriorated drastically. In the aftermath of Tito’s death in 1981 and the abolition of Kosovo’s autonomous status in 1989, there was political unrest, which directly increased emigration pressure. At the same time, with a shift in immigration policies in Switzerland in 1991, the recruitment of workers from Yugoslavia was no longer possible. Immigrants from the former Yugoslavia were now categorized as members of the so-called “third circle,” to which belong those people considered to be most culturally distant from the Swiss (Dahinden 2009b) and had no right to obtain work permits. As of this moment, immigration to Switzerland from the former Yugoslavia was only possible either by seeking asylum or through family reunification. However, confronted not only with economic hardship, but also with increasing political unrest at home, Albanian-

speaking workers slowly abandoned their plans to return and decided instead, whenever possible, to bring their families to Switzerland. Fitim is one of the people who made this decision, as were Amir's father and Teuta's parents.

Before this change in Swiss policy, many of these workers had experienced a kind of "permit career": after a few years as seasonal workers, they had been able to receive an annual permit that entitled them to bring their wives and children to Switzerland, and later on to get a residence permit. As a consequence, since 1989 there has been a steady increase in the Albanian-speaking population from the former Yugoslavia through chain migration, and a feminization of the migration flow has been observed. In addition, from 1980 onwards, politically motivated immigration could be observed. Members of the nationalist elite among Albanian students were increasingly persecuted and forced to leave Kosovo, seeking asylum in Europe. Especially in Switzerland, where Albanian-speaking workers had settled, the first asylum seekers from the former Yugoslavia began to arrive. The civil wars in the different republics of the former Yugoslavia and the outbreak of the war in Kosovo in 1998 led to a phase of mass emigration to Switzerland – although most of these migrants returned after the war. Those who obtained refugee status, however, did not return. In other words, Albanians became internally very heterogeneous in terms of their migration history, education, sex and so on. And they became more long-term and settled migrants. They were, like the migrants in Georg Simmel's (Simmel 1992[1908]) famous phrase, "the stranger who comes today and stays tomorrow."

There is, however, another element that is essential to being able to understand the evolution of the different transnational formations among Albanians: the political developments in Kosovo in the 1990s triggered new symbolic and social boundary-making processes among the former Yugoslav migrants along ethnic lines, and a strong Albanian nationalism emerged – on both ends of the transnational chain. Ethnicity increasingly became the language, currency and category used by migrants to legitimate their actions with regard to their lives in Switzerland, but also with regard to events in their homeland. It should be remembered that before the 1990s, transnational action had mainly been mobilized through family solidarity and reciprocity. However, since the 1990s, and particularly during the war in Kosovo, a new form of solidarity based upon ethnic criteria – a kind of bounded solidarity of destiny – developed and culminated in the mass mobilization of Albanian migrants – whether first or second generation – in home-town association projects, collective remittances and humanitarian projects (Dahinden 2008).

Overall, an ethnic consciousness among Albanian-speaking migrants emerged, which went along with the appearance of ethno-politics and nationalism and the crystallization of an ethnic "groupness." But this is only one side of the story of this new transnationally-induced ethnic boundary work: simultaneously, and in keeping with the logic of the always relational character of boundary-making (Jenkins 1997 ; Wimmer 2008), it was at this moment that, from the Swiss side, the formerly invisible Yugoslav workers now turned not only into "Albanians," but increasingly into "problematic Albanians." First, empirical studies show that many first-generation Albanian immigrants in Switzerland faced serious problems of marginalization and pauperization. Compared to other immigrant groups and to the Swiss population, data point to their precarious living circumstances, disadvantaged and under-privileged position and high unemployment rates

(Wanner 2004). Data also indicate limited personal resources, particularly in terms of cultural capital (Burri Sharani et al. 2010). Fitim is hardly the only Albanian migrant to have lost his job during the last few years. Second, in public debates, Albanian-speaking migrants were increasingly associated with crime, a patriarchal culture and family structure and violence against women, and the term “Albanian” became a catch-word for morally bad immigrants. Overall, the tendency was now to explain the observed social exclusion of some of those Albanian immigrants by stressing their cultural peculiarities – or even their cultural “incompatibility” as expressed by some right-wing parties.<sup>2</sup> In other words, in public discourse a reification and essentialization (Grillo 2003) of “Albanian migrants” took place “and their social problems were increasingly ethnicized and culturalized. Gender, and more specifically the assumed inequality of gender relations among Albanians – caused by their “culture” – were brought in as “cultural stuff,” to use Frederik Barth’s (1969) term, in order to mark this new bright boundary between the Swiss and the Albanians (Duemmler et al. 2010). This new categorization process was accompanied by strong discrimination against Albanians. Teuta’s and Amir’s experiences highlight these developments very well: both mentioned several times during the interviews the discrimination they experienced because of their ethnic origin and their Albanian names, and the difficulty they faced when looking for a job or an apartment. In sum, Albanian migrants settled down and developed an ethnic consciousness that was reinforced by external ethnicizing and culturalizing categorizations by the majority society.

At this point, two very different transnational formations developed, which corresponded to the two types of Albanian-speaking migrants. The former workers now settling down and characterized by low educational capital and working in non-skilled jobs showed only very weak forms network transnationalism. In contrast, those Albanian-speaking migrants who arrived as asylum seekers and got refugee status, and who belonged to the educated political elite, developed a very specific and strong transnational space, a kind of “diasporic transnationalism” on both dimensions of network transnationalism and transnational subjectivities.

### 3.2.1 “Missing” network transnationalism among the Albanian-speaking workers

When it comes to the network transnationalism of the Albanian-speaking workers, I have depicted in my research something I have called “missing transnationalism” (Dahinden 2005).

In a study I conducted in 2000, I was interested in the personal social networks of first-generation Albanian-speaking persons from the former Yugoslavia who were living in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. The network analysis revealed that transnational relations had very little importance within the social support networks of these ordinary Albanian-speaking migrants. Furthermore, the results showed that stable transnational social spaces relying on networks other

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<sup>2</sup> For similar processes in Italy, see King and Mai (2008), and for a discussion of these stereotypes see Schwanders-Sievers (2008).

than family were almost non-existent. Data suggested that at the level of everyday life and daily interaction, these ordinary Albanian migrants had developed a strong local orientation, and I discovered highly localized networks. Over three-quarters of the people who appeared in the personal support networks of the interviewees lived in Switzerland, most even near the interviewees. Furthermore, the study suggested that Albanian migrants formed part of their actual social relations only when they were in Switzerland. Half of the reference persons who were named by the interview partners were people they had not known before their immigration. In this case, immigrant social networks are neither “imported” nor determined through transnational relations, and social relations belonging to a social network before emigration are not automatically maintained in the transnational space. At the same time, the study also revealed that the networks displayed a strong ethnic homogeneity: according to the network analysis, those Albanian-speaking working-class migrants relied on other Albanian-speaking workers when they needed general advice about professional or family affairs or economic or emotional support. Leisure time was also spent with other Albanian speakers. In addition, Albanians turned to other Albanians to find a job or an apartment. From this study emerged a picture of an “Albanian community” that was almost hermetically closed and – at least among first-generation migrants – quite disconnected from Swiss society; but at the same time, and surprisingly, this “community” was not very transnational, at least with regards to their personal networks. As most transnational activities depend on the pre-existence of transnational relations, it does not come as a surprise that stable transnational practices among first-generation Albanian-speaking migrants were also almost entirely absent in the economic realm, i.e. when it came to transnational ethnic businesses. This does not alter the fact that Albanian migrants like Fitim supported their relatives in the country of origin with remittances whenever they had the financial means to do so, but I detected no transnational businesses of a sustainable nature.

How can we understand these immigrants’ limited participation in transnational networks, especially considering that they developed a strong transnational ethnic subjectivity?

I argue that it is at this point that locality comes into play. If we take a closer look, it becomes clear that explanations for the “missing” network transnationalism are highly interwoven with structural features of Swiss and former Yugoslav societies. As mentioned before, demographic data show that the socio-economic and professional status of members of this group is very low and that mechanisms of exclusion based on ethnic discrimination exist. This means that the observed ethnic homogeneity among Albanians is at the same time understood as a class homogeneity that has far-reaching consequences: if a migrant’s personal networks include mainly people who also have limited resources, the amount of social capital this migrant is able to mobilize is likely to be quite limited. Furthermore, although more and more Albanians from the former Yugoslavia are being given citizenship, there was still a large segment that did not have Swiss nationality, the Swiss citizenship regime being based on the *ius sanguinis* principle. To establish a transnational economic business with a Yugoslav passport or an OECD identity card from Kosovo was at that time almost impossible. For these reasons, these immigrants just did not have the resources – in financial terms, but also with regard to citizenship and cultural capital – to build up such transnational network fields.

But there is another important consideration. The other end of the transnational chain was not very “transnationalism friendly”: The situation in the post-war former Yugoslavia, above all in Kosovo, was and still is not favorable for stable transnational practices. To put it differently, neither of the two ends of the transnational chain offered the necessary resources for these migrants to develop stable transnational fields. Another important point is that although the Albanian workers developed a strong transnational subjectivity based on ethnicity, this new transnational membership went together with a “missing transnationalism” in the realm of networks and did not culminate in long-term ethno-political engagements. Although ethnicity was the new form of identification, and belonging was increasingly colored in these terms, these working migrants did not participate in transnational political activities that went beyond emergency help during the war.

### 3.2.2 The strong transnationalism of the Albanian political elite: “diasporic transnationalism

The political, educated elite developed other forms of transnational formations. Refugees, mainly well-educated first-generation males, became involved in Albanian migrant associations and political parties (see also Iseni 2013). For this group of migrants, the new ethnically defined solidarity manifested itself in long-term nationalist action, lobbying and political work. During the war, a part of Ibrahim Rugova’s Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), the political party that emerged in 1989 in opposition to the elimination of Kosovo’s autonomy, was exiled and resided in Switzerland, and Albanian political actors in Switzerland and Kosovo worked together through the networks of the Albanian associations.

These migrants developed a kind of “diasporic transnationalism.” Crucial for my argument is that I observed that it was those well-educated, politically engaged Albanian migrants who started to consciously perceive and define and speak of themselves in emic terms not only as Albanians, but increasingly also as a “diaspora.” Brubaker (2005) and Dufoix (2003) remind us that such “bounded” groups or such a “groupness” only come into being through the conscious and organized efforts of generations and networks of people, and especially through their cultural, social and political elites. Furthermore, in order to develop and maintain such an ethnically colored diasporic “groupness,” the main actors must interact closely with institutions, governments, networks and key persons in the host country. And this is exactly what happened: the Kosovo-Albanian elites in Switzerland and other European countries started to form local and international networks with humanitarian institutions, development agencies and so on, always in the name of “Albanians” or as a “diaspora.” A decisive moment in the crystallization of the “diasporic” aspect was without a doubt the lobbying of Swiss and international organizations for the independence of Kosovo. Overall, members of the political elite not only developed a strong transnational ethnic subjectivity, even starting to call themselves a “diaspora” and thereby producing internal cohesion and reinforcing the ethnic boundary; in the process, they also developed strong transnational networks.

### 3.3 Phase III: Islam as a “cultural repertoire” for transnational subjectivity

I maintain that we have entered a third phase that is characterized by an important transformation in the transnational involvements of Albanian migrants. Concretely, we now have to deal with the children of the first-generation migrants who – like Teuta or Amir – have reached adulthood. The question therefore arises: what happens with transnational formations when it comes to the second generation? This question has been the object of vivid debates and sometimes contradicting results (see for an overview of the debates Vathi 2013). I propose to look at this question through the lenses of network transnationalism and transnational subjectivity. With regard to the first lens, most scholars agree that if the main criterion is the actual involvement of individuals of the second generation, then ties with the parents’ country of origin will indeed loosen (Rumbaut 2002). The data provide evidence that migrants of the second generation adapt to local, social, political and economic contexts and that network transnationalism and transnational practices related to transnational ties decline, thus supporting the hypotheses of both “linear” and “segmented” assimilation theories (Jones-Correa 2002). Teuta and Amir, for example, do not have important transnational relations with their parents’ country of origin – when Teuta’s grandmother died, she even stopped visiting Macedonia. Amir and Teuta therefore rarely circulate between the countries; both are involved in Switzerland in friendship networks of mixed ethnic backgrounds and speak perfect German, and Teuta has completed vocational training in Zürich, while Amir is in the process of doing so.

When it comes to the dimension of transnational subjectivities, however, the situation is much more inconsistent and complex: Levitt (2009), for instance, argues that we should not dismiss outright the strong potential effect of being raised in a transnational field – of, in other words, growing up in a household in which people, ideas and money circulate between two countries. These children are not only socialized into the rules and institutions of the countries in which they live, but also in those of the countries from which their families originate. An example can be seen in Teuta’s parents’ wishes about the marriage of their daughter. Ideas about who is a suitable husband are negotiated and influenced in transnational space: her parents would like her daughter to marry somebody from “home,” putting forward an ethnic argument. As Teuta said, her parents regard marriage with someone from “the same culture” as a kind of assurance that the marriage will not break up; they also regard Swiss men as unreliable and very “different.” Teuta has to deal with these issues whether or not she wants to.

However, I think that we are witnessing a much more fundamental change when it comes to the second generation of Albanian migrants:<sup>3</sup> concretely, Islam has emerged as a new category and

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<sup>3</sup> Obviously, there are other forms of being transnational within this dimension. Some of my interviewees hold a strong transnational orientation and have even been thinking about returning and “bringing home” their knowledge, for

serves on the dimension of transnational subjectivity as a source in the sense of a “cultural repertoire (Swidler 1996).” A new form of transnational subjectivity has appeared due to the impact of Islam, which is transnationally diffused. I argue that the loosening of the second generation’s transnational ties is indeed mediated through the Islamization of Albanian-speaking migrants. Albanian second-generation migrants might be detached from Kosovo or Macedonia, but they are “realigned” with Islam. It is not “home” that serves here as a focal point for transnationalized identities, but specific ideas about Islam. “Islam” has become an ambivalent category in Europe since the events of 9/11 and the bombings in Madrid (2004) and London (2005). Muslims in Europe are perceived as a threat because they are “different,” and new symbolic and social boundary processes have been triggered. Islam alternately appears in such debates as an obstacle for migrant integration (Foner and Alba 2008) and as a menace to social cohesion (Grillo 2010). Islam is also made responsible for so-called “forced marriages,” and the “subordinated Muslim woman” as a figure who requires emancipation has emerged (Dahinden et al. Forthcoming ; Dietze 2010 ; Phillips 2010 ; Razack 1995). One effect of the appearance of this new category of Islam in European public discourse is what Schiffauer (2007) has called the “Muslimization of immigrants.” Migrants are increasingly defined in terms of their religion and decreasingly in ethnic or national terms, or as workers. In the same vein, migrants’ integration is understood as intrinsically linked to the culture of Islam, and no longer debated as linked to problems of social class, milieu or education, or ethnic origin (see also Ettinger 2008 ; Ramm 2010). This semantic shift in external categorization directly touches the Albanians living in Switzerland. In public debates and official statistics, they now appear under the category of “Muslims.” In other words, in public perception, Albanian migrants have been transformed from invisible workers – a class-related categorization – into problematic-because-culturally-different Albanians – an ethnic label – and recently into Muslims – a religious label. So it does not come as a surprise that Amir is increasingly referred to in school and by his colleagues as “Muslim.”

In other words, the category “Islam” has been transnationalized and has become an important line for social differentiation for these young people – a “cultural repertoire” for categorization processes. At the same time, the category of “Islam” has been appropriated by Albanians, in various ways. Historically, as Draper (1997) showed, the most important marker for Albanian nationalism (and thus boundary work) had always been language, and religion had never played a central role: Albanians had quite a pragmatic way of dealing with religion, changing it when the context required, as, for instance, during the Ottoman Empire. Likewise, in my studies from the 1990s until 2005 with first-generation migrants, religion was never brought up spontaneously by my interview partners. But in my more recent ethnographic fieldwork with young people of the second generation, it has become a category of identification and differentiation. Amir’s insistence that his future spouse should be Muslim is one example – even if he does not practice Islam in his

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instance in building up civil society or in helping in economic terms. I will not speak about those cases in what follows, but they must surely not be neglected.

everyday life. Traditional Albanian associations are struggling to survive, given that they are running out of members. Albanian Muslim associations, in contrast, are thriving, and more and more Albanians join non-ethnically defined Muslim associations. In sum, belonging is currently reconfigured, especially among second-generation migrants, according to this new transnationalized category of “Islam.” This reconfiguration is also affecting second-generation Albanian migrants who are not religious: now that they are being categorized as “Muslim,” they have to react to this category one way or another.

In other words, the traditional two-nation perspective – according to which migration involves receiving and sending countries – that is widespread in transnational studies (Gowricharn 2009) easily feeds the conclusion that second-generation transnational subjectivity is declining. However, the ongoing Islamization of Albanian migrants is not directly attached to either their sending or their receiving contexts. Islam serves as a “cultural repertoire” that is not connected to the nation-state model, but that has a transnational and multi-polar character.

#### **4. CONCLUSION: UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF TRANSNATIONAL FORMATIONS BY BRINGING IN OTHER THEORETICAL APPROACHES**

This paper has attempted to give insight into the dynamics of transnational formations by examining the situation of Albanian-speaking migrants living in Switzerland. In order to analyze these dynamics, I have introduced the distinction between network transnationalism and transnational subjectivities, focused on locality and highlighted the underlying motivations for transnational practices or subjectivities.

A first conclusion is that we find a high variety of transnational formations that cannot be subsumed under the generic title of “transnationalism.” Second, the distinction between network transnationalism and transnational subjectivities reveals that both dimensions are articulated, but that they do not always parallel each other. The first circular migrants did not have a strong network transnationalism or a pronounced transnational subjectivity. First-generation Albanian working migrants were not able to establish a strong network transnationalism because they did not have the means to do. At the same time, they displayed an ethnic or even diasporic stance cumulating in a membership identity that is transnationally shaped. Political elites among Albanian migrants are embedded in strong transnational networks motivated by a strong transnational identity. And finally, Albanian second-generation migrants do not maintain a network transnationalism, but they grow up in a field where global transnational identification with Islam has become relevant.

We can understand these different transnational formations by articulating the transnational perspective together with other social scientific theories.

First, theories of mobility and of “circular migration” are useful in reconceptualizing migration processes and understanding, for instance, the transnational formation of the first Albanian-speaking temporary workers, the ones I have called the transnationally mobile. Although early

social anthropologists did focus on “circular migration” (Chapman 1979), migration researchers later succumbed to methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) and perceived migration almost exclusively through the logic of the “national-container model,” hence as a one-way-road, followed by assimilation or integration. It is in this context that theories of mobility as they were developed by English geographers (Urry 2007) and French scholars (Tarrus 1993) help us understand the movements of people with greater nuance and to overcome this kind of methodological nationalism. French-speaking academics have become interested in, and have started to theorize, different forms of mobility in recent years (Peraldi 2007 ; Schmoll 2005 ; Tarrus 1993). These studies all point to the following two facts. First, migration cannot be understood as a single movement, but needs to be theorized as multiple forms of mobility. And second, the kind of circular mobility that I depicted for the early Albanian-speaking workers needs a very specific form of capital. I have called it “mobility capital,” and Tarrus (2002) speaks of “savoir bouger.” Notably, the social capital of such “transnationally mobile” people is not based on strong family or ethnic relations – as normally discussed in migration studies - but on weak relations (Granovetter 1973): trust and solidarity in the immigration country are built up with friends, work colleagues, bosses and acquaintances rather than with close relatives. In order to be able to stay mobile, these migrants have to develop networks with local actors or institutions within their circulatory spaces. Hence, knowing the contexts, having gatekeepers at the workplace, and knitting weak ties are components of this form of “mobility capital,” which is different in nature from ethnic or diasporic capital and which is the basis of such a specific transnational formation, as has been demonstrated in regards to the early Albanian-speaking workers.

Second, I argue that we can understand the dynamics of transnational formations by linking them to theories of ethnicity, particularly to the paradigm of boundary work: the idea of “boundaries” has come to play a key role in important new lines of scholarship across the social sciences and has been theoretically elaborated upon and empirically tested in relation to different categories: class, gender and ethnicity, for example (Lamont and Molnar 2002 ; Wimmer 2008, 2012). For our purposes, it is important to realize that though the result of physical mobility might be dispersion, dispersion does not automatically lead to the formation of so-called transnational ethnic or religious communities with a homeland orientation, or to boundary maintenance (Barth 1969) involving the preservation of a distinctive identity vis-à-vis the host society and a subjective belief in a common origin (Weber 1996 [1922]). Migrants can be transnational without participating in ethnic or religious boundary-making or maintenance. “Bounded” groups or “groupness” (Brubaker 2004) in this theoretical perspective come into being through conscious and organized efforts by generations and networks of people, and especially by their cultural, social and political elites. Such efforts involve an attachment to and a grounding in place, and they require the necessary resources in terms of linguistic, financial and other forms of capital. Hence the Albanian “diasporic transnationals” are the outcome of such processes of group formation. Such a transnational formation where the motivations are anchored in representation of ethnicity are the outcome of boundary work – and not the result of some ethnic or cultural essence common to all Albanian-speaking migrants. Hence, linking the transnational perspective with theories of ethnicity makes it possible to consider collective identities (in transnational or other spaces) and groups as the

outcome of social processes. It also makes it possible to overcome what Wimmer has called “an Herdierian ontological trinity” (Wimmer 2009) and Brubaker has called “groupism” (Brubaker 2004), namely taking ethnic groups as self-evident units of analysis and observations, and assuming that ethnicity and family are the most adequate categories through which to empirically investigate transnational formations. In other words, instead of taking ethnicity as an a priori explicans for transnational formations, it is useful to investigate the place of ethnicity and family, as explicanda, in the creation and maintenance of transnational formations. The same theoretical approach is useful in understanding the Islamization of Albanian-speaking migrants. It is not some kind of religious essence that has suddenly made Islam salient among second-generation migrants; instead, it is boundary processes that have done so, and that, as a result, have produced different forms of groupness.

Third, locality is indeed important not only for the specific network transnationalism that develops, but also for transnational membership identities. Local contexts, constraints, roots and opportunities shape transnational forms of being and belonging in important ways. Migration regimes, the structure of the labor market, economic opportunities and discrimination might have been the main factors impeding first-generation Albanians from integrating into local contexts – and into transnational structures. In other words, the development of stable, long-lasting transnational spaces is resource dependent. This opens up a more general question about social inequality under conditions of transnationalization. How is social inequality or unequal access to resources catapulted into transnational space? Although some scholars have started to reflect upon this question (Weiss 2005), it remains under-investigated and under-theorized.

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