

Crossing Borders and Shifting Boundaries of Belonging in Post-Wall Europe. A Gender Lens¹

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Introduction

Borders and boundaries are central to states and their nations. Physically marked borders as well as imagined communities (Anderson 1991) and their *limes* – boundaries are the frame for the praxis/management exercised by the state authorities on both sides. They are also the frame for the usage of the border and related boundaries by the local and by more distant populations. In this text the focus will be on the latter, although it is clear that the usage will be very much related to and affected by, not to say determined by, the state border-management regimes, which change over time and were undergoing a radical change from the early nineties on.

I want to explore how, with the change of the nature of borders, the practice of the border was modified or adopted as a completely new tool in improving one's social, political and economic condition. For people who used to live behind the iron curtain, crossing that border was impossible or entailed high risks that only a few could take or were prepared to take for the sake of an opportunity that was always beyond the border, on the other side. Crossing precisely that border with relative ease since 1989 not only represents a realized dream

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but can also yield an opportunity for a better life at home, that is, no longer necessarily on the other side of the border but on this side. For many people, departure no longer implies leaving forever, and for many it does not exclude return as it once did.

The way people practice border-crossing depends on their social and political context and their positioning in it. Those who have the option of no longer “turning their back to the border” (De Rapper and Sintès, 2006) experience a different degree of ease or difficulty in crossing a border. If they still need a visa (or need one again) in order to enter a country, they are much more jeopardized in their mobility than those who can travel visa-free. Social knowledge about border-crossing is unevenly distributed, and reliance on “gatekeepers” and migration brokers, either among the previously established personal networks or among professional smugglers (*passeurs*) or traffickers, becomes unavoidable for many border crossers, especially as border-management regimes tighten up. The enlargement of the EU and the tightening of its new external borders have also created a new situation for those citizens remaining on the other side and who now need a visa to enter Poland, Hungary or the Czech Republic. The situation is different in these new EU member states or in Southern European countries – such as Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Greece – that have become new targets for migration than in the old, core immigration countries.

Migrant women and men do not have the same opportunities. Their access to and their positioning in society and on the labor market both in their country of origin and the country of destination or transit are different. Mobility has a specific significance for women: historically they have been associated with immobility and passivity. For a long time they were either invisible or regarded as dependents rather than migrants in their own right. In many societies, in spite of overall feminization of migratory movements, the obstacles and restrictions to women’s mobility still persist. Furthermore, women on the move often face moral stigmatization. Therefore, a potential social impact of mobility as a newly gained or not yet achieved freedom is radically different for women than for men. Women are more likely than men to be undocumented and to enter jobs in the reproductive sphere, where their presence can be easily concealed. This can be an advantage, but it also increases risks. Crossing borders can be empowering, and established gender norms may be challenged. But it can also lead to new dependencies and reinforce existing gender boundaries and hierarchies.

My aim is not to draw a representative typology but to highlight migrants, border-crossers, as social innovators who find, invent and imagine new ways of living transnationally, using borders and mobility as a resource and thereby contributing, bottom-up, to integrative processes across Europe. The focus of this

chapter is on people in Eastern Europe who can build on their social capital and successfully use opportunity structures that tend to favor them as candidates to migration and mobility over other migrants (from Southern Europe in particular). The aborted attempts at mobility, forced displacements, and forced territorial assignments are all a widespread phenomenon of post-wall European migration. Trafficking in women in particular, human tragedies of attempts at border-crossing in the Strait of Gibraltar, the proliferation of retention centers, and expulsions are topics of both scholarly and political debate and attract considerable media attention. However, they are beyond the scope of this paper.

The transformation of the wall into a “door” – to use Georg Simmel’s metaphor (1994) – enabled the citizens of some states behind the former wall to connect what used to be separated, to *bridge the states and markets*². But as we shall see, the capacity and capability of social innovation and freedom of choice in trying to use the door as an opportunity are socially situated. They depend on social capital and gender and on the broader socio-political context.

Opportunity Structures and Social Capital

The redrawing of the European map in the aftermath of the events of 1989 and the collapse of the communist regimes triggered an unprecedented mobility of persons and heralded a new phase in European migrations. The former migration pattern, which was predominantly labor-driven, has become highly diversified. Refugees, “repatriates”, shuttle/commuter migrants, and undocumented and trafficked migrants are now some of the numerically most important categories along with the traditional labor and family migration (Morawska 2000; Morokvasic and Rudolph 1994; Okolski 2001; Wallace and Stola 2001; Weber 1998). New “migratory spaces” between East and West, between South and North emerged as spaces of departure and circulation, as transit and, increasingly, as target spaces.

When the border that prevented or jeopardized the moves became permeable, one of the most important features in the new migrations from and within Eastern Europe was not that people became “free to leave” to the West but rather that they were “free to leave and to come back” (Morokvasic 1999). What used to be an exodus (permanent emigration) in the time of the cold war could

2 “Bridging States and Markets” is the title of the book that Hedwig Rudolph and I edited in 1993, a collection of essays based on contributions to the conference on “Transitions” that we co-organised in 1991 and where the new political, social and economic context for migration and mobility in Europe was discussed.

now become a back and forth movement, as it historically used to be. Departure no longer implied leaving forever and does not, as before, exclude return.

The new possibility of circulation is facilitated not only by liberalized exit legislation but also by the relaxed visa requirements for the citizens of the states, now new members of the EU (visa requirements were first lifted for Poles as early as April 1991 and last for Rumanians on January 1, 2002). “Settling in mobility” has in fact become the only option where access to durable settlement – via asylum or the “Aussiedler” status – has meanwhile become highly unlikely.

The European “Schengen space”, with reinforced controls at the outer borders of the member countries and relaxed, deterritorialized internal border controls, further facilitates this circulation. After crossing the first border, migrants have no difficulty circulating within the space from one member state to the other. They can move freely within the Schengen space exploring opportunities, choosing more attractive destinations and abandoning those that have become difficult to access.

A further facilitator of the moves is a persistent demand for labor in certain sectors in the EU, a demand only partially covered by official recruitment into short-term work programs in the “old Europe”. These official programs³, in turn, are a stepping stone for establishing contacts and entry into the informal labor market, especially for those migrants who do not have established networks to rely on. As the EU countries try to regulate migration with different short-term contracts, they also indirectly produce disguised migration practices. As a result, the number of both legal and illegal entries into the EU has increased constantly.

Freedom of circulation within the EU has indeed made the borders inside the EU space less important to those who have citizenship, a legal status or passports that allow them to travel freely. For others, essentially non-Europeans, the controls have been tightened. For many people, interstate borders remain real obstacles to mobility and create a reliance on various transnational bonds and networking. Saskia Sassen (2003, p. 59) calls them “alternative circuits”, and they are capable of functioning undisturbed by such obstacles as borders and restrictive border-management regimes.

Southern Europe is increasingly a target for Central and Eastern Europeans. Because of its geography, it is more easily accessible by boat or on foot than old core immigration countries in Western Europe are. Most Eastern Europeans

3 In Germany; the main program provider in Europe majority of the jobs are filled mainly by Poles (Dietz 2005).

come as tourists, and then they stay beyond their permitted time. (The visa obligation has been gradually lifted for the citizens of the new member states and of candidate states; Ukrainians and Moldavians come with visas.) These target countries also have undergone an economic transformation, putting them on the same level of income and welfare as Northern Europe. However, there are significant differences in the nature of the economy between North and South. The Southern European economy is based on the expansion of the tertiary sector rather than on industry, and it is characterized by informality, flexibility and the dynamism of small-scale enterprise. These features create a specific demand to which migrants readily respond. They are found in dependent, low-paid jobs in agriculture and construction, in small manufacturing firms (mainly male migrants), and in tourism and catering with a high seasonal demand (both men and women). The context in which more and more local women are entering the labor market creates also a demand for domestic, mostly live-in, service workers, generating opportunities for immigrant women. So does the sex industry, which draws women from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe.

The circulation of Eastern Europeans to and from Southern Europe has been facilitated further by a series of amnesties for undocumented immigrants in these countries. In addition to having a certain pull effect for potential migrants, such amnesties mainly have two parallel and overlapping consequences. In some cases they have led to long-term settlement, especially when migrants have brought their families, resembling a more classical type of migration. In most other cases, they have enabled the migrants with a stable status to move more easily not only between their country and the one that legalized their status, but also to other areas within the EU space. However, the coming and going of citizens of Rumania, Poland, Ukraine or Moldavia in and out of Italy takes place at a different rhythm than is the case with countries of their immediate neighborhood (Weber 1998).

The post-communist transition has put a large number of women on the move. They are looking for opportunities, trying to face new market conditions. In general, women predominate in migrations from and within Central and Eastern Europe. In 2004 in Germany there were 12 Polish women for every 10 Polish men. The ratio was the same for Slovaks, 13 to 10 for Rumanians, 18 to 10 for Czechs, and 23 to 10 for Estonians and Latvians (Statistisches Bundesamt, quoted by Dietz 2005, p. 35). Their mobility mirrors the newly acquired or re-discovered freedom of movement, but it can also be a result of coercion and human trafficking. As in other parts of the world, it reflects new possibilities as well as a proliferation of precarious jobs and increasing dependencies. Women were the first to lose their jobs in the process of post-communist economic re-

structuring, and they became a large supply of would-be migrants, readily available to respond to the demand in destination countries. This demand has been varied, but women from East and Central Europe have had little access to regular employment in the West (Rudolph 1996), and when they are recruited, they tend to experience de-skilling to a greater extent than men do (Nedelcu 2005). They also have had less access to training schemes adapted to the labor market demand (Quack 1994). Working as an *au pair* remains one of the few legal means of *de facto* labor migration where young, single women predominate (Hess and Lenz 2001).

This is one of the reasons why women, a minority in official immigrant recruitment programs, have been turning to jobs in the informal sector as domestic helpers or caretakers or engaging in trading and prostitution. Most of the Eastern European women in Germany, Italy and Belgium are doing reproductive work as domestic helpers or caring for the elderly. In Italy, out of 35,000 regularly employed Poles, 25,000 are women. Of all the applications for legal status by Poles in Italy, 75 percent were in the domestic and care sector. Whereas the number of domestic workers from other countries has been stagnating or decreasing, the number of Eastern Europeans doubled in five years from 1998 to 2002 (d'Ottavio 2005, p. 102). The irregular character of women's entry and of their subsequent income-generating activity remains much more easily concealed than that of migrant men. Research in Germany shows that many of them manage to stay for a couple of years by moving back and forth using the legal tourist permission for three months and then returning home and coming back again (Hess and Lenz 2001).

The new EU member states, having reluctantly adopted the "acquis communautaire", which imposes visas on their eastern or southern neighbors, have each adopted measures to facilitate circulation and diminish the disastrous effects that closed borders have on an economy based on cross-border regional cooperation. Business creation has also been a popular way of legalizing the status for migrants from neighboring Eastern European countries (Okolski 2001; Wallace 2001). Citizens of Serbia can obtain their Hungarian visa on the border; Moldavians still do not need a visa to enter the EU candidate country Rumania, where they can claim Rumanian citizenship on the basis of their Rumanian origins.

The undesirable side effect of the external EU borders that fracture the spaces of regional cooperation in the East and in Central Europe and the Balkans encourages the practice of ethnic preference, whereby those who can claim common origin with their country of destination are treated differently than those who cannot claim it. The question of showing ethnic preference in order

to facilitate border-crossing has also generated parliamentary debates in Budapest and Warsaw, where the issue has been whether Hungarians and Poles should be given preference over other citizens of the neighboring countries (Serbia, Ukraine).

The policy and implementation of tight borders around Europe is based on an assumption about the capability of states to fully control their borders. The evidence shows that this is impossible (Morokvasic and Rudolph 1995). It is also based on the assumption that those people crossing the borders are intending to stay permanently. However, migration flows consist predominantly of people who do *not* wish to settle in the EU but rather look for work opportunities there, often in the neighboring countries first, and commute in order to keep up their standard of living at home. Besides being disastrous for local economies, closed borders are ineffective and produce counter-effects stimulating precisely the phenomena they are supposed to prevent and combat: illegal migration and the concomitant development of migration industry and smuggling.

Legal status and the state of origin are essential in discriminating between who can and who cannot pass, who can have access to the labor market and who needs an extra work permit, and who has no other option but to work illegally. Therefore, state policies remain central to understanding the formation of migrants' transnational circuits and their social practices. Evolving transnational relations between different social places in different countries are often shaped by the possession of a legal and stable status by those on the move. States cannot eradicate transnational migration phenomena, but they influence them directly or indirectly. They can make coming and going unattractive by raising taxes and transport prices, and they can render it more or less difficult by tightening or loosening the visa regimes. States' tolerance of informal practices can be interpreted as directly supportive of transnational networks that supply informal labor markets in demand of cheap and flexible labor.⁴

Mobility as a Resource

Georg Simmel, in his essays "The Stranger" (1950) and "Bridge and Door" (1994), keeps the doors open for the stranger as a symbolic possibility of stepping out of his own boundaries. Focusing on *route* rather than *roots*, Simmel reconciles the insider and outsider in the figure of the stranger, who is "the one

4 Potot (2002) states that Rumanian seasonal workers in agriculture in Spain are checked by the local police only if they are found in public places during working hours (i.e., when they are not where they are supposed to be).

who comes today and stays tomorrow ... but remains a potential wanderer because although he has not moved on, he has not quite overcome the freedom of coming and going” (Simmel 1950).

For a long time, maintaining contacts with and orientation toward the country of origin was believed to have a negative impact on immigrants’ opportunities and to jeopardize their upward mobility. This is because migration patterns were seen only in the perspective of immigration – settlement – integration. The transnationalist perspective (e.g., Glick Schiller et al. 1992, 1995; Portes 1996, 1999, 2000; Faist 2000; Vertovec and Cohen 2000) challenged the classic approach to migration as a discrete, one-way, movement from one location to another and the static view of migration or as Alain Tarrus (1992) formulated “a simple move between two sedentarities”. The new perspective suggests instead that the cultivation of strong networks with the country of origin can be a valuable resource. However, its overwhelming focus on durability and sustainability of transnational links over time leaves little room to capture the phenomena of short-term transnational mobility. It thereby excludes phenomena that may often be ephemeral, although transnational in essence, such as the mobility and migration from and within Eastern and Central Europe.⁵

Migration has always been a risk-averting strategy for individuals and households. In post-communist societies many people react to the transition economy by hitting the road, trying to avoid being left on the fringes of their societies that are undergoing rapid but unpredictable transformation. Women and men on the move act as social innovators as they use spatial mobility to adapt to the new context of post-communist transition. They are optimizing the impact of risks by transnationalizing them, that is, by managing opportunities and obstacles in their home and destination country or countries within a transnational social space (Morokvasic 2004). They contribute to the construction of this space by linking people and territories across borders through work and trade. Some people are legally employed on a short-term basis, others are “tourists” engaged in work and/or trade, often using previous official recruitment as a gate opener for further trips. These transborder and short-term movements in the form of shuttles – regular or undocumented for purposes of work or/and trade – have become the most widespread pattern in the post-1989 European migrations (Wallace and Stola 2001; Morawska 2000). They are no longer male dominated, as migrations used to be, especially in the early South-North movements of labor in the 1960s and 1970s.

5 This type of mobility has been increasing also between the South and the North of the Mediterranean (see for example Schmoll 2005).

Mobility plays an important part in the strategies of these migrants. Rather than trying to immigrate and settle in the target country, they tend to settle within mobility, staying mobile as long as they can in order to improve or maintain the quality of life at home (Diminescu 2003; Morokvasic 1999; Potot 2002). Migration thus becomes their lifestyle. Paradoxically, their *leaving home* and going away becomes a strategy for *staying at home* and, thus, an alternative to emigration. In that sense they are the Simmelian, post-modern types of migrants. Their resource is their transnational mobility, or rather their “savoir se mouvoir” (know-how-to-move, Tarrus 1992), their “transnational capability” (Al-Ali et al. 2001) and their capacity to stay mobile (Irek 1998; Morokvasic 1993, 1999). It is an important dimension of their social capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992)⁶ if and when they can mobilize it.

Different kinds of shuttle migration for purposes of work and trade have indeed become the major “occupation”, “profession” (Iglicka 1999; Irek 1998) or “career” (Potot 2002) for millions of people in post-communist Europe. Some migrants started this pattern even earlier, with Polish “pioneers” working as short-term commuter laborers and suitcase traders in the 1980s through the early 1990s (Jazwinska and Okolski 1996; Okolski 2001; Morokvasic 1994). Other examples are Rumanians commuting between their country and France, occupying a “niche” of selling a journal of the homeless on the streets of Paris or Nice (Diminescu 2003); Rumanians, Poles, Ukrainians, and Moldavians circulating between their country and Italy (Weber 1998); Russian “tchelnoki” coming and going at the Istanbul bazaar (Blascher 1996; Karamustafa 2001; Peraldi 2001); White Russians or Ukrainians in Poland (Iglicka 1999; Okolski 2001) and other migrants from Eastern Europe in the Polish and Czech informal labor markets (Morawska 2000; Sword 1999).

The most mobile people have been from Poland. They have relied on strong diaspora networks of a stable population of compatriots who settled primarily in Germany in the 1980s as refugees or as ethnic Germans. In 1990, 22 million Poles traveled abroad – 15 times the number more than a decade earlier, when travel “abroad” mainly meant travel to communist countries and when travel to the West was the privilege of a minority (Morokvasic 1994). They were followed by others who took advantage of established networks, travel routes and migrant niches.

6 “Social capital is the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing durable networks of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 95; own translation).

My studies show that Polish women moving between Poland and Germany create a transnational migratory space in which they try to optimize the opportunities and minimize the obstacles relative to their reproductive and productive work (Morokvasic 1994, 1999). The “self-managed” rotation system set up by migrant women domestic and care workers in Germany, Belgium, and Italy enables them to optimize the opportunities and minimize the obstacles relative to their paid and unpaid reproductive work. It relies on solidarity, reciprocity and trust of its participating members. Furthermore, it implies alternate cross-border job-sharing at a rhythm determined by the care for the family or professional obligations in the home country.

In addition to enabling women to have a transnational, double presence that combines their caring life “here” and “there”, the rotation system yields other opportunities for agency. First, women avoid being trapped in an institutionalized form of dependency on a single employer. This is the problem faced by live-in maids, as much of most of the literature on transnational migrant domestic workers has emphasized (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003). Second, the constant mobility of women enables them to avoid illegal status, as long as their sojourn takes place within the three-month visa-free period for tourists. The illegal character of the work done by a “tourist” is more easily concealed in a private household than on a construction site. In this sense women have more opportunities for bridging formal and informal activities than men do.

Third, in the sector where upward mobility is almost impossible and where most of the Eastern European women are de-classed and de-skilled, some women draw on their accumulated social knowledge and their experience in a rotation system and eventually develop into a small migration-management business. For example, the leading “broker” may be a German-Polish connection – a woman who has a stable status as a German citizen or is a long-term resident with a stable address. She starts using her own rotation group, her established local connections, and builds up a new network. The business brings income from renting living quarters to newcomers who work as cleaners and caretakers. In addition, the contact address and the job offers are marketable because without an address, a telephone and a “recommendation” of a trustworthy person, it is impossible for a newcomer to get a job.

The trade-related trips and other journeys may also involve occasional prostitution. Housewives, badly paid civil servants, schoolgirls and university students have resorted to it in order to increase their own travel gains or the likelihood of a successful trade transaction. Most Russian traders in Istanbul have been women, but a group of women under the control of a man usually suggests the possibility of prostitution (Peraldi 2001). Some women have traveled across

the border exclusively as weekend prostitutes, an activity that has enabled them to keep their jobs at home and double or triple their salaries in just one trip (Morawska 2000). Engaging in prostitution is considered to be a quick way to generate the starting capital for a project at home (Karamustafa 2001) or simply to make ends meet, especially for unemployed single mothers. This is not a new phenomenon in Europe. Among Yugoslav migrant workers in the 1970s and 1980s, low-wage female workers or those who were made redundant also resorted to occasional prostitution (Morokvasic 1987). Economic and social inequalities and limited opportunities for work in the former communist countries make women dependent on organized transnational networks for jobs and assistance in emigration. Turning to such networks entails risks, but women are usually aware of them and of the limits of promises of “decent and well-paid work”. Many women know that they may be trapped in prostitution but also that this is their only way into the international labor market.⁷

The people on the move take advantage of structural disequilibrium, legislation gaps and market imperfections, or they rely for their business activities on those who are mobile. They use the experience they had gained by circumventing the system during the communist period: “beat-the-system/bend-the-law” orientations and practices (Morawska 2000, p. 7). Some also had experience of suitcase trading in the Comecon countries during the socialist period (Irek 1998; Wessely 1999), when traveling and consuming was a way to resist the uniformity and inadequacies of supply. After 1989, it became a strategy to supplement insufficient income. Such migration should therefore be understood as an extension of strategies developed by individuals aiming to resist the decline of their social condition at home.

The transition to a market economy has freed workers. They officially have a job and social rights inherited from socialism, but often they do not receive any salary or it is not large enough to survive on. “In Poland salaries were too high to starve on and too low to live on,” I was told by my informants. Having

7 Of 431 cases of trafficked women prosecuted by the German Federal Criminal Investigation Office (Bundeskriminalamt) in 2003, 45 percent of the defendants declared that the type of work they were going to do was not disclosed to them by those who helped them across the border. However 32 percent of them admitted having known that prostitution was the type of work involved and they had agreed to the arrangement (Bundeskriminalamt 2004, p. 10). The debate surrounding the issue of prostitution and trafficking in women has meanwhile opposed those who stress the exploitative and slave-like circumstances into which immigrant women are “trapped” and those who are critical of framing women as “victims” and insist on their agency and conscious use of the “prostitution route” as the only access to the labour market in the EU (Andrijasevic 2005).

few residence obligations, they have plenty of time and are prepared to sell it at a low price. Evidence from research suggests that only a portion of the people on the move is genuinely unemployed (Iglicka 1999). It is rarely a survival strategy, rather it is a means of supplementing income at home. It satisfies the status requirements of a new middle class (Potot 2002), enabling it to consume goods that otherwise would be inaccessible: housing, housing equipment, cars and fashionable clothing.

These migrants mobilize and capitalize on a specific resource, their capacity to stay mobile for a long time, which is an immense advantage over people who do not or cannot move to different locations. The Poles I interviewed in the early 1990s could make the equivalent of a month's salary in Poland, and sometimes even double or triple it, on a single trip. Magda (16), a schoolgirl from K. specialized in pirated music cassettes, buying them for DM 1 in Poland and selling at DM 2 in Germany. On each trip she made the equivalent of her mother's salary which was 1.8 million zloty, or DM 200 at the end of 1992 (Morokvasic 1994). Other researchers have reported similar findings. "There is hardly any risk. Even if they (the customs officers) take all you carry with you, you can recover everything with one single trip ... For every DM 1 you invest, you get DM 10 back" (Irek 1998, p. 28). The range of business activities was wide. Some people traveled to make a profit on the exchange rate, buying all they could transport in one country and selling it in the other. Others commuted to repair cars, dental equipment and teeth; to do domestic work or care for the elderly; to work on building sites or to harvest crops. Iglicka (1999) found that the average net profit made by migrants to Poland was three to 30 times the average monthly salary, depending on the migrants' country of origin.

During their itineraries, the migrants rely on transnational networks of "friends". Such networks are built on the common experiences and interests of those who have worked in the target country, who travel the same distances, invest in the same spaces and deal with the same intermediaries (e.g., travel agents, guides, recruiters, lodgers, train attendants, border guards, customs officers, and shop owners). The migrants, during their more or less prolonged absences from home as they travel through Europe, also turn to neighbors, professionals, or other sympathetic people to substitute for them at home and at work during their absences.

The strength of these ties lies in their functionality and the efficiency of the activities that the migrants engage in as they pursue their objectives rather than in community-related logistics (Morokvasic 1999; Peraldi 2001). These ties come close to what Mark Granovetter (1973) termed "weak ties". They connect members of different groups on both sides of the border into networks of infor-

mation and assistance. They are acquaintanceships based on trust and reciprocity rather than kin and personal friends. Given the “pan-Slavic” familiarity in Eastern European languages, the network may appear to consist of “compatriots”, functional intermediaries of different origins but all specialized in mobility management, a sector that has gradually grown into a migration industry.

For the shuttle migrant-traders whose sojourns are usually relatively brief, the functioning of the networks is even more determined by their activity than by common origin. The networks are built on territory where precarious solidarities operate for the duration of a journey (or of successive journeys). They dissolve shortly thereafter and are rebuilt anew with other people during other journeys. The specific – but non-ethnic – resource of these migrants is their own readiness and availability to be mobile.

The situation cuts across all social strata, including university graduates and highly skilled workers (between 12 to 25 percent of migrants from Eastern Europe are in this category). They are on the move in order to supplement wages, to preserve or improve their standard of living at home, but also, in particular the highly skilled, to keep up-to-date in their area of expertise (Morokvasic 1994). Dispersed all over Europe and in North America, they are unified in part by their use of the Internet, which is accelerating the development of diasporas (Nedelcu 2005).

The short-term migration is also about “learning about being abroad”, so these moves can also be a stepping stone for would-be entrepreneurs who are learning about creating and conducting business, accumulating initial capital and going on to create more orthodox and established businesses (Irek 1998; Sword 1999).

Those migrants who now settle in mobility between Andalusia and Rumania are those who earlier acquired a certain kind of mobility know-how, a “savoir circuler”. Commuting is for instance common between Teleorman, an agricultural region in Rumania in crisis, and Andalusia, where there is a demand for cheap, flexible, Eastern European laborers. They are welcomed as skilled, adaptable, undemanding, and non-visible, and are therefore preferred to Moroccans by the local employers. For the Rumanians, this route is an extension of previous migrations. Hitting the road to improve the level of living at home belongs to a way of life where each family is used to having one or more members leave at regular intervals (Potot 2002). The migrants now working at intervals in Spain participated in various labor export schemes that were concluded under Ceausescu with the FRG, Libya, Egypt and Iraq.

Shifting Boundaries of Belonging

Shifting boundaries of group membership and identity markers of belonging, rendering them negotiable according to a situation, may facilitate transborder objectives and functioning. The act of shifting the boundaries between “us” and “them” tries to take advantage of ambiguous or multiple identities and of the social capital they entail for being mobile and shifting according to the situations. The capacity of shifting, of managing multiple identities, is affected by social and political context and by the positioning of those who shift. Such practices take place especially in border regions, but they tend to reach further. Whole regions and states become transit spaces where border- and boundary-crossers adapt not only their physical mobility but also the categories of their belonging in response to obstacles and opportunities they find “here” and “there”. The practices also tend to stretch beyond the boundaries of a person’s own group to those who join or take over the networks or the networking know-how.

Most research evidence on migration today stresses the importance of continuity in the migratory experience. The current practices build on previous migrations and migratory capital from the communist period and even before. Polish “guest workers” in the German Democratic Republic and Russian military personnel were among the precursors in “suitcase trading” because they could move during a period when others could not (Irek 1998; Peraldi 2001). It was the legal and stable status that provided the best basis for circulation.⁸ Today’s migrants capitalize either on their own previous experience of shuttle migration and suitcase trading in the socialist period when they acquired a know-how-to-travel, a migratory capital, or they join the existing networks and learn from and rapidly emulate the relatively successful experience of others.

In turn, the migrant’s application for stable status is not necessarily motivated by permanent settlement, but rather by the search for better work conditions, easier mobility and free circulation. The focus on immigration as settlement in migration research has diverted attention from cross-border practices and transnational lives of those categorized as “permanently settled”.

Poland has been by far the major source of migrants who spread all over Western Europe, with Rumania becoming another, albeit much smaller, important source of extremely diverse flows. In both cases the evidence suggests that

8 Suitcase trading took place within the Comecon countries before spreading to the West. West Berlin had a special entry regime for Poles even before 1989 (up to a one-month visa-free stay).

the predecessors of the moves, or the primo migrants, were those who were admitted into the target country because of their ethnic belonging: ethnic Germans and Rumanian Jews. Considered as “repatriation” or “return to homeland”, the migration of ethnic Germans to Germany was strongly supported by the FRG during the Cold War, with Poland, the former USSR and Rumania being the main source countries. When Poland liberalized its passport legislation, more than one million German Poles already resided in the FRG and constituted an important foundation for the newcomers. From 1950 to 1990 the FRG received close to 2.5 million ethnic Germans, more than half of them originating from Poland.

As settled residents with stable status and often as German citizens, they served as intermediaries between newcomers and German society as employers, lodgers and interpreters. Half a million ethnic Germans originating from and residing in Poland are estimated to have kept their dual residence and to commute between Poland and Germany (Jazwinska and Okolski 1996). Likewise, Germans from Transylvania are using their German citizenship or status as permanent resident in Germany to circulate between Rumania and Germany while residing *de facto* in Rumania (Michalon 2003).

Some of these newcomers find jobs in transnational informal labor markets somewhere in the border zones (e.g., Görlitz). The major incentive is the chance to take advantage of their dual citizenship and various opportunities on both sides of the border for their businesses. For instance, as Germans they have access to the EU enterprise creation scheme for the unemployed of East Germany, and as Poles they have production facilities and cheap labor thanks to their Polish networks across the border in Poland, in Zgorzelec (Cywinski and Graczyk 2002).

About a quarter of a million of ethnic Germans left Rumania before 1989. This “permanent emigration” slowed in the 1990s but instead initiated a circulation from Germany to Rumania for family reasons, vacations and business. This what it initially was meant to be a permanent migration transformed itself into transborder circulation at irregular intervals, and in the same time created opportunities for non-ethnic German Rumanian migrants seeking work (who in turn would use the existing networks). Bénédicte Michalon (2003) demonstrates how the emigration of Saxons from Transylvania to Germany, a process conceptualized as a permanent “return” to the home country, actually produced diverse migration dynamics, including circulation. There is continuity between their previous settlement in Germany and their present circulation. To switch from permanent emigration – which under the Ceausescu regime was the only possible option – and circulation, the Saxons are again mobilizing ethnicity and rely-

ing on pre-existing networks. They use the legal framework of “permanent emigration” but they remain based in Rumania, undertaking only brief trips to Germany. In this sense, their circulation remains an ethnic migration (Michalon 2003, p. 21). Motivated originally by family reasons, their mobility at irregular intervals is gradually transformed into labor migration. Unlike Poles and other Rumanians, this group shows no evidence of “settlement in mobility”. The Saxon networking structures are expanding to incorporate non-Saxon Rumanians in mobility for the purpose of work in Germany or elsewhere in the Schengen space. As suggested by Alain Reyniers (1996), many Rumanian Gypsies also migrated in this way. They first headed to Germany before moving on to other European countries, developing cross-border networks and knowledge of institutions. Some of their networks and labor market niches were, in turn, taken over by other Rumanians (Diminescu et al. 2003). Likewise, Turkish speakers immigrated from the former USSR and the Balkans to Istanbul, opening the commercial route and adapting the local commerce to the taste of Eastern Europeans. They thereby facilitated the arrival of a much broader spectrum of future traders from the area (Peraldi 2001).

Jews from Rumania emigrated to Israel throughout the 20th century, taking part in the revival of permanent immigration to that country after 1990. They are now proprietors of investments in Rumania and are leading the revival of socio-economic relations between the two countries. When Israel opened its doors to temporary labor migration of non-Jews, Rumanians contributed a great deal to these flows. Today they represent the fourth largest group of workers, some legally but most as “overstayers”. The majority are men working in the construction industry. They owe their access to Israel to gatekeepers who use their experience and migratory capital to become migration brokers (Diminescu et al. 2003). In a study of Russian Jews in Germany (Doomernik 1997), the majority of the informants declared that their emigration was motivated by the geographic proximity of Germany and Russia and by the possibility of commuting for business purposes.

In the context of autarchic communist Albania, the people of the regions bordering Greece had no permission to approach the border, not even to talk about it, let alone to cross it (De Rapper and Sintès 2006). The hermetically closed border, coupled with a ban on watching Greek television, reinforced the distance and ignorance about the other side. Crossing the border at that time was extremely risky both for the person who attempted to cross and for his family or anyone who might have abetted the endeavor. The opening of borders by Albania in 1990 was not followed by a gradual lifting of visa requirements for Albanian citizens by the target countries, as was the case in the Central European

countries. Instead, Greece, one of the two countries most concerned by this migration, immediately implemented restrictive immigration legislation, thereby closing its space. The border and the activities related to border-crossing became a resource that only certain groups of people could use. The people who were the most mobile who had entrepreneurial initiative in different types of commercial activities were those who could capitalize on their former connections to Greece, their Greek ancestry or presumed orthodox religion. They therefore had the right to exemption from visa obligations. By contrast, Albanian Muslims participated in cross border migration merely as simple workers engaged as unskilled, cheap labor. It seems that in the situation where doors selectively open, where speaking Greek and being Christian orthodox increases migration opportunities, the ethnic markers and religious belonging become a matter of negotiation and manipulation. People find various means to claim Greek ancestry and religion, such as changing names, adding a second, Christian name to the Muslim one or marrying into a Greek family. These practices may have been facilitated by the present Albanian context, in which the government emphasizes religious tolerance, at least in discourse, after decades of having negated religious feelings and affiliations under communism (Wilmart 2004).

Border-crossing has become an essential resource and a means of upward social mobility in the border region of Pogon. Different populations have adopted different strategies of being at home here and there, capitalizing on ancestry and double belonging. Some groups, such as the Wallachians, have created a role for themselves as intermediaries. They are the only ethnic group in the region to organize transnationally, thereby exemplifying “transnational ethnicism” (Gossiaux 2002, p. 186, quoted in De Rapper and Sintès 2006). This illustrates how the action of a state to close borders not only selects the border crossers, but reinforces collective boundaries and local heterogeneity. This in turn becomes a useful element of migratory capital for potential border crossers in the region.

Women instrumentalize for their own purposes the representations regarding themselves and corresponding policies based on these representations. It is generally easier for a woman to use the family reunification channel than for a man. However, Eastern European women do not “follow their husbands” who migrate first as in the traditional migratory pattern. Rather, they are likely to be primary-migrants, be single and marry a local man: For example, 30 percent of all marriages between German men and foreign women were with an Eastern European (Dietz 2005, pp. 40f.). As Dominique Giabiconi (2005) claims, marriage to a local is not a part of the strategy of settlement for Polish women in

France but rather belongs to the strategy of upward mobility initiated even before their emigration from Poland. Women also use the mail-order bride system as a strategy of immigration, and they learn to take advantage of attributions that initially handicap them (Vartti 2003).

Conclusion: Some Limits of Migrants' Socially Innovative Agency

“First I worked three years in order to be able to finish building our house. Now, I have been working for three further years to maintain that house, because the heating and the rest are enormously costly and my husband is unemployed. One could never pay that without my Belgian salary. That is my life: six years of cleaning jobs in exchange for a beautiful house in which I live only one or two months a year.” (Polish migrant in Brussels; quoted in Kuzma 2003, p. 122; own translation)

Mobility as a strategy can be empowering, a resource, a tool for social innovation and agency, and an important dimension of social capital, but only – if it is under the migrants' own control. As is true of so many aspects of globalization, mobility entails new possibilities but also many downsides, such as a proliferation of precarious jobs, increasing dependencies and sometimes even lack of mobility and freedom. For those people who are free to move and who can mobilize the social capital necessary for their moves, it is much easier today than it used to be to live in two societies at the same time, maintaining two homes and commuting between them. Dual and multiple citizenships are among the visible facilitators as well as outcomes of transnational movements and transnational belonging. Therefore, it is important to keep and make use of dual citizenships, of being for instance German in the Schengen space while remaining Russian in Russia, Polish in Poland and Rumanian in Rumania.

However low migrants' competence in migration and mobility “know-how” may be, they have a capacity and willingness for autonomous action. As Anthony Giddens (1982, p. 197) suggested, “even the most seemingly ‘powerless’ individuals are able to mobilize resources, whereby they carve out ‘spaces of control’ ...”. One has to remember that the mobility entrepreneurs act in the context of globalization which tends to eliminate barriers to the circulation of capital and goods while selectively maintaining or even erecting new barriers to the circulation of people. Their action contributes to “democratizing borders” as Etienne Balibar (2003, p. 170) would call such resistance to the state logic of

exclusion and segregation. They are not abolishing borders, but trying to circumvent them and even use them as a resource. When Greek state closes the borders, thus screening the border crossers from the neighboring Albania, the reinforced ethnic heterogeneity becomes a resource, a useful migratory capital for some of the potential border crossers or their clients on the Albanian side. Border crossers are social innovators⁹, for they take risks to transgress and use borders to improve their economic condition or try to escape from an oppressive political or social climate. Their innovative action may fail or succeed. In this text the focus has been on those people in Eastern Europe who can build on their social capital and successfully use opportunity structures made available to them in the process of changing border management regimes by the states. Women and men rely on spatial mobility as a resource optimizing the impact of risks by transnationalizing them. Individual strategies can become a collective resource, social knowledge about border crossing being shared by the members of the network, sometimes beyond its boundaries.

The evidence on differential socially innovative agency of men and women engaged in short-term mobility or shuttle migration is scarce (the question is seldom raised) and that concerning women only is contradictory. Today, the world-wide feminization of migration reflects the increasing number of women in service jobs, mostly domestic work, but also nursing, entertainment and prostitution. These occupations are built on gendered assumptions of women's affinities to work in the reproductive sphere. Performing in these sectors seldom helps destabilize norms relating to the gendered division of labor and often even reinforces gender hierarchies.

Women from Eastern Europe nevertheless innovate in the organization of their work and private life transnationally, for the rotation system enables women a transnational double presence that combines life here and there. In the domestic and caretaking sectors, where women are predominant and where upward mobility is practically impossible, they find niches for business creation. Highly skilled, they invent multiple ways of countering unemployment, de-skilling and other barriers on the labor market, and they thereby achieve upward mobility (Nedelcu 2005). Being a woman may sometimes be advantageous when engaging in migration – they can for instance rely on networks that are specifically female and resourceful throughout the migration experience.

By migrating, many women may also acquire more autonomy than they have had in their society of origin, and they prove themselves capable of using their

9 Lazaroiu and Ulrich (2003) define social innovators as persons who develop strategies around new solutions implying risks (and under situations of tension) illegitimate means to achieve legitimate goals.

transnational social capital. By acquiring material prosperity, women also become empowered to abandon unsatisfactory relationships at home or to impose more tolerant and egalitarian relationships in the couple. Women with families often mention that they find themselves able to renegotiate the division of labor in the household. They feel they have more respect and authority than before they began migrating (Irek 1998).

Other evidence suggests contradictory outcomes of upward mobility and empowerment. One of the contradictions that most migrant women have to come to terms with is that their economic upward mobility is often coupled with social downward mobility. This outcome may be to an extent shared with migrant men. Women however have to compromise and negotiate in order to overcome the contradictions inherent in observing traditional gender norms while at the same time performing in a way that puts these gender norms in question: when they are – at it is increasingly the case – the only breadwinners in the family or when they earn more than their husbands do. Gender norms and expectations often remain undisturbed and unquestioned. Paid work and providing for the family (“I have to feed my kids”) became already the internalized norm for women in communist regimes, to the extent that work outside home has been merely a part of the role of a “good mother”. As migrant workers, women simply continue the tradition of paid work as care for the family.

Unlike men, though, they have more difficulty in capitalizing symbolically on the returns of their work at home. The possibilities of gaining social recognition at home through economic promotion abroad are gendered. Whereas economic success is likely to adorn the image of men as “migration heroes”, for women, it tends to be associated with “transgressing moral codes” (Potot 2005, p. 255). The capability of men and women of enjoying the returns of their success abroad are different. Men can display their success and participate in business networks at home. Women are not a part of these networks, and they have to handle the stigma of the bad reputation associated with a woman’s economic success in patriarchal societies like Rumania.

More research comparing different border crossing practices and transnational linkages in different countries and in the context of different discourses surrounding men, women and mobility is needed to grasp the impact of gender, class and ethnic origin on migrants’ agency and its possible outcomes. This will also improve our knowledge of ongoing bottom-up integrative processes across borders in the European space and its periphery which supplement the absence or scarcity of institutional links, build bridges by circumventing or resisting the borders.

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