



FINDING THE WAY HOME: METHODOLOGY AND FIELDWORK REFLECTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Home is a concept that plays an important role in almost every person's life. The way in which it is present varies greatly from person to person, but the idea is nearly unavoidable. While the term 'home' does not exist in exactly the same form in every language and in every culture, the ideas that it is imbued with are still present in some fashion. My project is a study of the ways in which young migrants connect with their current community and space, countries or cultures of origin, and how they create, or choose not to create, numerous and varied homes and home connections. As I will explain in more detail in the coming pages, I follow many scholars in claiming that home connections can be numerous, often exist in the imagination, and involve strong sensory and emotional ties. As a researcher with a background in the anthropology of childhood and a former youth development professional, I am particularly interested in the lives of young people as they transition to adulthood. I am focusing my study on the age group ranging from 15 – 25, and comparing the experiences of migrants who have different migratory statuses: undocumented, asylum seeker, and permanent resident. These categories have the potential to significantly impact the connections the migrants are both able and willing to make.

SPACE, PLACE AND HOME

In speaking of home, especially in the case of migrants, the discussion must take into account studies of nation, space, and place. In his simplest description, Tuan describes 'space' as freedom (1977:3). Spaces become places when we know them and attach meaning to them. In the following quote Tuan uses getting to know a neighborhood as an example of how 'space' becomes 'place'.

A neighborhood is at first a confusion of images to the new resident; it is blurred space 'out there.' Learning to know the neighborhood requires the identification of significant localities, such as street corners and architectural landmarks, within the neighborhood space. Objects and places are centers of value.
(Tuan 1977:17-18)

There are few places that can compete with 'home' as the most meaningful place in a person's life and few places with which a person could be more intimately acquainted. Given the above example, what is especially interesting is that people are also attached to, and create, places that they cannot 'know' intimately. Tuan says that, "it is a characteristic of the symbol-making human species that its members can become passionately attached to places of enormous size, such as a nation-state, of which they can have only limited direct experience" (Tuan 1977:18). Even though a person cannot know an entire city or country the way they can know their own house or neighborhood, people still have deep attachment to such places. They imagine that they have some sense of these places in their entirety, and this imagined connection is often deeply emotional and personal.

Just as meaningful places can be local, national, or even global, home can also be thought of on many different levels, including a single building, a community, a sense of cultural identity, and even an entire nation or collection of nations (Massey 2005, Jansen and Löfving 2009). The state of the world is undeniably one of connection and movement, and for many years “anthropology has known that the experience of space is always socially constructed” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:11). Land being divided into nations which are tied to culture, and people being ‘rooted’ into these nations, are ideas that cannot be described as ‘natural’ (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, Appadurai 1996, Hannerz 1996). In fact, the ways in which people feel at home may have as much to do with ‘rootedness’ as it does with individual and collective imagination of the present, the past and the future (Pink 2009).

Homes are numerous, temporal, and imagined, and for migrants, the concept of home is even more complex. Katie Walsh (2011:516) aptly describes this complexity in the following quote:

[...] especially for migrants, ‘home’ as a site where everyday life is lived may not coincide with the meaning of home as a space of belonging. Therefore, migration highlights the way in which home is a process and, as such, involves continual practices of home-making to be felt and experienced (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Miller 2001).

Home is no longer defined as a single, sedentary place where the majority of one’s private life is carried out, and it can even be a place that one has never lived. It is sometimes considered as several sites occupied over the course of a person’s life, some of these sites being occupied concurrently, and connected through travel, time, memory, and transition (Fog-Olwig 1999, Parrott 2005, Das, Ellen, Leonard 2008). The concept may include “an actual place of lived experience and a metaphorical space of personal attachment and identification” (Armbruster 2002:20), or a place of routine where one feels some semblance of “personal control” (Povrzanović-Frykman 2002). It is described in terms of identity, a feeling of belonging, and even a “mythic place of desire” (Brah qtd. in Armbruster 2002:20). Rapport and Dawson use home as an analytical tool to speak about identity (1998:4) and define home as “where one best knows oneself – where ‘best’ means ‘most’, even if not always ‘happiest’” (1998:9). Home can also be a place or idea that people fear and that they experience as a site of violence (Blunt 2005). As Blunt and Varley so clearly sum up, “as a space of belonging and alienation, intimacy and violence, desire and fear, the home is invested with meanings, emotions, experiences and relationships that lie at the heart of human life” (2004:3).

In a study such as the one I am undertaking, it is key to rethink normative notions of home (Blunt and Dowling 2006) and investigate the different meanings homes can carry for different groups of people.

This becomes clear when considering, for example, the home experiences of women and children. In terms of gender, traditional western depictions of home paint this space as being maintained by the woman. In some sense it is the woman's domain, but it is also a space of retreat for men who spend the majority of their day in the working world. Feminist critique highlights the ways in which the home can actually be a place of oppression for women, especially in cases of domestic violence. On the other hand, several feminist critiques explore the home as "a site of resistance" for women of color (Blunt and Dowling 2006:20).

Like women, children are also considered to be confined to the home, but they are not given any credit for creating or maintaining this space. If we think of home as a place where one has control (Povrzanović Frykman 2002), then it quickly becomes clear that this definition may not fit the case of children. For young people the home is seen as a place they inhabit rather than create. "Children are presumed to be key inhabitants of 'homely' homes, though it is rare for children to be given any agency in the running or representation of these homes" (Blunt and Dowling 2006:115). Considering that a great deal of research "depicts youth as objects of adult activity" (Wulff 1995:1), when young people are confined to the home, a space of rules and regulations for them (Blunt and Dowling 2006:115), they have very little chance of gaining any type of control. For all these reasons, research often overlooks young people's agency in this realm and does not acknowledge the creative ways in which they do, in fact, contribute to making homes. Decorations, spaces for play, technology, virtual social networks, and their own imagination are all domains in which young people make homes. Gill Cressey conducted a study that illuminates the importance of imagination in regard to a homeland where one does not reside, and it also highlights the pathways for home connection that are open and easily accessible to young people. His work focused on British Pakistani and Kashmiri youth and their visits to their families' homelands (2006). He explains that going home is not only achieved by travel but that "collective and individual returns home can take the form of literature, returns in the imagination, films, home videos, telephone conversations and sharing of memories" (Cressey 2006:57). While I will be focusing in part on the pathways of connection that young people take advantage of and create for themselves, I will also take into account this element of control that keeps presenting itself in the discussion of home. Some migrants have very little control over how long they will be able to stay in Belgium and they may have limited rights. I will be investigating if and how this lack of control impacts their home connections.

THE STATE AND MIGRATORY STATUS

Belgium is a federal state that allows for the division of responsibilities to be divided between the federal, regional, and community levels. As one might expect, issues of foreign policy, public health,

and social security are the duties of the federal state. This includes policies concerning migration and asylum. The regions are divided into the Flemish region, the Walloon region, and the Brussels capital region. Their responsibilities include issues involving their territory such as employment, housing, transportation, and farming. The communities are divided based on language, so there is a Flemish, a French, and a German-speaking community (Belgian Federal Government 2009). It is these communities that “are responsible for culture and issues directly related to individuals and their language, such as aid to people, health and education, integration of foreigners and emancipation of ethno-cultural minorities...” (EMN 2012:7). However, in Wallonia, integration has been deemed a task of the region, rather than the language-based community. This means that all of these levels of governance have an impact on the research I am conducting. Length of stay, integration requirements, the possibility of cultural activities, and social support all impact ‘home’ feelings in the current community, as well as levels of empowerment, comfort, and control felt on the part of the migrants. For these reasons it is essential to have an understanding of the three main migratory categories on which I’ve chosen to focus.

Residents

Resident status is applied to those foreigners that stay in Belgium, legally, for longer than three months (blbe). People that hold an EU passport or are from the EEA or Switzerland are allowed to stay in Belgium without acquiring a visa, although there is still an application involved and the migrant is required to present a number of documents. The family members, a category that includes parents or grandparents in the migrant’s care and children under the age of 21, also have permission to stay. If a family member from a 3rd country is joining the migrant then there is additional paperwork involved (blbe). Non-EU citizens must apply for a visa if they intend to stay longer than three months in Belgium. Non-permanent stay requires proof of the lack of a criminal background, referred to as “a certificate of good conduct”, a work permit or proof of enrollment in a higher education facility, and a residence inspection. The inspection involves a visit to one’s home by a police office in order to ensure that the applicant actually lives in the identified residence. In order to procure permanent residence a non-EU citizen must prove he/she has lived in Belgium for 5 consecutive years, he/she has a secure and sufficient income, and he/she must have health insurance that is valid in Belgium. If the immigration department gives its consent to the application then the applicant will receive a long-term residence permit. When leaving Belgium, the “Aliens Service” requires that foreigners notify the department of their departure (blbe).

Asylum process

In 1951 “The Convention relating to the Status of Refugees” (UNHCR 2010) was signed in Geneva and this is still the main reference used when decisions of refugee status are made in Belgium. If one wishes to apply for asylum in Belgium they must file an application with the Immigration Department. This is often done when an immigrant does not qualify for refugee status. According to the Foreign Affairs website, the application can be filed “either on arrival at the border or within eight working days after arriving in Belgium, at the OE’s (office des étrangers) office, in a closed centre or in prison” (Kingdom of Belgium 2010a). If it is determined that the asylum request can in fact be processed in Belgium, then the application moves to the office of The Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS/CGRA/CGVS). “The CGRS is an independent authority and the central asylum authority in Belgium” (Kingdom of Belgium 2010a). If the application is denied at this stage then the applicant has the opportunity to refile the application with new information, and once again the OE will decide whether or not the application will be considered. The CGRS can confer refugee status, “subsidiary protection status”, or deny protection altogether.

What is key for my study is that the “OE is also competent to maintain the asylum applicant in a closed centre and to deliver orders to leave Belgium.” Where one stays while awaiting the decision on their status will surely impact the ‘home’ connections they make and how comfortable they feel in Belgium. Asylum applicants are entitled to a place in a reception center for the duration of the application process. They are initially assigned to a collective reception center, which Fedasil describes as an open center where residents can come and go as they please. In addition to room and board the residents are given a daily allowance, access to medical and psychological services, and legal assistance. Fedasil or the Red Cross usually maintains these centers. The Fedasil website states that Belgium has capacity for more than 22,000 people in its reception centers (Fedasil 2014b). There are 54 reception centers in Belgium and, while they are all very different, they all provide the same basic services. The Fedasil website describes these services as “‘bed, bath, bread’, guidance, daily life, and neighborhood associations” (Fedasil 2014a). It is interesting to note that daily life includes education, training courses, community services, and work. Minors are required to attend a neighborhood school, often times after first completing a type of introductory course. Neighborhood associations means that there events that make it possible for residents of the reception centers to work on projects with community members with the hopes of making the center an ‘integrated’ part of the surrounding community (Fedasil 2014a). There are also open visit days and a newsletter that is distributed to neighbors so they can learn more about the center and upcoming activities. It is interesting to see what Fedasil as an organization considers important for the residents’ daily lives. Apart from food, clothing, shelter, and access to medical treatment, Fedasil’s website shows how they wish to openly display their priorities for

their residents. There is an emphasis on the migrants making a contribution to the work force or attending trainings that could later be of value in a job search. They also speak a great deal about community activities and the mixing of the residents with the outside population.

The right to be sheltered in a reception center ends at the time the application process is completed. If an applicant receives a positive decision then they are given two months in which to secure housing, and they have the possibility to request assistance from the Public Social Welfare Center. If an applicant is denied asylum then he or she will be required to leave Belgium, either by “forced” or “voluntary” return. “The priority is to convince the residents of the advantage of a voluntary return as opposed to a forced return” which requires police involvement (Fedasil 2014b). Usually departures are arranged within 30 days of the decision. It is important to keep in mind that this requirement to leave may come after an asylum-seeker has spent several years living in Belgium.

There are reception centers specially designated to house unaccompanied minors in Belgium. When they first arrive they are housed in an initial reception facility and undergo an age assessment test. “On average, 73% of those subject to an age assessment test could not be considered as unaccompanied minors” (EMN 2013:35). In most cases, unaccompanied minors (UAMs) cannot be sent to other member states and cannot be forced to leave Belgium before the age of 18. Several staff members in the migrant support organizations where I’ve been conducting research have stated that it is in Belgium’s best interest to determine that people are over the age of 18. If a person is of ‘majority age’ then they can more easily be returned to the country of origin. If the applicant is deemed to be under the age of 18 then he/she is relocated to a center or group home. The staff members in these facilities are tasked with helping the young people adjust to life in Belgium and helping them to prepare for life after they leave the facility. I am currently conducting research in one of these facilities, and the staff members often talk about what will happen to the young people when they turn 18. If their asylum cases have been rejected, they may have a difficult road ahead of them. Since the beginning of 2013 new measures concerning rejected asylum applications from UAMs, and UAMs who do not apply for asylum, have been enacted. There is now a reintegration grant that is meant to facilitate the process of voluntary return. When UAMs seeking asylum turn 18 and have not been awarded asylum status these young people are provided with accommodation until their voluntary return can be arranged. If it is possible to contact the parents of a UAM who is not seeking asylum, then the parents will be given 700 euro, per parent, as a type of assistance for when the young person returns to the country of origin (EMN 2013:35).

Undocumented migrants

According to the department of foreign affairs undocumented migrants who are discovered in Belgium have a choice about their return to their country of origin. “Persons present illegally on Belgian territory can choose between voluntary or forced repatriation (with or without police supervision)” (Kingdom of Belgium 2010b). The website says that the Belgian government works closely with countries of origin to ensure that the undocumented persons are able to return. This is necessary, and often proves difficult, because many people travel without papers, passports, or any identifying information. The webpage also sites the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum and the five elements that it contains and to which member states are meant to adhere. Among these are the commitments to “control illegal immigration by ensuring that illegal immigrants return to their countries of origin or to a country of transit” and to “make border controls more effective” (Kingdom of Belgium 2010b). At this point in my study I have only spoken with undocumented migrants that are above my target age range. I am hopeful that I will still be able to spend time with young people whose status falls into this category, and it will be interesting to see how their experiences may differ from people that are older. What I’ve learned so far is that police checks at metro and train stations sometimes make transportation difficult, and leads to people hesitating when making a commitment to group activities. This is especially true when one’s attendance may affect the group at large. Being undocumented also limits the art projects and groups in which one is able to participate. For example, it would be difficult or impossible to be involved with projects at Bozar, a center for fine arts in Brussels, without proper identification, so many of the undocumented migrants I have met find their musical or artistic outlets through nonprofit organizations. These organizations are not required to check participants’ identification and the migrants trust that knowledge of their status will not be shared. For the older migrants I’ve spoken with, it seems that this level of trust makes the groups in which they participate very important to them, and aids them in feeling closely tied to those that keep their secret. For younger migrants it remains to be seen how this status may impact their sense of security and creation of home connections.

METHODS

For this ethnographic project I am conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews and engaging in participant observation. So far this has involved performing with a Balkan music, attending ceramics classes at a non-profit organization that offers support to migrants, and spending time in a group home for unaccompanied asylum seekers. The Balkan music group is a collaboration of two nonprofit organizations and the participants are Belgians and migrants of various ages and backgrounds. This group also meets with similar groups from two other cities in Belgium to collaborate and play together. The ceramics class mainly consists of first and second generation teenage migrants who come to the class once a week after school. At the home for asylum seekers my time is simply spent helping to make

dinner and talking with the residents. I am endeavoring to learn French, and I record interviews when possible, but I am also emplacing myself and using sensory ethnography in the way explained by Sarah Pink (2009), David Howes (1991), Tim Ingold (2011), and others.

Ethnography and participant observation

I have conducted a brief investigation into the history of ethnography and current interpretations of what it means and how it should be conducted. Due to the varied nature of ethnography, its definition cannot be all encompassing or concise. According to Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland, and Lofland (2001) the main defining components of ethnography are observation and participation (4-5). They point out, however, that many other tools may be involved in this approach and ethnographies are rich and varied as a result. Karen O'Reilly describes ethnography as spending time with people and becoming a part of their daily lives. According to her, this includes observing occurrences, listening to the things people say, and asking questions (2005:3 in Pink 2009:9). Many scholars believe that it is nearly impossible to separate ethnography and participant observation, and participant observation is a key component of my project. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw describe participant observation as “establishing a place in some natural setting on a relatively long-term basis in order to investigate, experience and represent the social life and social processes that occur in that setting...” (2001:353). Sharing experiences with others is a remarkable interaction that, according to Ingold (2011), people often take for granted. He describes the achievement of this sharing as a key component of participant observation.

Sharing is an achievement, not a state of affairs that is given *a priori*. It is something we have to work at. Specifically, it is an achievement of joint practical activity, of moving and perceiving together with others in the setting of that activity. That is what we do in participant observation.
(Ingold 2011:324)

According to Becker, sociologists use participant observation when they feel it is not possible, or advisable, to create a hypothesis ahead of time, before empirical observation has been conducted (1958:652-653). I would argue that this is the case in my own project. Becker describes participant observation as a technique in which analysis happens during the course of the research, and when a researcher is “interested in understanding a particular organization or substantive problem rather than demonstrating relations between abstractly defined variables” (652). He further supports the use of this technique because it offers what he describes as “many items of evidence” (657) to support a conclusion. He explains that just hearing a person say something is not as convincing as also seeing it in action, such as observing in one’s behavior what that person has said or described (657). The advantages of having these multiple types or pieces of evidence is most easily achieved by participating as much as possible in the lives of one’s research participants.

Sensory ethnography

While not devaluing these more traditional definitions and executions of ethnography, Pink recognizes that it is often impossible to conduct research in the manner described above (2009:9). She cites an example of her own work in which she studied people's housecleaning routines and was not able to live in their homes and to spend the majority of each day with them. Living full-time in the homes of my research participants is also impossible for me, so I meet with them regularly every week and have become a full and active member of the activities in which they participate. Pink explains that the sensory ethnography approach, while not able to produce exactly the same material that may be the fruit of a traditional ethnography, can provide "alternative, and ultimately valid, ways of seeking to understand and engage with other people's worlds through sharing activities, practices and inviting new forms of expression" (Pink 2009:9).

Pink's championing of sensory ethnography can be described as adding emphasis to the role of one's senses. A thought I had myself when learning about sensory ethnography, and something that Pink acknowledges, is that sensory ethnography does not appear to be a novel practice. Ethnographers have always used all of their senses when embarking on ethnographic projects. In response to this Pink advises that it is time to "rethink ethnography to explicitly *account for* the senses" (Pink 2009:10). Pink states that sensory ethnographies are able to "...both attend to and interpret the experiential, individual, idiosyncratic and contextual nature of research participants' sensory practices *and* also seek to comprehend the culturally specific categories, conventions, moralities and knowledge that informs how people understand their experiences" (Pink 2009:15). It appears to me that it is difficult to speak about place in an ethnography, in my case home and home-connections, without attending to the senses through which people create and experience such places and connections. In his work on space and place Tuan made it clear that he considered the senses to be integral part of place making (1977:18). This also supports the argument made by Becker, that many types of evidence allow us to better understand and more fully support conclusions made in ethnographies (1958:657). These types of evidence may include paying attention to what can be learned and achieved by a focus on the senses in addition to interviews and other types of observations.

Pink's own description of sensory ethnography inevitably leads to the Howes and Ingold debate on this topic. Pink discusses their argument that I will attempt to briefly recount here. From my, and others', point of view, the main difference between the two arguments is the focus on cultural construction of the senses, or at least how the sensory world is perceived. Ingold accuses Howes of focusing far too much on cultural categories and ignoring individual experience. Ingold believes that Howes views

people as being alone inside their own sensory experiences. These experiences can only be shared “by framing these sensations within a system of collective representations common to a community and validated by verbal convention” (Ingold 2011:314). Ingold argues that, in fact, participant observation allows a researcher to overcome verbal barriers to communication and understanding in what he calls a “communion of experience” (314). Once this is established verbal understanding and other exchanges can rely on this foundation.

Howes argues that Ingold ignores the social and is, in fact, a naturalist. He cites Ingold’s argument that all things are connected and so “relations among humans, which we are accustomed to calling ‘social’, are but a subset of ecological relations (ibid.:5)” (Howes 2011:329). Howes sees this as ignoring social structures altogether. In his view “it is important to understand how society mediates our relations with human and non-human others and with the environment. Social relations and categories also structure how we experience or use our senses...” (329). Diverging in emphasis from both of the above arguments, Pink’s main focus is on emplacement and she explains that “ethnographic experiences are ‘embodied’— in that the researcher learns and knows through her or his whole experiencing body” (Pink 2009:25). Emplacement takes this idea a step further by acknowledging that places, the environment, and material surroundings also impact experiences and one’s knowledge. She states that it is important to “become involved in making places that are similar to theirs [informants] and thus feel that we are similarly emplaced...” (Pink 2009:40).

Semi-structured interviews

Ethnographic interviews differ from other types of interviews in important ways. Heyl (2001) states that ethnographic interviews were traditionally conducted in the interviewee's ‘own language’ and took place on the research site where the ethnographer spent a great deal of time. Time is the main difference she cites between ethnographic interviews and other types of interviews, because on site interviews are not exclusively, or necessarily, tied to ethnography (2001:369). Typically ethnographic research is conducted over a longer period of time which allows for “on-going relationships” to be established (Heyl 2001:369). O’Reilly argues that, “there might not be a clear distinction between doing participant observation and conducting an interview (2005:115)” (qtd. in Pink 2009:83). This means that interviews happen in many different ways. They are sometimes not formally recorded, they can take place unexpectedly during interactions with research participants, and they often occur while another activity is taking place. For instance, I have conducted interviews in ceramics class while both my participants and I worked on our projects, and during music rehearsals while the director was working with another section. The final key difference that I would like to point out is that during interviews the rest of the sensory world does not disappear. As Pink stresses, people will still be

communicating not merely through their words but also with materials, gestures, etc.

Thus I suggest interview encounters should be understood as instances in which interviewer and interviewee together create a shared place. Interviewer and interviewee communicate as embodied and emplaced persons, sometimes using media technologies in this process.

(Pink 2009: 82)

This is important in my project because there are several issues that arise when I am conducting ethnographic interviews. I do not speak French well enough to fully understand the complex answers that my research participants give to the abstract questions I ask. This is the main reason that I have been recording, and will continue to record, interviews whenever possible. This data will only provide one piece of the puzzle in terms of what I'm hoping to discover during my fieldwork, but it is a valuable piece. So far I have been able to conduct some interviews in English, especially when French is not the native language of my participants, but I have also conducted interviews in French. I write many of my questions ahead of time in order to be prepared with the French translation, but I still ask questions that follow the course of the conversation. I have also conducted interviews that I was unable to prepare for because they occurred spontaneously. In the instances in which I've conducted interviews in French, I have been lucky enough to be able interview the respondents with a trusted person present that can clear up any linguistic misunderstandings. In ceramics classes and music rehearsals other members of the group, or in some cases the instructor, have been willing to serve as an informal translator.

Collaboration with participants

There has been a trend in ethnography to have participants be a part of the research in more ways than just through interviews. Pink, among others, speaks about the "appropriation of techniques from arts practice [that] might secure means of communicating academically framed representations of the sensory embodied experiences of one group of people and/or ethnographers themselves to (potentially diverse target audiences" (2009:24). This is especially the case in research conducted with young people and often takes the form of photo projects, where participants are asked to draw pictures or are given cameras and asked to take photos that will contribute to the project. In the spirit of this type of collaboration I have started a ceramics project with the young people in the class I attend. I have made a large clay foundation and given each student a piece of it. I asked each of them to make their portion into their piece of a dream street ("rue de reve"). In the future, if there is time and they are willing to participate, I would like to ask them to collaborate on a project of completely their own design and to make a neighborhood in whatever way they would like. I hope to also find a way to create something with the music group, but at the moment they are very focused on their upcoming performances and their time together as a full group is limited.

Sampling

I have discovered that nonprobability sampling best fit this study. Sigona and Hughes (2012) explain that nonprobability sampling works well in situations where the researcher is not endeavoring to get a sufficient sample of an entire population, “as, for example, in the case of populations that are hidden or hard to reach” (2). Finding the young people in the chosen age group is a difficult task and for these reasons I also use purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Sigona and Hughes explain that purposive sampling is used to find specific respondents that allow one to focus on “particular characteristics of a population” (2). In addition, snowball sampling allows me to find research participants through the recommendations of current participants. In this way there is someone to vouch for my credibility and trustworthiness, which is especially useful when seeking out participants who are, for example, undocumented or part of the Roma community.

ANALYSIS

In the initial stages of analyzing my data I am using a mixture of grounded theory and ethnographic approaches. Grounded theory had been criticized for being too positivistic and having a tendency to be narrow, and ethnographic approaches can lead to large amounts of data that become difficult to connect (Charmaz and Mitchell 2001:161). I plan to follow the approach suggested by Charmaz and Mitchell (2001:161) that involves a mixture of grounded theory and ethnographic analysis. I am analyzing my data continuously from the beginning of the study, comparing data from the beginning of the study to data collected later, and I’m searching for “emerging categories” in order to “demonstrate relations between concepts and categories” (161). I’m confident that use of the constant comparative method in grounded theory, ethnographic analysis and data gathering, and not falling prey to the use of prescribed categories before deeply analyzing my data, will lead to a fruitful analysis. I will also remain open to different categories and methods of analysis, and also data collection, depending on how the research situation evolves. As Charmaz and Mithchell stress, “Our subjects’ worlds and our renderings of them take precedence over methods and measures” (161).

Sharing food

At the group home for unaccompanied minors, ages 15-18, seeking asylum I have helped to do the shopping and prepare dinner. For my first visit I made chocolate chip cookies and brought them with me to share with the young people, but I also offered to make an American dish. Due to a misunderstanding I was prepared to make a small dish of macaroni and cheese to add to the larger meal, but the staff members were under the impression that I would be preparing the entire meal. Since I wasn’t prepared the educator (the title given to staff members at the home that help the young people

with 'life skills') and I decided to make spaghetti instead of something more complicated. Before we left to go shopping I saw a girl from Kenya cooking something in the kitchen while another resident, an Albanian girl, asked her what she was making. The first girl replied that it was Kenyan. I wonder how often this type of interaction takes place in such a diverse household.

At the store the educator and I each chose vegetables for the sauce on our own and then just decided to use them all. Back at the house two of the residents came to help chop vegetables, but Tida, an 18-year-old young man from Congo, stayed for the entire preparation of the meal. When the meal was finally finished the staff members heaped large portions of the pasta and sauce onto everyone's plate. There was a lot of discussion over whether or not this was an American dish, a Russian dish (the 'educator' is Russian), or a 'Tida' dish. We decided it must be a mix of all three. In fact, in all of my field sites I have been offered food and have brought or have plans to bring 'American' food. It seems to be important for people to know where dishes come from and Petridou and Pink argue that one can learn a great deal from food sharing.

Petridou explains that the creation of home and self in a new place is dependent on recreating certain past experiences and connecting to values and familiar practices (2001). Pink makes a similar point in explaining that "taste memories are a part of all of our biographies" (2009:74) and that "sharing the tastes in which these memories are embedded" help us to begin to understand certain aspects of other people's history. Food and its preparation involves all of the senses and is strongly tied to memories and feelings of 'hominess.' This is especially important to consider when the freedom to eat what one chooses is taken away, or access to certain types of food is limited. "Feeding involves relations of dependency and power" (Petridou 2001:91) and the food that people have access to and choose to prepare speaks to the bonds they feel with specific times, places, and communities. Bloch explains Smith's idea that commensality, or eating together, "has for all human beings the psychological meaning and effect of solidarity" (Bloch 1986:3). Pink also highlights the benefits of sharing in the memories and meanings that can be understood by partaking in food and routines with others (Pink 2009:76). Pink's elucidation of the benefit of eating with others highlights further benefits of this practice.

Thus sensory ethnographers can benefit from being attentive to the possibility of learning through the sensory sociality of eating with others, and recognizing how the sharing of tastes, textures, eating practices and routines can bring otherwise unspoken meanings to the fore.

(Pink 2009:76)

I believe that the same ideas apply in the realm of music and the arts. In addition to sharing meals with my participants I have also put myself into a position where I have the opportunity to share similar

sensory environments with them. I hope to be better able to “understand how others remember and imagine (in ways that might not be articulated verbally) through their own immediate emplaced experiences” (Pink 2009:40). This will help me to understand how these experiences create connections to the homeland and to Belgium, and will allow me to see how these connections are present in people’s daily lives. The sharing of music and the creation of art projects alongside others allows me to share similar sensory experiences that involve all of the senses. This is what I am striving to do when I participate in the ceramics classes and music rehearsals and performances.

Sense of community and comfort

The ceramics course takes place on Friday after school from 4-6 and the young people usually show up around 4:30. The Roma music group rehearsals take place on Saturday mornings from 11-1pm. The music director of the group said “I want to know why they come here on Saturday morning. What is their motivation?” I want to know the same thing about both of these groups. When I asked one 18 year old young man, Costel, he had an interesting answer. Costel is Roma and from Romania and has lived in Belgium for 7 years. He said that he comes to rehearsals because he likes to perform and you have to come to rehearsals in order to be in the concerts. I then asked if and why Roma music is important to him. He said that it reminds him of traditions in Romania and that Belgians, or other people, can listen to this music but they won’t understand it. He said it is the same for him with other types of music. He can listen to it and enjoy it, but he doesn’t fully understand it. He also invites his friends to the group and says that he likes that the music is in languages he grew up with in Romania.

In the ceramics class I asked one of the older members, Hadi age 18 and from Afghanistan, why he comes to ceramics class. The teacher, Yasmine, was there while we were talking and Hadi said he comes because he likes Yasmine. They both laughed and she proceeded to tell me a story about how he gave an Eiffel tower that he made in ceramics class to his French teacher. Hadi chimed in and said, in English, “sucking up!” Although they both laughed after his declaration that he came because of the teacher, I don’t think this statement is untrue or an exaggeration. Yasmine makes tea for all of the students when they arrive and she asks them about school and their families. There is a cat, Pasha, who lives in the office building where the ceramics class takes place. Yasmine takes care of the cat and the teenagers always seem excited to pet and play with it. When one young lady announced that it was her birthday Yasmine gave everyone a small, store bought, cake, we all sang happy birthday, and the girl blew out a candle. In this instance we shared a tradition that Yasmine was accustomed to practicing and, again, we shared food. This was a type of community building activity and Yasmine makes the young people, and myself feel very comfortable. Right now the class is getting so full that Yasmine might have to start a second group. In addition to this, the young people share a common interest, help

each other with their projects, and get to know each other. Some of the students from Morocco add Arabic script to their projects and create decorations to give to their parents. This is showing connections to different places, the home in Belgium and the country of origin and seems similar to what Costel, from the Balkan music group, describes when speaking about connections to Romania through music.

The sense of community in these arts groups, according to my own observations and the statements made by the young people with whom I've spoken, is a big part of what motivates them to come to the meetings. In all of my interviews so far the young people have stated that their friends are from all over but that they don't have many, or any, Belgian friends. What is interesting is that these groups are fairly mixed in terms of the participation of people of different nationalities. Despite this, my participants have cited the experience of racism directed at them from other migrants as a significant problem. In the conversations I've had with the young people about their music preferences, they have all stated that they still listen to music from the country of origin. This could show that, as Elias, Lemish, and Khvorostianov discovered in their study on the musical preferences of young migrants, the young people are connecting to music from the country of origin because they do not feel accepted in the current community or are simply missing a past home (2011). On the other hand, however, they also seem to be finding the acceptance in the art community that is difficult for them to achieve in other areas. In his study, Rotas (2012) explains how refugees have helped to change the category of British art and what it means to be British. He gives an account of refugee artists whose work was displayed in an exhibition of British art. While Rotas tells us that the cultural grounding of the artwork is still very clear, and the audience is aware that the works represent cultural experiences they have not encountered or do not understand, cultural transmission is still occurring and the host culture is being influenced (212). Rotas further explains that the definition of the refugee's work as 'British' contributes to the remaking of "place Britain" and the idea of Britishness (219). If these works had been displayed in an exhibition of immigrant art, for example, the work would have been cast in a different light and the audience invited to focus on differences. As it stands, the refugees gained unofficial status as 'British' and a significant type of acceptance into the community. I think the young people I am working with may be experiencing a similar kind of status in their art communities.

Security

At this point in the fieldwork I have worked with young people in several categories. There are those whose migratory status is dependent on a partner or spouse, who are from the EU and have the potential to permanently stay in Belgium, those who are seeking asylum, and those who migrated with parents and have short-term permission to stay in Belgium after turning 18. I cannot yet draw

conclusions based specifically on how each status differently impacts the young people's home connections, but I hope to be able to do so in the future. When it comes to issues of security, control, and knowing whether or not one has the right to the stay, or the freedom of movement, the young people's migratory status is key. This is especially true due to the fact that 18 has the potential to change one's migratory status, privileges, and right to stay in the host country (Gonzalez 2011). For example, according to Hadi, now that he is 18 he can only stay in Belgium for 5 more years unless his status changes in that time. He said he doesn't mind this because when he's finished with school he plans to become a pilot. To do this he wants to go to the US, or anywhere where he will be accepted to attend flight school.

CONCLUSION

At this point my fieldwork categories are still emerging, and I realize that my modes of analysis and conclusions from initial findings will continue to change. I am still in the early stages and it has proven challenging and time consuming to gain access to these young people who are deemed vulnerable and in need of protection. I have taken great care and time in considering the ethical dilemmas involved in such a study, and I have only recently been able to spend significant amounts of time with these young people on a regular basis. Despite the limited amount of time I have been able to spend in the field, the significance of certain elements has already become clear.

Many of the young people with long-term status maintain membership in arts groups due to the sense of community that they do not find in other areas of their lives in Belgium. These groups allow them to have friendships with people in the current community who share common interests, but they also maintain creative and imaginative connections to the country of origin through their arts. They have ties to languages they value, not necessarily their native languages but ones that are familiar from the country of origin or transit countries, through the music they perform or the script they write on their projects. Through their art projects and music they are connected to memories of a past home familiar themes. The young people taste and share dishes that spark their interest in the people they live with, but they also prepare foods that are familiar and comforting. The ability and desire to participate in these activities, both now and in the future, do appear to be impacted by the knowledge of one's ability to stay in Belgium and by the limitations of one's status, but this is an element I will investigate further in future. For the moment it is clear that the young people's home connections are numerous and shifting, and they are constantly renegotiating their own place in homes and places that they inhabit, create, and imagine.

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