'GOING HOME': MIGRANTS' IMAGINED CONNECTIONS AND HOME CREATION

Shannon Damery

Université de Liège - CEDEM

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Introduction

My master's research centered on young people's concepts of home in sheltered housing and was conducted in a state-run residential facility and with a group of unaccompanied minors in a refugee integration center. A portion of my research involved investigating the ways in which immigrants maintained attachments to their past homes and their country of origin. I focused on the young people's use of space as well as their material, social and sensory connections to present and past dwellings. The project I now propose is the next step in this vein of research. This project will focus on the ways in which Congolese immigrants with varying statuses in Belgium maintain connections to their 'homeland', create connections to their current space and community, and how these connections affect their integration.

Belgium and the Congo have a long and complicated history. According to recent estimates, there are currently about 60,000 Congolese immigrants residing in Belgium (Demart 2013:5). I chose to work with the Congolese diaspora in Belgium because I will have access to three generations (Demart 2013:6) and a well-established community. My study will focus on the 'imagined' (Pink 2009:40) and I will use anthropological and sociological notions of 'integration,' 'transmigration,' and 'home'. I will examine how connections are fostered through social networks, the arts and the creation of sensory environments, and how these connections differ depending on age, gender, status and the length of time spent in Belgium. Through these avenues I hope to discover if the people in this diasporic community turn their imagination of the homeland into their own reality of homeland experiences in their new communities.

Literature Review

Home

In speaking of home, especially in the case of diasporic populations, the discussion must take into account recent studies of nation, space and integration. Home can 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). Anthropologists accept that land being divided into nations which are tied to culture, and people being 'rooted' into these nations, are ideas that cannot be conceived of as 'natural' (Hannerz 1996, Gupta and Ferguson 1992, Appadurai 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 2009:40). My hypothesis is that the connections that people choose to create and maintain to their homeland will significantly affect their integration in the host community.

Home is 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 (Das 2008, Olwig 1999, Parrot 2005). 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 2002:118). It is described in terms of identity, a feeling of belonging and even a "mythic place of desire" (Brah qtd. in Armbruster, 2002:20). In my analysis I will be examining spatial, temporal, sensorial and emotional connections that people create and cultivate with their various homes.

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. Just as people are not rooted to a single home, neither are they necessarily rooted to a single nation (Glick Schiller et al. 1995). It is understood that transmigrants, a term that came into wide use in the 1990s, stay connected to their 'homelands' while also maintaining membership in a host community. There is an ongoing discussion about how these multiple and varied connections affect their integration. While taking this into account, I anticipate that a study of people's home-making practices, and their chosen connections to a 'homeland,' will also highlight the choices they make in terms of integration in their host community.

Homeland
According to Veena Das, Jonathan M. Ellen and Lori Leonard, in anthropological terms the domestic has three definitions: "the contingent relation between family formation and residential arrangements (Yanagisako 1979); a domain opposed to, as well as contained in, another context such as the politico-jural domain (Barnes 1971; Fortes 1959, 1972); and objects, feelings, and persons that are tamed, as in domesticating the strange or the wild (Lévi-Strauss 1966)" (Das et al. 2008:350). In the course of this research I will be looking at each of these domains. Relationships with family and friends, the effect of state practices and policies and the immigrants' official statuses and the ways in which people may make 'strange' places into their homes. This last domain, however, is very clearly a two way street. I will also have to examine how the current community in Belgium 'grooms' immigrants for acceptance or keeps them at a distance.

The term 'home' is often synonymous with 'homeland' (Povrzanić Frykman 2002, Armbruster 2002) and this connection means that feelings of nationalism come into play in the discussion of home (Povrzanović Frykman 2002). Maja Povrzanović Frykman conducted research with what she calls the Croatian diaspora and Croatian refugees in Sweden. She describes 'diaspora' as "migrant communities numerous and active enough to mark their presence in both the home country and the host countries" (2002:119). She explains that there are important differences in the meaning of home, and indeed the meaning of Croatia, for these two groups. Because refugees were forced to flee their homes they suffered a "double loss of home and of the homeland they knew before the war"(Povrzanović Frykman 2002:135). In contrast, the diaspora community tended to be very nationalist and relied on symbols that connected them to Croatia rather than memories of a physical place. Despite certain elements of a shared community and nationality, members of these two groups created their 'narrative identities' in very different ways that involved a combination of national and personal narratives (Povrzanović Frykman 2002:134-135). This highlights the significant impact of status on one's imagination of home and feeling of belonging.

Integration

Integration is an infinitely complex term, described and defined in various ways in different realms. In popular discourse integration appears to be synonymous with economic success and a great deal of adoption of the host culture. In terms of social science, assimilation is often described as the *complete* adoption of the host culture, which comes at the loss of the immigrant's original culture and practices (Algan et al. 2012:4). John Berry is a cross-cultural psychologist who has influenced social science discourse on this topic. Larissa Remennick describes Berry's 1990 and 2001 publications, in which he views "assimilation, integration, marginalization and separatism as a continuum stretching from complete inclusion to total exclusion" (2003:27). Berry explains that acculturation "involves various forms of mutual accommodation, leading to some longer-term psychological and sociocultural adaptations between both groups" (2005:699).

This view shares some similarities with the multiculturalist view of integration in which several cultures can exist together at the same time, while immigrants make choices regarding their own cultural identities (Algan et al. 2012:5). Remennick explains Bernhard Nauck's theory that the way a person is able to integrate depends greatly on one's social and cultural capital (2003:28). According to Remennick, "effective integration requires diverse personal resources: languages, education, social skills, and the ability to adapt to different roles" (2003:27). The necessity of these many skills is clearly illustrated in the European Union's "common indicators of migrant integration" which include employment, education, social inclusion and active citizenship (Kraszewska 2011:10). In her study of repatriate integration, Remennick explains that, for

analytical purposes, integration can be divided into two categories. There are "structural aspects of immigrant inclusion (employment, functional social networks, participation in host social institutions) and acculturation in relation to the cultural aspects of the process, including language shift, informal social networks, and cultural consumption" (2003:27). My study will focus mainly on the cultural aspects of connection, and will therefore include a discussion on the cultural aspects of integration.

Agency, choice, and spaces of exception

Choice is a key element of integration, and will also be a focus of my project. Remennick explains that integration was sometimes viewed as a passive activity in which the immigrants were the receivers of culture. More recently it is understood that immigrants choose the ways in which they will integrate, and that there is a great deal of strategy involved (Remennick 2003:27). While many factors of their lives are not under their control, immigrants of all statuses may still enact agency in terms of their integration, connections and home-making practices.

A key element of my study will be the ways in which people's official status in Belgium affects their home-making practices. In his work, Simon Turner contributes to the discourse on 'spaces of exception' (Agamben 1995:126). Turner conducted research in the Lukhole refugee camp in 1997 and 1998 and described this place as a space of exception because it is a restricted space that the refugees will only occupy until they can be 'resettled'. The refugees live what Agamben describes as 'bare life' (1995:126) because they are not allowed a political voice. They are expected to abide by rules and laws that govern their lives, but they are not permitted to participate in the creation and implementation of these conditions. In addition to this, the refugees are painted as being innocent victims. In order to deserve help from the relief agencies the refugees must be deemed 'helpless,' and their own agency is ignored (Turner 2010:2). Refugees in this situation are also expected to refrain from any type of involvement in politics. Despite this restriction and the agencies' efforts to enforce it, the refugees still engaged in their own political activities within the camp.

For the purposes of my study, 'spaces of exception' are not only physical spaces, but can also be a person's legal status. Many immigrants, of varying statuses, are denied the full rights of citizens, especially and most clearly the right to vote, and they often do not know how long they will be allowed to stay in the host country. In terms of age, people under 18 are denied the right to vote and, according to Jean and John Comaroff, are treated as though they aren't full members of

society (2005). Even under the formal restriction of this official status, young people and immigrants still find ways to act in the political realm. I wish to discover how living in different spaces of exception, and whether or not the immigrants live a 'bare life', affects the connections that they make. Turner explains that he is building on the work of Mary Douglas, Victor Turner, and Liisa Malkki when he explores the idea that refugees "expose, in other words, the constructedness of the relationship between people, place and identity (Turner 2010:6). By taking the role of the 'other' or 'outsider', in actuality not belonging to any nation, they are viewed as a danger, but also allow the host society to identify itself. The effects of status make tremendous differences in immigrants' lives and are likely to have some influence on their home-making endeavors.

In terms of integration, Willem Schinkel explores the imagination of society. In this context he describes social imagination as "the routinized and professionalized ways in which social life is rendered visible" (2013:1142). His focus is on the monitoring and measuring of integration. "Because it is so intertwined with images of what the national society is and who belongs to it, immigrant integration constitutes an exemplary case to study such social imagination" (1143). Arjun Appadurai describes imagination as the groundwork for action. He explains that, "it is the imagination, in its collective forms, that creates the ideas of neighborhood and nationhood, of moral economies and unjust rule, of higher wages and foreign labor prospects" (1996:7). Imagination makes it possible for people to 'feeling at home' or out of place, whether home is considered a house, a community, or an ancestral homeland (Appadurai 1996, Illuoz 2009).

Gill Cressey conducted a study 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 "returns home can take the form of literature, returns in the imagination, films, home videos, telephone conversations and sharing of memories" (Cressey 2006:57). The young people in Cressey's study stressed that it was important "to maintain a right to count both places as home" (2006:63). I will attempt to discover who feels this entitlement in creating connections. I will explore this right to claim a place as one's own through the lenses of artistic expression inspired by the homeland, the creation of a "transnational popular culture" (McAlister 2002), and in their own social networks.

Sensory Environments

Music

In my past research I investigated how young immigrants maintained a connection to Afghanistan through music. This exploration led me to Jo Tacchi's study of people's use of radio in their homes. She explains that radio is used to "connect with other places and other times" and is "linked with memories and with feelings" (Tacchi 1998:26). Similarly, music itself is a "symbolic tool" of inclusion and exclusion that can illuminate "symbolic boundaries" between different groups (Gazzah 2008:75). Elizabeth McAlister conducted a study on the Haitian festival music, Rara, and how the performance of this music in New York was a way of purposefully rejecting and identifying with different sets of roots, identities and cultures (McAlister 2002:186).

Jean-Sébastien Marcoux explains that when people move "choices of memory" (2001:70) are being made. Objects can be links to memories and other times and places (Parrott 2005, Das et al.2008). When people are forcibly relocated or have to flee a dangerous situation, their ability to make these choices of memory in terms of objects may be very limited. While these objects, limited as they may be, are important in terms of one's sensory environment, music is more accessible, and is especially key when physical objects cannot be transported. In addition to its accessibility in terms of agency, music is simply a useful lens through which to view culture. In her PhD dissertation, Miriam Gazzah explains that music is a particularly powerful tool for studying young people and their identities, especially in terms of migration (2008:74). In support of this claim she highlights the emotion and identity formation tied to music. Music is highly emotionally charged and "is consequently closely related to people's feelings of home, of belonging, of the past and of the future" (Gazzah 2008:74).

Some scholars also argue that music is a gauge by which one can measure integration. In their study on the musical choices of Russian youth that immigrated to Israel, Elias et al. concluded that "music serves as a sensitive indicator of a particular stage in immigrant youth's involvement in the adaptation process" (2010:73)." Young people that had recently arrived in Israel listened to local music, but this preference changed over time. Eventually they began to identify more with Russian music and Elias et al. concluded that this was partly due to their disappointment with the host community and their place in it. A study on these identities will illustrate the degree to which people feel at home and connected to both their communities in Belgium and to their familial homelands. I will be working to understand if they do indeed count both places at home and how much they feel a part of, and choose to be a part of, both places. Music is always evolving and "it is easily mixed with new and/or other cultural practices and is consequently able to innovate and as a result, to articulate new identities (Bailey and Collyer 2006:174)" (Gazzah 2008:75).

Food – feeding the imagination

To conduct a thorough sensory ethnography, the sharing of food is virtually unavoidable and leads to fruitful data. It is especially key when conducting research with migrants because food from a place that one considers home "evokes a large network of associations between values and practices, such as cooking, cleanliness, family, sociability" and these "are all subsumed within the idea and ideal of home" (Petridou 2001:101). Food and its preparation involves all of the senses and is strongly tied to memories and feelings of 'homey-ness.' This is especially important to consider when the freedom to eat what one chooses is taken away, as was the case with the refugees in Turner's study (2005). The residents of Lukhole camp were all given the same rations and were not allowed to grow their own food. "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.

Proposed Study and Methods

It may be a challenge to gain access to members of the Congolese diaspora. For this reason, I intend to use snowball sampling. I will conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews and also become a participant observer. In addition, I will endeavor to learn French, but I will once again emplace myself and use sensory ethnography in the way explained by Sarah Pink (2009). Pink argues for the value of sensory ethnography and suggests that "ethnographic experiences are 'embodied'– in that the researcher learns and knows through her or his whole experiencing body" (Pink 2009:25). I will make every effort to experience a similar sensory environment to people in the communities where I will be conducting research. 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).

Maurice Bloch explains Robertson Smith's idea that commensality, or eating together, "has for all human beings the psychological meaning and effect of solidarity" (Bloch 1986:3). 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 also in the realm of music and the arts. In putting myself into a position where I have the opportunity to share similar sensory environments with this community, 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.

Conclusion

Home is created, remembered, and imagined by numerous connections, relationships and experiences and is in some way present in most every person's life, even a person living 'outside' of what they consider to be their true homes (Damery 2011). The investigation of people's imagination, both collective and individual, and "emplacing" myself in their sensory world will allow me to understand their attachments to their various homes and homelands. By focusing on people's acts of creating connections to their 'homeland,' I will not only discover how, why and to what degree they maintain connections to the familial homeland, but also how these efforts highlight their choices and level of cultural integration in Belgium.

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