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Conceptualising Continuity: A Material Culture Perspective on Transnational Social Fields



ABSTRACT

Positioned at the intersection between ethnology, migration research and studies of material culture, the article argues for recognising the importance of the material layers of transnational social fields. Drawing on Levitt and Glick Schiller's analytical distinction between ways of being and ways of belonging, it exemplifies how a material culture perspective contributes to a balanced understanding of migrants' lives as positioned in both material and discursive terms and equally importantly formed by practices as by representations. Three theoretical statements, grounded in the analysis of ethnographic material, are elaborated in the article. They refer to the presence of objects in another location, the continuity of practices perceived as normal, and the practice-based feeling of emplacement. Bourdieu's notion of habitus and Hage's discussion of hexis are used to explain the interconnectedness of these statements. The article suggests that studying the changes of habitus that occur due to migration is needed for a deeper understanding of the processes of migrant emplacement through practice.

The understanding of habitus is related to the idea that it is an imperfect grammar of practices full of ambiguities, not a set of (predetermined) practices (i.e., the habitus is split), and if the understanding of the field is that it gives orientation to these practices, it is not determining them (i.e., the field is fractal). This is meant to capture the collective character of individual agents (they belong to series of specific social universes or fields) and the individual dimension of change and uncertainty incorporated into the agent's habitus and the practical reasons for their actions. (Bigo 2013, 126)

Material Practices in Transnational Social Fields

This article aims at contributing to a discussion of migrants' transnational practices from an eth-

nological perspective by following the theoretical lead formulated by Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller in 2004. By paraphrasing the title of their article 'Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society', I point to the importance of broadening the standard focus on social relations and identities by looking into the material layers of transnational social fields. This article proposes that research on migrants should not prioritise ideas and discourses of identity and belonging; rather, it should pay equal attention to the practices and lived experiences involving objects that migrants carry, send, receive and use across borders.

Transnational social fields are made out of social and symbolic ties between places, networks and positions established and sustained by sets of practices. Ludger Pries defined them as 'pluri-local frames of reference which structure every-

day practices, social positions, biographical employment prospects, and human identities, and simultaneously exist above and beyond the social contexts of national societies' (Pries 2001, 23). This article pursues everyday practices mentioned by Pries, but instead of focusing on their social aspects it focuses on their materiality and their habitual character. It contributes to the growing body of literature transnational migrants' material practices (see, e.g., Werbner 2000; Salih 2003; Walsh 2006; Burrell 2008a and 2008b; Rabikowska 2010; Hui 2013).

The 'object-turn' (Woodward 2001, 117) adds important perspectives to research on migrants (see e.g. Ho & Hattfield 2011; Dudley 2010), especially if based on an ethnographic approach, which is unsurpassed in its ability to reach and represent the individual level of experience and the everyday dynamics of sense-making. Objects can be important for reasons of personal attachment, practical usefulness or their everydayness in a person's life – regardless of where that life is being enacted. They can be brought 'from elsewhere', recycled or replaced by other objects, or they may replicate the arrangements from other locations. They have, however, one important effect in common: by being used, objects bestow and ensure a multi-scalar continuity of practices and places in the context of transnational migration (Povrzanović Frykman & Humbracht 2013).

For the sake of clarity, when presenting the theoretical argument in this article, I talk about migrants' practices and mention their non-migrant counterparts only sporadically. However, the concept of transnational social fields encompasses also places and people to which migrants have a relation to; these are usually, but not exclusively, the places of their origin (here also called 'homeland'). If an experience-oriented understanding, grounded in insiders' acts and perceptions, is attempted, material aspects of continuity imply that the places of emigration (and of regular or occasional return) are equally important as the places of immigration. Moreover, all people somehow involved in transnational connections are a part of the field, even those who are not migrants themselves. Consequently, the meanings of 'here' and 'there' are relative; they

depend on the point of view of the migrant as well as their non-migrant counterparts who stayed behind and are a part of transnational social fields. Finally, 'field' is preferred to the equally often used 'transnational social space' (Faist 2000), as it allows for a direct link to Bourdieu's notion of field, here hinted at (albeit not developed) in the discussion of habitus.

As the scope of this text is theoretical, ethnographic material is used in order to illustrate and exemplify the theoretical statements. These statements, however, are grounded in the analysis of the material that includes more than fifty narrative interviews, ethnographic observations and visual material obtained in Sweden, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina within the project 'The transnational life of objects: material practices of migrants' being and belonging' funded by the Swedish Research Council in 2011-13 (see Povrzanović Frykman 2015; Povrzanović Frykman 2017; Povrzanović Frykman & Humbracht 2013). The research was guided by the question of which objects are brought or sent from and to the migrant's homeland and why.

Research participants were mostly, but not exclusively, migrants to Sweden and included refugee-, labour-, student- and family migrants from a number of countries. Also some non-migrant relatives to the migrants were interviewed in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The project avoided the ethnic lens (see Glick Schiller 2008) by treating the importance of ethnicity in migrants' lives as an empirical question; the participants were not selected on the basis of ethnic affiliation. While recognising that people are always embedded in specific socio-cultural contexts, the group belonging-related objects and practices were not seen as more important than objects and practices relevant to individual migrants, that often appeared as more clearly related to their educational/professional background than to their ethnicity.¹

The sections following the opening auto-ethnographic vignette present a broad outline of the project mentioned above and a set of theoretical statements that were developed in the course of analysis of material gathered in the project. The subsequent sections elaborate on these statements by discussing the chosen examples through

the lens of habitus. The concluding section summarises the main theoretical points put forward in the article.

A Key: Emplacement through Practice

The autobiographical vignette presented in this section (based on my own experience as a transnational migrant) serves as a description of the kind of material practice relevant to the discussion in the following sections. It clarifies the interconnectedness between an object and a particular practice; the acknowledgement of that interconnectedness is central to the material culture perspective promoted here.

The keys to my two homes always travel with me in both directions, even if someone is in place at the other end to open the door for me. While they perhaps materialise the certainty of ownership, I am aware that I carry them as providers of the immediate and practical possibility of re-entering my respective homes in a 'normal' way, without having to ring the bell. However, in the first year or two of life in Sweden, the supposedly taken for granted act of opening the door to my new home was not entirely unproblematic. The very action of entering my home reminded me, on a daily basis, that ideas, behaviour and artefacts are co-dependent, that agency inheres in the relationships between the various entities that constitute the field of action (Knappet 2002, 97). In actual fact, I was constantly being reminded of my foreignness.

Every day, over again and over again, I turned the key in the direction normal for all keyholes in Croatia, only to be reminded that here, in Sweden, it is the wrong direction. The opposite movement was needed – far less complicated than Latour's (2000) Berlin key which demands elaborate moves that are difficult to 'remember', or rather, to embody. This, in fact, is the nub of my argument: we do not consciously remember or think about how to unlock the door: we simply do it. Furthermore, we have learned how to do it by actually doing it. While I understood intellectually that I was turning my key the wrong way, the action was so habitual that it took more

than a year to eliminate. I could then enter my Swedish home without feeling irritated by a moment of interruption that signified a crack in the normality of my being in another country. While the problem had been solved in Sweden, I found myself trying to enter my Croatian home in 'the Swedish way'! Again, time was necessary before matters settled and keys once again started to be used 'properly', without the associated mistakes that oblige one to ponder incorporated and emplaced ways of being.

A migrant who feels out of place at, for example, not being able to sing along during a public celebration, can perhaps cope with the situation by 'dismissing' it as a non-obliging historically constructed expression of belonging. However, a key that resists the ingrained micro-movement of enabling a person to enter one's own home is more difficult to deal with: it is the materiality of things resisting 'normal' behaviour. Facing the locked door, one cannot relativise one's own position or negotiate it discursively; one is made aware of not having been there long enough to *practice* the act of entering. The door, the presumed gateway to one's own place in the new world, resists habitual moves and becomes a physical rejection of (an element of) a foreign habitus.

As an autobiographical account of a bodily felt 'abnormality', this vignette describes how a 'normal' daily activity was interrupted by migration. Engagement with the materiality in familiar and unfamiliar contexts, as well as the change of familiarity of 'here' and 'there', yielded reflections of the importance of emplacement through practice. This vignette also suggests the relevance of capturing the temporal aspects of individual biographies, including the changes in competences that may be related to the length of stay in a new, less familiar context or to intensity of involvement in the old, familiar one.

Material Layers of Being

Objects have often been interpreted as expressions of belonging, status or family history, as expressions of social and cultural difference. Their roles have been explored in connection to

remembrance or pride, mourning or celebration, privacy or symbolic communion, or economic connections. Here, they are seen as material layers of transnational social fields and a means to deny the split between the pre-migratory and post-migratory experiences.

The use of the objects, products or food 'from elsewhere' in different locations is proof of functioning transnational connections. Rather than ideas and discourses of identity and belonging, the suggestion here is that *practices and lived experiences* involving objects that are carried, sent, received and used significantly contribute to the (re)production of social ties. While it goes without saying that objects can be carriers or expressions of different kinds of capital and that, crossing the borders between 'here' and 'there', they may re-confirm social ties in space and time, in this article social ties are seen as 'folded into the materiality of things' (Pels et al. 2002, 17). This article is an exercise in theorising the material layers of transnational fields, not their social aspects.

Inasmuch as people's activities are sustained by or inscribed in a particular materiality, the objects can be explored as *elements of material foundations of migrants' lives that traverse locations across state borders*. The principal interest pursued here is not into objects as generators of feelings and cultural meanings, but into *the roles objects play in animating material practices* (see Woodward 2001), *emplacing lives and inhabiting places*.

Importantly, the habitual uses of objects and practices of emplacement discussed here pertain, first and foremost, to the ways of *being* – daily social relations and practices (see Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004) – and not to the symbolic roles of objects. In Levitt and Glick Schiller's analytical distinction, *being* in a social field does not necessarily mean that people identify with any representations of that field. They have the potential to act or identify at a particular time, 'but not all choose to do so' (ibid., 1010). Signalling or enacting group identities is a core issue in the ways of *belonging*.

This can be illustrated by a situation in which a migrant, a wife in an 'interethnic marriage', was irritated by her Swedish husband presenting the dish she has prepared for guests as 'ethnic' (see

Povrzanović Frykman 2010). In doing this, he was *not letting her be*, but positioning her into the realm of belonging defined by ethnicity. For her, the recipe was not 'ethnic'; it was her mother's. If it referred to identity at all, it was to her identity as a daughter, the heiress and recipient of her mother's know-how. Similarly, when students in an Italian university hall of residence shared food brought from their respective Italian and Croatian homes (see Matošević 2010), the practice was part of their *way of being a student* and not a matter of belonging, talked about in terms of multicultural representations. Only ethnographic research can discern when a food item transported from one place to another is simply a matter of being in a transnational field that facilitates continuity through a 'normality of consumption'; and when it is recognised as a matter of belonging with acquired representative functions (see, e.g., Petridou 2001).

Finally, a parallel occurrence of being and belonging can be exemplified at a party following the annual festival of Croatian culture in Sweden (see Povrzanović Frykman 2010). When the festival programme was over, the cellar of the premises rented for the occasion was turned into a disco. A popular singer from Croatia gave a live performance, thereby attracting crowds of merry visitors who proceeded to sing along and dance energetically. The contrast with earlier speeches constructing the 'community of Croats in Sweden' and the representational use of national symbols on stage was apparent. The lyrics were in Croatian, and many of those present knew one another, but this was first and foremost a group of people enjoying dancing and singing together in a dark, overcrowded space and having a lot of fun. Only half an hour after the start of the dance event, I happened to overhear (in the midst of very loud music) the nervous exclamations exchanged between two men from the organising committee: 'We forgot the flag! We forgot the flag!' Whether anyone else noticed its absence is debatable. However, the organisers obviously felt responsible for signalling belonging and placed the Croatian flag at the edge of the small stage on which the singer was performing, thus redefining a space of transnationally embedded

festivity as a space of transnationally confirmed national belonging.

The examples pertinent to the theoretical discussion in this article are not about enactments of identity that demonstrate a conscious connection to a particular group. They refer exclusively to the *ways of being*, to the actual relations and practices in which individuals engage in their everyday lives. What objects might symbolise is not of primary relevance here; instead, I focus on *habitual use* of objects that remains uninterrupted in lives that are stretched between different locations. I maintain that the theoretical outline presented in this article can be applied to the material layers of any translocal social field.²

Connection, Normalcy, Emplacement: Three Statements on Continuity

Bruno Latour (2000) wrote that the word *mediation*, as in 'objects mediate social relations', can become an asylum for ignorance if it is interpreted as an 'intermediary' that carries meaning but cannot fabricate it. If, on the other hand, the focus is on objects as 'mediators', their active role is acknowledged in the creation (mediation) of meaning. Objects, then, do not 'express', 'symbolise', 'reflect' or 'reify' social relations – they *make* them.

For an ethnographer interested more in the mundane than the symbolic and representational, objects of everyday use are of special interest. Namely, when an object is so much in use that daily life without it has become inconceivable (or it is even no longer 'noticed'), it does not make sense as a sign, but rather as part and parcel of a person's subjectivity (Warnier 2001, 21). This is, for example, illustrated by Susan Pollak (2007) who writes about a late grandmother's rolling pin that migrates with her granddaughter and is used every time she bakes, and by Kathie Walsh (2006) who describes how a simple plastic bowl received from her mother has a taken-for-granted presence in a British expat's home in Dubai. As observed by Ian Woodward (2001, 134), 'even the most emptied-out, banal objects of ... domestic material culture have a role to play.'

The following three theoretical statements were grounded in the analysis of ethnographic material gathered in the project mentioned above. They refer to (i) the presence of objects in another location: *Objects 'from there' embody presence in another location*; (ii) the continuity of practices perceived as normal: *Objects of everyday use establish a continuity of the ways of being by facilitating 'normal' material practices that are uninterrupted by migration*; and to (iii) the practice-based feeling of emplacement: *Familiar practices facilitate a feeling of emplacement*.

These statements are closely interconnected. With regard to its (i) *presence in another location*, an object 'from there' (acquired in another location) may serve as a *palpable connection* to a place that is physically distant yet a part of the migrant's lived experience (see Povrzanović Frykman & Humbracht 2013). It can be seen as a part of embodiment of the user's presence in another location. As explained by White and Beaudry (2009, 212), 'materiality – vis à vis the ways people eat, sleep, move about, and so on – is part of embodiment, and the ways that cultural contexts create corporeal style and constitute bodies are a critical part of embodiment.'

As for the (ii) *continuity of practices*, albeit at a small scale and in a partial manner, an object acquired 'there' and used 'here' can contribute to the user's experienced *continuity of being* both 'here' and 'there'. As noted by Marta Rabikowska (2010, 378), habitual practices 'alleviate the sense of fragmentation and discontinuity caused by displacement.' The continuity of 'normal' material practices that are uninterrupted by migration can be facilitated by objects 'from there' obtained in another location, but also by objects 'like there' obtained *in situ*. In that respect, it is not crucial where the object comes from; the *habitual character* of a particular practice involving that object is central.

Finally, the possibility of (iii) keeping up habitual practices (which requires that the materiality at hand does not resist them as in the example of my Swedish key) is crucial to the *feeling of emplacement*. As illustrated by the autobiographical vignette above, objects and practices embedded in a particular local context affect the

migrant's agency; the feeling of emplacement can be described in terms of trust and recognition of competences – others' as well as the migrant's own – which ensure that life is lived in a 'normal' way both 'here' and 'there' in a transnational field.

The discussion that follows highlights how looking at habits and habitus – here, from the perspective of material culture – can help in conceptualising the migrants' experiences of continuity in and of transnational social fields.

Habitus and Hexis

'Continuity', as used here, equals 'normalcy'; it refers to the migrants' perception of their life being lived in an expected, familiar manner, both 'here' and 'there', regardless of where its segments happen to be emplaced. In probing the conditions for this sense of normalcy, Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* appears as useful, although he is not interested in the materiality as such, but in objects as reified cultural capital (see Reed-Danahay 2005, 108).

The very term habitus has been chosen in order to 'set aside the common conception of habit as a mechanical assembly or preformed programme' (Bourdieu 1977, 218, note 47). In *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (ibid.) Bourdieu defines habitus as principles that generate and organise practices: 'Through the habitus, the structure which has produced it governs practice, ... through the mediation of the orientations and limits it assigns to the habitus's operations of invention' (ibid., 95). In *The Logic of Practice* (Bourdieu 1990, 52–65) he elaborates how the principles that generate and organise practices can be 'objectively adapted to their outcomes without conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations in order to attain them' (Hage 2013, 53). In *Distinction* (Bourdieu 2010, 166) he states that 'the habitus is necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions'.

In the context of my argument, the material aspects of those meaningful practices are central. Ghassan Hage's (2013) discussion of Bourdieu's

habitus is of special relevance here, since he pursues the *being* and takes into consideration the materiality of the body. Hage explains that habitus for Bourdieu is 'both a manifestation and a measurement of ... how well is a body capable of deploying itself in a particular environment' (ibid., 81).³

While habitus generally refers to 'the internalisation and sedimentation of experience on one hand, and the production of a generative capacity and the externalisation of this capacity on the other' (ibid.), the related notion of *hexis*, which denotes a fusion between 'having' (possessing an object) and 'being' (capable of an activity that lends the sense of normalcy), seems especially useful for the theorising that focuses on material culture.

Bourdieu defines bodily hexis as 'a pattern of postures that is both individual and systematic, because linked to a whole system of techniques involving the body and tools, and charged with a host of social meanings and values' (Bourdieu 1977, 87). It is 'a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking and thereby of *feeling* and *thinking*' (ibid., 93–94; emphasis in the original). For my argument, it is crucial that it (also) involves material objects, which Bourdieu refers to as 'tools'. In Hage's words, hexis is 'a habitual and ongoing having whereby what is outside of me becomes an inseparable and durable part of me – it becomes me. There is a movement and a fusion between what I have and what I am' (Hage 2013, 81). Referring to Aristotle's discussion of 'having', Hage explains that if a person says 'I have a coat', this does not tell us where the coat is. It can be left at home, although it is needed to shield its owner from the cold. Hexis, instead

is a kind of coat that become part of me and is always accessible. It allows me to always have, not just the occasional capacity – such as when I have a coat at home – but the continuous practical capacity to shield myself from the rain and the cold as soon as I need to do so. Never would I have to say I left it at home, because the coat in a sense has become part of me. In fact it is me or perhaps, better still, it is within me to become a coat. That

is, it becomes a part of the way my body efficiently deploys itself in the world... (ibid.)⁴

In this sense, the accumulation of being generated by the habitus 'does not only pertain to technical domain of accumulation of practical efficiency' (Hage 2013, 87). It also embodies a more existential domain that Hage calls 'the accumulation of homeliness' (ibid.). In this article, it is referred to more broadly as 'normalcy', and the material aspects of that normalcy are put to the fore.

In a discussion of Bourdieu's 'political economy of being', Hage (2013) points out that Bourdieu does not posit that everything people do or say is aimed at maximising their social profit, but that it is aiming at perpetuating or augmenting their *social being*. Bourdieu's 'empirical existential analytics' (ibid., 79) is directed towards the production and circulation of culturally specific ways of perceiving being, that is, 'whatever is contextually sensed as "good", fulfilling, satisfying, viable, etc., life' (ibid.). This analytical approach is useful for investigating also how objects and material practices help migrants to feel that their transnational being is 'good', viable and satisfying; I would add – 'normal', running smoothly, without interruption that may be caused by migration. In Hage's words:

One can say [...] that habitus is a principle of homing and building: of striving to build the space where one can be at home in the world. [...] When we say that a habitus 'fits' in its environment, it does not mean that there is some kind of imaginary 'total fit'. Rather, it means that the *habitus* is part and parcel of an environment where it is capable of generating actions that strive to make us at home. (ibid., 87)

The notion of habitus helps us to understand how particular objects and the material practices they facilitate become incorporated and solidify – or change – habitual behaviour and the need for particular objects.⁵ Objects that became part and parcel of a migrant's subjectivity (those one 'cannot be without') are especially useful for illustrating the theoretical points made above, particularly those involved in the change of habitus due to life in the country of immigration.

In a text on theorising subjectivities, Anne-marie Mol pointed to the fact that 'philosophical theories incorporate exemplary situations' (Mol 2008, 33), even if the fact that they always 'appear to be situated somewhere' (ibid.) is not clearly recognised by philosophers. They may, as in Sartre's case, talk about 'being' and 'nothingness' but at the same time actually reflect on strangers in Paris sidewalk cafés (ibid.). The work of Sartre, suggests Mol, 'can be understood much better once we trace the ways in which the particular type of "meeting between strangers" that occurred in Paris sidewalk cafés, is inscribed in it, for this is the puzzling situation Sartre (always also) thought about' (ibid.).

As an ethnographer and a researcher deploying narrative interviews, which produce detailed 'stories' of experience, not generalised descriptions, I certainly see the benefit of focusing on the situations that exemplify how migrants' habitus changes due to living in different places – the situations in which research participants noticed how they changed because of being migrants. Focusing on such *exemplary situations* is a methodological choice that allows for pursuing truly the emic perspective on the dynamics of continuity and change of habitus and on the role that particular objects and material practices may have in the process. Objects are seen here as crucial for their 'constitutive agentic effects within the entangled networks of sociality/materiality' (Pels et al. 2002, 2). They are involved in a set of actions incorporated into habitus.

The next section exemplifies the analytical potential of habitus, which lays in helping us understand how particular objects and the material practices they facilitate become incorporated and what are the effects of such incorporation with regard to the experienced continuity (i.e., normalcy of transnational lives of people who *inhabit* different locations).

The Materiality of Habitus: Some Empirical Examples

The unproblematic connection between 'here' and 'there' by keeping intact certain material practices

is based on the use of objects. Implied is also the quality of the migrant's own competence – the embodied knowledge of how to use them, the embodied 'normality' of a practice.

For example, an Iranian woman living in Sweden knows how (and therefore wants) to prepare the tea of her own preference by using a specific type of kettle. The reason for using the kettle is not its technical superiority: she said that she wants it 'only to have the same routine and the same looks' as in Iran. The material practice she was socialised into in her native surroundings demands the use of this particular object; the other side of the experiential coin is that its presence – or, in her words, 'looks' – not only evokes but *materialises, makes tangible, the continuity between the two kitchens in the two countries as well as between what the same person does in these two different locations*. Upon migration, the material practice that contributes to this informant's feeling of emplacement (into in her home-in-the-making in Malmö) is not detachable from this very object.

A woman living in London and visiting her parental home in Istanbul several times a year, told me that she habitually took shoes to be repaired in the Istanbul shop that her parents have frequented for years. High London prices are not the reason for this practice; she does it 'without even thinking about it' – it is 'so normal'. This practice is pure habit (underlying her transnational *being*) and exemplifies the experiential continuity of transnational fields. Shoes used in one location are repaired in another and return to the first location for further use. A continuity of circular movement is thus established, as is the continuity of this person's presence in her Istanbul neighbourhood, where she attends to everyday matters in spite of (also) living in London. Several people I interviewed in Sweden, including refugees, labour migrants and student migrants from a number of countries, told me about shoes and clothes brought to their place of origin for repair.

A less standard, yet relevant, example was provided by an academic couple with children who travelled back and forth not only between countries but also between continents: Whenever they moved, they brought their kitchen table along.

Made of solid oak, the table is admirably large and extremely heavy. Spending huge amounts of money on having the table transported was not a rational choice, but an answer to the need for uninterrupted continuation of a number habitual practices this family engages in around that table. In their many temporarily rented homes furnished by others, their table was a minimal but stable point of homemaking and, at the same time, a solid point of departure towards new emplacements in their new surroundings.

It is crucial that objects such as the ones mentioned above are well-known (since habitually used) to the migrants and can thus continue to be used in new surroundings in ways that do not demand any special efforts. This is sometimes interlinked with the conviction about the superior quality of the preferred objects; such objects (especially food items) often come from the original homelands. However, I find the opposite examples especially relevant in the discussion of how the notion of habitus helps us to better understand what is at stake in the process of migration, namely, examples of objects utilised and practices exercised in the country of immigration that migrants 'cannot be without' when travelling to their original homes.

A Bosnian woman got used to certain food products during her years in Sweden; she arrived as a refugee at a young age and returned to her place of origin after having completed higher education (see Povrzanović Frykman 2017). *Lingonbröd* (lingonberry bread) medicine for the children, and Thai and Mexican spices, are in her luggage whenever she returns from the visits to her parents who still live in Sweden. Swedish shops namely offer a great selection of food that is hard to obtain in Bosnia, and she says, 'I brought from Sweden quite different cooking habits.' Her friends tease her since the food offered in her home is quite different from what is usually consumed in Bosnian homes. However, her husband (himself not a migrant) acquired the taste for Mexican and Thai spices. On the other hand, this woman's parents kept the habit of regularly preparing traditional Bosnian dishes during the two decades of their life in Sweden. Yet, they developed a preference for 'Swedish' coffee

and consequently drink it – and serve it to others, to the disagreement of their son in law – not only in Sweden but also on their visits to Bosnia (see *ibid.*).

A young American man married to an Italian woman lived in Italy for three years before moving to Sweden. He got attached to the *espresso moka* – a non-electronic espresso making device that is used on a stove (see Povrzanović Frykman & Humbracht 2013). He has been taking it along ever since ('everyplace I've gone'). He eventually stopped taking it to US as he bought one for his mother instead. It turned out that she is not using it; it is actually used only by her migrant son during his visits. The coffee-maker is related to the preferred taste of coffee ('I developed a taste for it; it is more tasty than American coffee'). By having the coffee made in a particular way, this man makes sure that his day starts 'normally' on regular workdays, on tourist trips and during family visits, in his homes in Italy, Sweden and the US. The smell, sound and taste produced by the coffee-maker create a particular sensual environment in any place this device is used. This man's preference for a taste and the respective aspects of his habitus changed due to living in another country and getting familiar with a different materiality (here, related to coffee-making).

Similarly, a man raised in Greece and Italy (see *ibid.*) started to use a cheese cutter since moving to Sweden for professional reasons. He not only uses a cheese cutter on regular basis in Sweden but also brings it to family members in the other three countries encompassed by his transnational social field. He endorsed a new material practice that he tried to introduce to his non-migrant counterparts. Whatever the result, he is sure that the cheese cutter – an object he 'cannot be without' – is at hand when he visits them.

I find the issue of replicating or duplicating the use of a utensil both 'here' and 'there' especially powerful illustrations of *hexis*. My material suggests that keeping the same kind of utensil in each location in which migrants organise their everyday lives (so that they 'feel at home') is rather common. Cooking and eating utensils, such as cookers, tools, pots and mugs, appear as an important part of the material context of do-

mestic food production, consumption and (often troublesome) transportation that is indispensable in the discussion of the sense of continuity in transnational lives. A variety of food-items (especially spices) and food-preparing utensils, including e.g., electronic water-heaters that are brought along from Sweden and eventually left 'there' (in a regularly visited household in the country of origin) can be interpreted in terms of *hexis*. 'Having' and using a device, a food item or a spice, some cosmetics or a (non-prescription) medicine, is clearly an aspect of *being*, i.e., the capacity of an activity (practice involving objects) that lends the sense of normalcy. The more basic, everyday and taken-for-granted the presence of an item is, the more strongly felt is its absence.

Importantly, the fact that food (unlike e.g. the kettle or the coffee-maker above) is perishable as it is consumed, does not contradict the argument here. On the contrary, it can be seen as the utmost proof of the 'normal' way of being unhindered by migration, if the migrant is able to enjoy the preferred tastes and smells without much worry about being able to acquire them again, at any location within a transnational field. It is the *practice of eating* specific food prepared in a specific way that assures continuity, not the stable vs. perishable materiality of a food item.

While the objects mentioned above ensure an uninterrupted pleasure and smoothness of 'normal' everyday life, the familiar cosmetics, pills and herbs are also preferred for reasons of trust (see, e.g., Abranches 2014). The more they are in direct touch with the body, the more important becomes the issue of trust. There seems to be a general tendency (not specific to migrants) to prefer medicine produced and *packed* in the way we are familiar with, even if a different product might have precisely the same chemical content. In line with my argument here, it is the familiarity of the very package that matters. My material contains numerous stories about seemingly trivial items that are easily available both 'here' and 'there', such as e.g. shampoo, being stubbornly carried across transnational fields.

Migrants and their counterparts have a broader realm of comparison and a larger number of choices, but they often engage in 'unnecessary'

transportation of things across national borders.⁶ However, the critical matter here is that they are keeping the continuity of their normalities and that the objects ensuring the continuity are often so banal and common that they are seldom reflected on, just as the shoes mentioned above are repaired 'there' 'without even thinking about it'.

Fractures of Habitus: Reflections on Change

Simultaneity of migrants' lives as defined by Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) encompasses both ways of being and ways of belonging. Here, the simultaneity, or experiential continuity, of the ways of being is in focus, as well as the role of objects and material practices in providing migrants with a sense of 'being themselves' in different locations. Since processes of incorporation and emplacement involve both the body and the senses, subjectivity changes as a consequence of lived experiences and adoption of new material practices. In the case of migrants, it is probable that it somehow changes with regard to the overall materiality in the context of immigration. New ideas, values and behaviours may be adopted as a result of migration, but also new ways of doing things, new material practices. However, while they contribute to a smooth emplacement in a new context, they might be perceived as disturbing fractures in the old ones.

Therefore, stories of *exemplary situations* (as suggested in Mol 2008), which exemplify how a migrant's habitus changes due to living in new contexts, are of special interest here. These are situations in which people gain insight into how different they became (how they feel different or are perceived as different) because of being migrants and having had new experiences in new contexts of emplacement. These stories tell about gaps between the expectations and the actualisation of 'normalcy' in the 'old', familiar contexts of origin, the gaps that require reflections on what 'being myself' actually means in material terms.

Jennifer Rowsell (2011) posits that objects that people hold dear and important allow for ac-

counting for *fractures of habitus that are observable in instances of practice*: 'Fractal habitus, as a term and concept, helps me to identify ... dispositions and parts of self that I would not be able to see and to access otherwise' (ibid, 334). For Rowsell, 'fractal habitus' is a way of 'interpreting micro subjectivities to access ways of making meaning in certain context' (ibid., 335).

Situations exemplifying fractures of habitus are those significant moments in which migrants either become aware of doing something (involving objects) wrongly (as in my example with the key) or in which they are perceived other people as doing something wrongly. While it is not surprising that a recently arrived migrant needs time to figure out how to engage with the materiality of the new surroundings, the migrant's return into the old, familiar surroundings seems to be especially revealing of the perceived fractures of habitus. Fractures in normalcy demand reflection; they make people aware of changes set on their route by the act of migration. As will be exemplified below, they may involve strong emotions.

For example, a fifty-year-old woman who migrated from Croatia to Sweden at the age of eighteen said that 'she needs two days to adjust' whenever visiting her sister, with whom she stays when in Croatia. She specifically referred to a different manner of washing the dishes.⁷ She is critical of her sister's way of doing it, but wants to 'adjust' in order not to offend her sister. She is able to adjust since she is familiar with that particular material practice; she is still 'from there' and can quickly adapt to a practice that makes her unproblematically emplaced in her sister's household.

Another example pertains to how those staying behind are critical of the migrant's habitual behaviour, in this case, of not switching off the electricity whenever leaving the room. This woman living in Sweden has namely been exposed to recurrent comments, uttered both by family members and friends in Croatia, on her careless use of electricity. The irritation seems to be considerable (and hard to hold back), as the critique has been uttered in the migrant's own home.

Such situations of perceived (irritable) difference exemplify why thinking in terms of 'fractures' is useful. It opens up not only for exploring

the very changes of habitus but also for exploring how these changes are negotiated and overcome, or feared and left uncommented, or held against the migrant, causing conflict. Moreover, the critique such as the one concerning the 'abuse' of electricity also implies a subtle reminder of a better living standard in another country. 'It shows that you live in Sweden', this woman was told. The line of difference was thus drawn not just between the migrant and the person staying behind, but between the people who can and those who cannot afford 'behaving like that', pertaining to broader (economic) power asymmetries in the transnational social field.

Towards the conclusion, there is an exemplary story describing a different kind of fracture that is intrinsically connected to an object of daily use – an old coffee mug in a migrant's home in the country of origin. The story was shared by a young female student who did not have the money to visit her family frequently. To her great disappointment, she realised that the family members who stayed behind had ultimate power in defining normalcy involving this object, not herself. At the occasion of one of her visits home, this student saw that her mug was now used also by her mother and sister. *Her* mug was reduced to just 'a mug' in the household.

The tacit understanding within that family, of 'ownership' of that mug and its exclusive connection to one person's practice, has been disrupted by migration. As the young woman returned home relatively rarely, from the point of view of the family members who stayed behind she was not truly emplaced in their home any more.

This is not a story about formal ownership or the right to exclusive use. It is a story of ownership-through-practice and of the need for the migrant to practice emplacement. It is a story of emplacement, here evolving as (perceived) displacement. Finally, it is a story of a fracture in habitus that was imposed on the migrant by those staying behind. Notwithstanding the loving and intimate relationship, both the mother and the sister saw this young woman as someone who 'left' and therefore supposedly had no claims at the habitual emplacement, as was the case before she became a migrant. 'We thought it didn't mat-

ter anymore' they said, while the young woman sharing the story just could not get over it as she was so deeply hurt.

Conclusion: A Practice Theory of Becoming

A material culture perspective is needed for a balanced understanding of migrants' lives as positioned both in material and discursive terms and equally importantly formed by practices (pertaining to the ways of being) as by representations (pertaining to the ways of belonging). Positioned at the intersection between ethnology, migration research and studies of material culture, this article argued for recognising the importance of the material layers of transnational social fields. The claim that objects and material practices contribute to, or even condition, the constitution of transnational social fields implies that they should be explored as material foundations of migrants' lives that traverse locations across state borders.

Simultaneity of migrants' lives in transnational social fields defined by Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) encompasses both ways of being and ways of belonging. This simultaneity, or experiential continuity, can be exemplified and understood by following the objects. In the theoretical framework presented in the article, what objects symbolise if displaying belonging is less important than how they provide migrants with a sense of 'being themselves' (by allowing them to engage in familiar mundane practices) in different locations. The objects' role as generators of feelings and cultural meanings is set aside, in order to focus on their roles in animating material practices, emplacing lives and inhabiting places.

Three theoretical statements were elaborated, that were grounded in the analysis of ethnographic material. They referred to the presence of objects in another location, the continuity of practices perceived as normal, and the practice-based feeling of emplacement. Bourdieu's notion of habitus and Hage's discussion of hexis helped to illuminate the interconnectedness of those statements and suggested that studying

the changes of habitus that occurred due to migration is needed for a deeper understanding of the processes of emplacement through practice.

I hope to have exemplified how 'the object-turn', which implies a shift from the 'identity-talk' to 'object-talk', adds to the complexity of our understanding of migrants' lives. Objects do help the migrants to overcome or even deny the segregation between different locations in transnational fields of their own making. They also prompt them to reflect on how they change(d) by having practiced emplacement in the context of their lives in the places of immigration. In the case of the keys mentioned above, I eventually learned how to use them in both countries; one could say that I eventually became a fully-fledged transnational migrant. This implies that, with some effort and over a period of time, I got emplaced in both contexts in equally harmonious ways.

Such changes over time suggests the need for what can tentatively be called a *practice theory of*

transnational ways of becoming – of becoming a transnational migrant who is smoothly emplaced in different locations. However, a 'smooth' – or 'good', viable and satisfying – transnational being is not a static achievement; it depends on ongoing processes of emplacement that always involve practical engagement with the materiality of things.

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NOTES

- 1 In the research project mentioned above, methodological individualism – defined by Daniel Miller (2009, 3) as 'an approach to people that is no more psychological, and no less anthropological, through a decision to concentrate on the individual as primary unit of analysis' – helped to 'break the spell' of looking at migrants as members of groups based on their origin. For more elaborate discussion on methodology see Povrzanović Frykman 2017.
- 2 The question of how transnational (cross-border) practices may differ from translocal practices within one country is beyond the scope of this article. On the level of empirical research, however, geographical distance intertwined with border regimes and economic status, communication infrastructures and possibilities of transport as well the local availability of objects and goods that make people 'feel at home' need to be taken into consideration when teasing out the relevant differences between transnational and other translocal practices.
- 3 See Atkinson 2015, for the discussion of whether habitus can be severed from fields to become 'detachable capsule' for analysis.
- 4 'If what I have becomes what I am, it means that what was outside of me has also become an internal part of me. It is here that emerges the dominant trope of an 'internalization' that creates in me a 'durable' disposition, a durable mode of being. The easiest way to think of this internalization is by thinking about how a body acquires 'physical fitness' after years of regular exercise. Fitness becomes a durable quality of one's body, something one always has rather than something one can have or have not, which means it becomes something one is. Habitus, however is not just general fitness, it is fitness to meet the challenges that a specific social milieu throws at you by the mere fact of living and evolving in it' (Hage 2013, 81–82).
- 5 Some authors refer to it as 'silent knowledge' that 'dwells in the body' (see Frykman 2012). As pointed by Deborah Reed-Danahay (2005, 101), Bourdieu sees body as a 'memory pad' through which learning takes place and is inscribed (see also Bourdieu 1977, 94, on 'the body as a memory'). Related to this is the analysis of personal artifacts along 'expected modes of performance' (White & Beaudry 2009, 213).
- 6 For the discussion of changed practices due to different means of transportation and due to the changes of habitus related to the time spent in another country, see Povrzanović Frykman & Humbracht 2013.
- 7 It is a common fact that matters of hygiene are sensitive; dish-washing has been observed as a domain of sensitive differences also in a national comparison between Sweden and Denmark (see Linde-Laursen 2010).

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KEYWORDS

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