Finnish Migrants in Germany: Identities, Positions, Representations

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The article is the summary of a Master's thesis submitted in 2014 at the European-University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder). Its research question concerns the links between Finnish culture, migration and identity constructions. To understand this adequately, the concept of daily identity work was applied. The participants were Finnish migrants living in Germany for several decades. The data was collected with a method mix consisting of narrative interviews and a participatory visual method based in photovoice. The results were presented in the depicting of different practices and material belongings that function as identity resources in the process of identification with Finnish culture. Many elements from Finnish culture were visible in the self-representations of the participants, even though they at first negated the assumption that Finnish culture played a role in their lives.

Keywords: migration, Finnish Migrants in Germany, identity constructions.

In 2014 Finland has been more visible than usual in Germany, because it was the center of attention at the Frankfurt Book Fair. The cooperation between Finland and Germany has a longer history though, with past interaction in literature, science, economy, culture and tourism (Lehtonen 1998). Finland was present in Germany for a long time. Nevertheless, the term "invisible migration" is used regarding Finnish migrants (Ruokonen-Engler 2012). Martin Böke assumes that this perception is connected to the fact that Finnish migrants are a small group in contrast to other groups of migrants in Germany (Böke 2009, 5-6). Often the self-perception of Finnish migrants as not genuine migrants is cited (Ruokonen-Engler 2012, 59; Böke 2009, 14). This also stems from an ethnizing hierarchy in the discourse about migration in Germany, in which Finnish migrants obtain a privileged position (Ruokonen-Engler 2012, 264).

Outi Tuomi-Nikula points out that in the 1960s migratory movements from Finland first got noticeable in Germany (Tuomi-Nikula 1989, 24). Furthermore, that in contrast to the self-image as being invisible, in daily life many habits and material belongings from Finnish culture can be witnessed, like Finnish furnishing (Tuomi-Nikula 1993) or the celebration of Finnish holidays (Tuomi-Nikula 1989, 114). Finnish migrants in Germany have been sparsely studied. The existing material consists of the works of Tuomi-Nikula as well as of an article (Böke 2009). A newer publication is by Ruokonen-Engler (2012). It studies the privileged position of female Finnish migrants in Germany. She criticized the existing research for a strong focus on acculturation-processes, which are influenced by static concepts of culture and society. Therefore, they conceptualize integration and acculturation as a task that the migrant has to fulfill (Ruokonen-Engler 2012, 41).

The research interest of my Master's thesis, the basis for this article, concerns the quality of links between daily identity work and culture in the context of Finnish migration. The focus is on the mechanisms of daily identity work. It explores the role of Finnish culture in it. Specifically, the research question was:

What role does Finnish culture play in the identity constructions of Finnish migrants after decades of living in Germany?

It is unavoidable to conceptualize culture and cultural difference as constructs that are to be seen in specific contexts and discourses (Moosmüller 2009, 13). Especially academic discourses about cultural identity seem relevant. What is the effect of an idea of cultural identity if its constructed character is highlighted; if the existence of essentialized, homogeneous societies is negated and if traditions are merely perceived as inventions (Ha 1999, 121)? Influenced by these perspectives from Kien Nghi Ha, one comes to the conclusion that the focus has to be on the complex ways which made these constructs come to life and on traces and marks left by them in histories, experiences and narrations, because those are the foundations of current, ever-changing self-perceptions and positions (Eickelpasch and Rademacher 2004, 67).

Rolf Eickelpasch and Claudia Rademacher describe identity as a topic that never goes out of style, important not only in academic contexts, but also in daily life. Especially, since postmodernity brought an increasing erosion of once solid pillars of identity construction (Eickelpasch and Rademacher 2004, 5). The transition from seemingly ordered modern times to late modernity or postmodernity is characterized by crises (Kraus 1996, 27). This is a challenge, because identity constructions are always closely connected to subject formations in specific eras and social contexts (Kraus 1996, 22). To handle the term identity adequately under postmodern circumstances, this article is guided by Heiner Keupp and his colleagues, who coined the term daily identity work (Keupp 1999).

The academic discourses surrounding migration are of equal importance. Here migrants are conceptualized as people whose reality is marked by connections and networks between country of origin and their country of residence and of enhanced mobility between those societies. In order to understand the links between identity, culture and migration adequately, it was decided to use this transnational perspective (Han 2010, 61; Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc 1992; Pries 1996). Its value is that it makes it possible to understand phenomena that reach across borders of nation states and their societies (Pries 2001, 49). Petrus Han points out that transmigrants rely on more than one society in the development of their identities (Han 2010, 70). Finnish migrants in Germany are influenced by these conditions, too.

Daily identity work

Transformations like individualization, erosion of traditions, pluralization and fractured barriers that characterize late modernity certainly play a role in identity formation. A result of these shifts is the vanishing of the "normal biography" (Eickelpasch and Rademacher 2004, 26-27). Processes of identification become more problematic and more variable. The subject is made up of many, sometimes conflicting or unresolved identities. There is no coherency. Identity develops in connection with the multiple ways in which one is is represented or addressed in the various cultural systems surrounding us. Contradictory identities are pulling us in several directions at all times, we have to change identifications continually. The only artificial coherency is self-constructed through comforting narrations about ourselves (Hall 1994, 182-183). Therefore, one can state that identity as an academic concept is "riddled with ambiguity, riven with contradictory meanings, and encumbered by reifying connotations" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 34). This makes work with it fairly difficult.

The theory of daily identity work might offer a solution for this dilemma. It conceptualizes the construction of identity as a life-long process, too (Keupp 1999, 189). It is close to the negations of fixed identity mentioned above. Stuart Hall proposed to speak about a continuous process of identification instead (Hall 1994, 196). In daily identity work the mechanisms of this process are in the focus.

Central elements of daily identity work are establishing connections, mediation of conflicts, usage of resources and the generation of narrations to bind the other elements together (Keupp 1999, 60). The goal is to give life experiences a coherent and comprehensible shape (Keupp 1999, 190).

Central terminologies of daily identity work

Partial identities are connected to certain contexts of life, like work or family. They are subject to continuous change. Old ones might vanish, if one for example changes jobs, while new ones gain importance (Keupp 1999, 217-219).

Identity feeling is understood as agglomeration of all biographical experiences (Keupp 1999, 225). It is assumed that some aspects have meaning be-

yond partial identities. They trickle into the "identity feeling". It determines how coherent the person perceives itself and its surroundings. It also dictates what one perceives as adequate identity goals (Keupp 1999, 225-226), of which some are directed at social recognition and integration, based on the wish to establish belonging. Identity goals can be motivated by a wish to strengthen self-esteem or a feeling of uniqueness (Keupp 1999, 261-262). Daily identity work is a challenging navigation through a network of contradictory demands. Mediation of conflicts is frequent and takes shape as ability to endure tension and recurring crises . In order to achieve identity goals one mobilizes resources. This idea is based on the different sorts of capital developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1983), who differentiates between economic, cultural and social capital. In daily identity work those are translated into economic, cultural and social resources. Capital transformation was adopted as well, as resource transfer (Keupp 1999, 196- 201).

Narrative connections between past, present and future or between different living environments are a central part of daily identity work. They negotiate how experiences in the contexts of partial identities, as an employee, as parent, as Finnish citizen or as migrant, are related to each other (Keupp 1999, 190). Ha highlights that migratory experiences can be regarded as fractures in one's own history, that have to be fixed through narrative conjunctions (Ha 1999, 24). The result is a narrative identity. This concept works well with the developed perception of identity, because openness and constant unfinishedness are included. It is a continuous struggle to establish coherence and continuity in an ever-changing self-narration (Kraus 1996, 169). Amir Sheikhzadegan attributes great significance to the narrative identity in postmodernity, since continuous transformation of living conditions and possible identifications force people to constantly redo their self-image (Sheikhzadegan 2013, 20).

Methodology

The aim was to equip the participants with as much power as possible. Furthermore, it was decided to use a method mix. Each method constructs the subject in a specific manner. It is an opportunity to achieve more depth in answering research questions (Muri 2014, 460). The idea was to do narrative interviews and additionally use a visual elicitation method. Both function as incentive to highlight Finnish origins. Especially daily practices would be in the focus of the visual method. The participants were informed about the reasons for the usage of a visual method, how it functions and what intentions were connected to the employment of this method. Still, it was a novelty. If questions are asked in a new way, the answers might show nuances that have been neglected so far.

The additional visual method was based on photovoice, a method with roots in "health promotion principles and the theoretical literature on education for critical consciousness, feminist theory, and nontraditional approaches to documentary photography" (Wang 1999, 185). Usually, it is applied to marginalized people (Strack, Magill and McDonagh 2004, 49). This was different here, since the participants were privileged persons. Photovoice is "an effective tool through which participants may narrate their perceptions and experiences" (Wang 1999, 191). It might be more accurate to speak of a visual elicitation method inspired by photovoice. The idea was to construct an incentive for controlled daily identity work, to use it as invitation to present oneself as "Finnish".

During the first meeting the participants were given a vague photographic mission. They were equipped with a camera and a time span of a couple of days for photographing. The posed task was: What aspects of your everyday life are Finnish?

This way the participants would reflect about these aspects before being interviewed about them. Often they would mention during the first meeting that there were no Finnish aspects at all to their daily activities and surroundings. Nevertheless, all of them were able to produce data that proved these assumptions wrong. Some days after collecting the images, the participants were asked to choose three images that they would like to discuss more deeply.

All in all, the empiric basis consisted of five life stories, 44 images and five interviews about the images. Four participants were female, one was male. The data was produced in April and May 2014 in Munich. The participants were born in Finland in the 1940s, with exception of one born in 1957. The majority arrived in Germany during the 1970s. The latest arrival was 1980.

Analysis

The analysis of the narrative identities was guided by Wolfgang Kraus (1996) and the concept of the positioning of narrative identities developed by Gabriele Lucius-Hoene and Arnulf Deppermann (2004). Sheikhzadegan criticized this approach for neglecting the role of lifestyle and daily habits (Sheikhzadegan 2013, 26). The visual part is an effort to fill out the blind spots. This article will focus on those results and not on the narrative identities.

Contacts and traveling

For the majority of the participants regular visits to Finland are very important. Not only seeing relatives and family in Finland, but also vacations in traditional Finnish cottages have been mentioned. One participant explained that she could not imagine a summer without spending time in the cottage. Now that her German husband is retired they spend many months of the year there. Almost all other participants expressed very similar views. Only one participant stated that she travels to Finland rarely. She was aware that this is rather untypical in contrast to other Finnish migrants.

With transnationality as paradigm influencing daily life and identity constructions (Ruokonen-Engler 2012, 86), this border-crossing activities can be considered important for daily identity work, too. Migrants maintain ties to old social contexts this way (Ruokonen-Engler 2012, 89). Tuomi-Nikula points out that the former networks of Finnish migrants back in Finland can shrink over time (Tuomi-Nikula 2013, 124). Regular visits can be regarded as a counter-measure. If one conceptualizes these contacts as social resources, the strengthening of former social ties and the establishing of belonging can be understood as identity goals here.

Contacts to other Finnish migrants are equally important. This does not only regard leisure activities, but also the involvement in German-Finnish structures. Of course there are variations in engagement. Analyzed with the idea of social resources, it can be highlighted: Contacts are not only a reservoir of examples for various identity constructions and their success or failure in a specific social situation. They also serve as an environment that communicates what kind of identity projects are to be regarded as desirable and which are not eligible. Furthermore, contacts serve as resource in dealing with obstacles and difficulties, because they can offer support in difficult times and situations (Keupp 1999, 202-203). One participant mentioned that she got to know a Finnish church group by chance, without being religious in any way. She decided to maintain these contacts though, in order to have a possibility to talk to Finnish people and she mentioned that these contacts appear to gain importance. She reckons that the solidarity under Finnish migrants in Germany might be much stronger, as for example among German migrants in other countries.

Another participant established contacts to Finnish migrants as soon as she arrived in Germany. She mentioned that, especially through the Finnish church group, she got to know many Finnish migrants in the area. She now has a vast circle of Finnish and German-Finnish friends. She also initiated a support group that offers mutual aid for Finnish migrants. This is an example how social resources can be supportive in order to overcome obstacles. If one acknowledges that this activism stems from Finnish migrants and the target group are in turn also Finnish migrants, it can be assumed that both the helping and the receiving of support fosters a sense of belonging. According to Tiina Lammervo who studied Finnish migrants in Australia "traditional ways of maintaining Finnish culture have been visits to Finland, visitors from Finland, or better yet, new immigrants from Finland" (Lammervo 2011, 192). This was also true here.

Media and daily rituals

Here books, movies and music are understood as Finnish media. All participants consume those, but also active production played a role. Many participants talked about Finnish music. One played Kantele with the pupils in the Finnish sunday school, where she was a teacher. She highlighted that the music of Jean Sibelius was important to her and intimately connected to Finland. Another participant talked about her son, who presented Finnish songs on the Kantele at an event at his German school. Another participant, a professional musician, mentioned a CD with early Finnish folk music he released in Germany.

One emphasized the importance of an internet-radio. The first picture she took during the visual part of the research showed this radio. It makes it possible for her to listen to Finnish radio programs every day and this is a great source of joy in her life. Ludger Pries points out that communication media of this kind make it possible that the country of origin is very present in in the daily lives of the transmigrants (Pries 1996, 467). The internet-radio is only one example. Today the Internet offers easy access to Finnish newspapers. This has been documented by other photographs taken by the participants, too.

Another important topic was Finnish food. Pries writes, that consumption and preparation of food from the country of origin is meaningful for migrants as a continuation of cultural habits (Pries 1996, 468).

Especially for one of the participants this has clearly been very important. She explained that Finland is quite present in their daily cooking and that she often bakes Finnish pastries. At least every two weeks. Furthermore, she reported that the way she usually arranges the coffee-table, it could as well be anywhere in Finland. She documented this aspect with images. She regards these aspects as something very ordinary and mentions that her German husband has adopted this way of life benevolently. She continued with a memoir of how she and Finnish friends once prepared hundreds of Karelian pirogis for the Finnish Christmas market in her kitchen. Lammervo found that Finnish food is especially important in the context of holidays, too (Lammervo 2011, 193). Another aspect showing up multiple times concerned gruel. One image taken by a participant for instance showed many different packages of gruel.

Finnish connoted work and voluntary work

Almost every participant was involved in work connected to Finland. This is interesting because it shows how Finnish origins have been used as helpful instruments on the job market. Pries writes that transnational social spaces influence the work biographies of people heavily, since they function as a separate regime of access-, allocation- and mobility-possibilities (Pries 1996, 469). This way specific perspectives and fields of activities are created for privileged transmigrants, like Finnish migrants in Germany. One participant worked as official translator on the side. She also has been approached by a consulting group looking for people to help them venture into the Finnish market. An offer that she rejected. For a while she was employed as organizer of German-Finnish culture weeks and in the Finnish consulate, where also another participant worked. The latter earned money as a Finnish speaking tourist guide, too.

This did not only regard wage labor but also voluntary work. Many participants did voluntary work in German-Finnish structures. Those included a Finnish music society, church groups or the German-Finnish Society and a group that organized Finnish neighborhood help. The Finnish sunday schools have been places where some of the participants were very active, too.

Language

For the participants language has been a central topic. It wasn't merely about talking Finnish, but more importantly about teaching Finnish to children and grandchildren. None of the participants mentioned Swedish as the second official language of Finland, though.

One person brought up multiple times how important it was for her to raise her children bilingually. In the daily life of the family it was ordinary to change languages often. She mentioned that for her it is something special to be able to speak Finnish. She considered Finnish as an intimate, secret language of her family. She has been very consequent in establishing Finnish in the family and also told as anecdote that her children once organized Finnish lessons for their German friends.

Another participant described her efforts to teach Finnish to her grandchildren, who unfortunately are more interested in soccer than Finnish grammar. Tuomi-Nikula has asked German-Finnish children about their Finnish-skills. It became visible that the initiative of parents is relevant for the development of the language skills of their children (Tuomi-Nikula 2013, 109). There was only one participant who did not intensively foster Finnish skills in her children. This was due to the fact that the family spent time in Asia when her children were little and she expressed sincere regret that she did not teach them Finnish. The teaching of the Finnish language can of course be regarded as the fostering of cultural capital, or in other words, cultural resources.

A participant mentioned that the Finnish language gained importance as she got older and also so that she despises the currently spoken Finnish slang in Finland. She reported that Finnish friends told her that her way of using the Finnish language clearly signalizes that she has been living abroad for a long time. If she ever speaks Finnish, it is with her siblings in Finland, with the people from the church group and with other Finnish contacts in Germany.

Objects

Tilmann Habermas differentiates between symbolic objects and utility objects. Symbolic objects primarily represent something, while utility objects have a practical use. It is possible that the latter additionally have a symbolic function, described as connotation (Habermas 1996, 180). It can be assumed that the photographed objects all have Finnish connotation.

Personal space has specific functions too. It allows assumptions about inhabitants and personal space can also be used for self-expression (Habermas 1996, 135). In connection to daily identity work it shall be assumed that people do construct themselves through their personal space under the usage of various identity resources. The material resources function as instruments for the realization of identity goals. Tiina Lammervo found that the first generation of Finnish migrants in Australia usually decorated their personal space with Finnish objects and memorabilia. She explains this as a way to strengthen and maintain a "Finnish identity" (Lammervo 2011, 193-194). Tuomi-Nikula wrote about this aspect as well. According to her, furniture as national symbols helps to maintain an "ethnic identity". She describes an expectation of German visitors to find an authentic Finnish house, too. This favors the identification with Finnish origins and the expression of those (Tuomi-Nikula 1993, 19-20). The foundation is the already mentioned positive recognition of Finnish migrants in Germany. It creates the possibility to provoke validation through symbols of identity (Habermas 1996, 302).

Finnish memorabilia are charged with meaning. A traditional Finnish wall carpet can be a symbol for Finland, but it can additionally be a symbol for family in Finland (Lammervo 2011, 193). One participant explained that two of the images she took do belong together. One showed a framed picture of the wedding of her parents. The other showed an old doll. Together these two images are a symbol for her childhood. Tuomi-Nikula noted that the average age for leaving Finland is 23. Therefore, objects that symbolize the childhood and youth in Finland have a great emotional value. These objects are unique and not replaceable. (Tuomi-Nikula 1993, 26). Tillmann Habermas describes those objects as anchors that symbolically refer to the past of a person and to absent significant persons and places (Habermas 1996, 302). This way the objects are used in order to establish coherency, too.

Other images that have been chosen for discussion by the participants show objects that could be classified as symbols for Finland and Finnish culture. Tuomi-Nikula understands those objects as symbols,

signalizing Finnish origins and the identification with Finland. She refers to Finnish flags or traditional costumes as obvious symbols for Finland (Tuomi-Nikula 1993, 21-22). Here this definition is wider. Objects that signify Finland in a more subtle way are included. An example are the Kalevala plates, that decorate the living room of a participant.

The participant told that her family has collected these plates for a long time. Often they have been presents from Finnish relatives. Interestingly, the presentation is very similar to observations

made by Tuomi-Nikula earlier. She described that many families own the complete set of plates and that they are often put in a representative place, like the living room, as in the case of this participant (Tuomi-Nikula 1993, 22). They extended the Kalevala-theme beyond the plates. There is also a wall-clock with lyrics from Kalevala carved in, made by a Finnish potter who lived nearby, too.

In the garden of another participant there is another distinctive personal symbol for Finland. It is a symbol both for Finland and for the family. Together with her husband she planted two birch-trees when they bought their house. These stand for the sons but she also considers birches as a symbol for Finland. She explained that whenever she sees the trees, she is thinking about Finland. This was her reason for planting the trees. Tuomi-Nikula wrote that the positive, exotic image of Finland as country of lakes and forests is so influential that urban Finns like the participant identify with it, too (Tuomi-Nikula 1993, 25-26).

All participants owned Finnish objects of utility or design objects. It seems relevant that these objects are used on a daily basis. One participants said that Finnish design objects are Finnish, because they are understood as objects of utility. Therefore, these objects are described as objects of utility with strong Finnish connotation.

Conclusion

The research question this project was started with asked what role Finnish culture plays in the identity constructions of Finnish migrants after decades of living in Germany. To answer this the theory of daily identity work was applied. This allowed the observation of the mechanisms of identity construction and it was a possibility for highlighting the role of Finnish culture in it.

It became clear that even after decades in Germany Finland is still a major point of reference for all the participants. It plays an important role. As shown, elements with Finnish connotation were clearly visible in their daily identity work and Finnish origins still constituted an central part of the identity feeling of all the participants.

In some of the life stories Finnish culture only played a marginal role. The visual data showed that in these cases Finnish elements were very present

in daily life, though. As a vague tendency, it was found that the persons who were more involved in activities nourishing a Finnish partial identity, also identified more strongly with Finland, or in other words, did position themselves more distinctively as Finnish persons.

Furthermore, at first the participants often were not aware of how many "Finnish elements" were present in their daily life and material belongings. This only became clear later, when they were forced to reflect on their lives and lifestyle during data production. As already shown by Tuomi-Nikula (1993), every participant had Finnish material objects in the household. Since these objects played representative and decorative roles and often took central places in the residences, it became clear that they can be regarded as resources in daily identity work.

In order to achieve the identity goals connected to Finnish culture, the participants employ certain resources and practices with Finnish connotation beyond material belongings. As shown in this article, these encompassed activities like the consumption of Finnish media and food, regular visits to Finland as well as the maintaining of ties to other Finnish migrants and to friends and family in Finland. Furthermore, the fostering of the Finnish language proved to be very important in this context.

The identity goals and the usage of relevant materials vary, like the individual biographies and experiences of the participants do, too. Anyway, the thesis that transmigrants keep strong ties to their country of origin can be confirmed (Han 2010, 69). Furthermore, the same does apply to the assumption that transmigrants rely on more than one society in their construction efforts (Ruokonen-Engler 2012, 87).

As mentioned before (Ruokonen-Engler 2012, 344-346; Böke 2009, 18; Tuomi-Nikula 1993, 19-20) the positive connotation and "invisibility" of Finns in Germany definitively has an impact on the identity constructions of the participants. It encourages the highlighting of Finnish origins, since rather recognition than discrimination can be expected. Finnish migrants in Germany are very privileged this way.

While elements connected to Finland were in the focus, of course also other identifications are important. These have been merely in the background, since the research question specifically highlighted the role of Finnish culture. An example for other identifications is the self-description of one participant: He called himself a Bavarian musician.

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