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Magdalena Nowicka

Abstract How do professionals constitute their homes under conditions of extensive mobility? The study is based on interviews with professionals working for an international organization who are chronically mobile. Despite their high mobility, they describe little difficulty constructing homes. Home can best be understood here not as a fixed location, but as a set of relationships, to both humans and non-humans. There are elements of spatial proximity, but also of distance, and homes may be defined by both objects present and excluded. They may be a focal point, but at the same time part of a heterogeneous network that spans localities as well as binds past and present. Home is therefore territorially defined, but only as an extended network rather than as a bounded location.

Mobility is a part of everyday life. We all travel longer or shorter distances for private and business reasons; we change place of residence – we decide or are forced to migrate; our friends move. We leave and come back. Home. In everyday life, we use the term ‘home’ without reflecting. We leave home in the morning, go to office, and manage some shopping on the way –home. We go for holidays and come back – home. Yet this obvious move back and forth is questioned under certain conditions. A refugee whose country has been destroyed by war may be asking where his or her home is: is it in exile? Is there perhaps the only one home in a particular place back there, in the country of origin? Is home a house or is it the whole country in which I live? Someone who travels extensively and spends most of their time on the way may be asked and compelled to reflect: do I feel home everywhere? Am I ‘in the world at home’? Or is quite the opposite true: have I been detached and no longer have a home?

Mobility challenges the notion of home. This recognition is a starting point of this paper, which is concerned with the idea of mobile locations. It arose in the course of the empirical study conducted between December 2002 and September 2004 within the framework of a project on mobility and spatial relations among transnational professionals (Nowicka 2006a). My aim here is to make an explanatory contribution to our knowledge of daily practices of highly-skilled professional individuals. In particular, I look closely at how professionals constitute their homes under the conditions of

extensive mobility. I ask if and how frequent travel – in some cases over 120 days in a year – as well as regular changes in place of residence – influence the way the internationally-working professionals construct their homes.

Social theorists have begun to consider the issue of home and mobility and have made an attempt to break with the idea that home must be a fixed location. This argument is also implicit in transnational studies, yet rethinking home does not directly challenge methodological nationalism. Often, mobility and territorial fixity are opposed one another and this dualism is presented as a tension. Relatively little is known about the transnational way of life of highly-skilled mobile professionals. Research has mainly focused on their professional networks and how they transmit knowledge between global cities (e.g. Beaverstock 2005). Only few authors pay attention to small-scale private connections and friendships among mobile professionals (e.g. Kennedy 2004), and such studies are generally focused on particular locations and interactions between them, taking home as given and fixed. This paper extends the analysis by focusing on the relationship between mobility and place, and enhances our knowledge of how mobile professionals feel ‘in the world at home’.

Drawing on an analysis of in-depth interviews with mobile transnational professionals, I focus on the ways in which they construct home when they resettle in a new place and how mobility (frequent, short-term travel) and resettlement influence the way they construct a home environment. One of the findings from the interviews was that the individuals adapt to new situations and new places very quickly and do not miss their previous locations. To explain why, I have looked elsewhere at place attachments (Nowicka 2006a, b). Yet I also suspect that the way these individuals construct homes may answer this question better. I do not assume that home is a stable physical place where domestic life is realized (Douglas 1991) nor that home is a secure and closed territory (Allan and Crow 1989: 7). Instead, I explore how mobile individuals achieve security, stability and familiarity under the conditions of temporality, flexibility and anxiety characteristic of a mobile life-style.

Finally, in this paper I add to the literature on migrant transnationalism by focusing on how migrants and mobile people create personal social fields that stretch across boundaries. Thereby, my key concern is the geographical aspects of migration, and in particular the question of how such home spaces come to be ‘pinned down’ territorially. I look at homes as placements of practices of varied geographical stretch (Amin 2002: 386) and as entities, which are attached yet mobile. This attachment does not have a

typical spatial character, it is not limited to a particular geographical location, and it stretches over house, locality, city and continent. Such constructed homes are mobile thanks to the fact that they include globally-spanning elements – social and technical networks – and they are mobile within these networks (Amin 2002; Mol and Law 1994). The example of such mobile homes helps us to break up with bi-local and multi-local approach to migration represented by the classical migration but also by certain transnational studies. These focus on transnational social spaces (Faist 2000; Pries 2001) which are understood as nodes that are fixed or anchored places in networks and by flows between these nodes (Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Voigt-Graf 2004). I want to show that these nodes, and the most private among them, are not fixed but also mobile locations.

Home and mobility

There is a growing interest in the mobility of people, goods, money and information. For many authors, exile, emigration, labour migrancy, and tourism are the central motifs of modern culture, while being rootless, displaced between worlds, and living in a fluid present are the most fitting metaphors for the modern consciousness (Nkosi 1994: 5). The concern for losing one's stable point of perspective has increased rather than faded out. Mobility has often been considered a danger to personal well-being and mobile people are seen as uprooted. Mobility is said to take people out of their places of origin. Mobile people are rootless, have no bond to any particular place, and their identity is apparently de-territorialized (Ferguson and Gupta 1997: 39; Rushdie 1983). 'The national order of things' (Malkki 1997: 62), in which nation, its territory and the imaginative collectiveness are the source of any individual identity, has pathologized having no roots, no binding or no home. Within this approach, any migration is considered to occur between the containers of nation-states, and thus mobility extracts people from identity-building structures. Within this pessimistic (or postmodern) perspective, mobility leads to emergence of 'non-places', in which mobile people spend most of their time and which do not have power to bind the past and the present, or to provide any emotional relationship and identity (Augé 1992, 1994). It creates people who live in the absolute present only, having no point where their past, present and future could meet (Heller 1995: 2).

While it is recognized that ‘other’ cultures, for example nomadic tribes, carry their homes (and their family, culture, and community) around and are therefore at home everywhere (Peters 1999: 21), a great concern is expressed that the contemporary mobility within western communities may lead to the nomadization of life (Bauman 1996; Deleuze 1977; Fritz 1999; Kaplan 1999; Pels 1999). While Gypsies or Arabian nomadic tribes may well deal with the temporal character of their territorial attachments, western sedentary societies are in danger from mobility. Alternatively, non-residential and mobile homes are at the margin of societies, evoking concern with urban homelessness (Snow and Anderson 1993). The contradictory view would see postmodern nomadism as a romantic idea of total freedom (Braidotti 1994).

More recently, some authors have recognized that the idea of home involves mobility (Clifford 1998). This conceptual turn invoked a more ‘optimistic’ approach to mobility. Mobility means that the individuals are freed from local bindings and have the possibility of shaping their lives and social networks without losing local attachments (Beck 1983: 38). Ferguson and Gupta (1997: 39) suggest that the notion of home as a durably fixed place is in doubt though certain aspects of life can remain ‘localized’ in a social sense. Urry (2000: 133) observes that contemporary forms of dwelling always involve diverse forms of mobility. People dwell in and through being at home and away, through the dialectic of roots and routes. Displaced people, as well travellers are likely to find home in a routine of practices, a repetition of habitual interactions, in memories, myths, and stories carried around in the heads (Berger 1984; Allan and Crow 1989). Their homes may be constructed around religious practices, which offer emotional support during the trauma of resettlement (McMichael 2002), or around the taste or smell of familiar food. Migrants may belong to the country of origin and the host country and be socially well anchored in both locations (Boyd 1989; Espinosa and Massey 1997; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). Accordingly, conceptualizations of home require the broader perspective of pluri-local attachments.

In other words, one dwells not only in a place but also in travel (Clifford 1997: 2). Thus, home should be seen as something that individuals can take along as they move through time and space (Rouse 1991: 8). For a world of travellers, home comes to be found in a routine set of practices, in a repetition of habitual social interactions, in the ritual of a regularly used personal name (Rapport 1994). Home involves mobility also in another sense. Home is a turning, and not the exit, point of movement. It is established

by movement and the feelings of being at home are activated by movement back and forth (Westman 1991: 20).

Re-conceptualizing territorial boundedness

The notions of home and mobility unavoidably involve the concepts of space and place. Although home has been increasingly conceptualized as involving mobility, the tension between mobility and fixity has not completely vanished. More importantly, however, home is still considered a location in space, and this has its grounds in the understanding of space and place (Nowicka 2006a: 29-46). Social sciences traditionally understand mobility as acceleration in time and space, and presume that it is performed in space. Place would be opposed space and equated with stability and fixity (Massey 2005: 29). It referred to the realm of the immobilized (Cox 1998; Massey 2005: 49; Taylor 1999). Places are key sites in the social organization of space, the sources of identity and meaning (Ong and Nonini 1997). Home, as a meaningful and active moment in time and space and in creation of individual identity, social relations and collective meaning would be thus bounded to place (Immerfall 1998: 176): home is where 'space becomes place' (Short 1999). Home is thus regarded a stable, unmoving centre from which the world around can be perceived, conceived and experienced, and thanks to which ethnic and national identities can develop (Heller 1984). It is considered a fixed environment: being at home means being stationary, centred, bounded, fitted, engaged, and grounded (Rapport and Dawson 1998: 27). Social science would thus choose a spatially fixed home and investigate how its particularity and atmosphere is being created by family members or how the homeless or exiles relate to their past location.

Instead, I want to ask *how* homes are localized. In order to answer this question, I first consider the notions of space and place and re-conceptualize the idea of territorial binding. Simmel understood society as the sum of interactions. According to him, space is interesting for sociology not as a natural, geographical background of human existence but as a condition for interaction in a society. Space does not simply determine societal organization but societies create a spatial form in natural space through their interactions (Kuhn 1994: 33). According to Simmel, every social fact finds its spatial reflection. Yet the relation of certain social formations to space can be contingent. There are several possibilities of how space fixes social facts. Simmel observed a historical development

from substantive to functional fixing of a focal point. Functions can be connected to a certain space; an example is mortgage on ground - its value is fixed to a certain place, but not because of immobility of mortgage but because of its function (Simmel 1958: 473). In this case, fixation has a symbolic character. Fixation has also a social dimension, where the focal point is a point of social interaction. For example, a town is a focal point for traffic, which results in the production of a certain social formation of mobility (Kuhn 1994: 39). The third possibility of fixation arises when otherwise independent elements brought together around a particular space, as churches centre the activities of religious communities (Frisby 1984: 128). Certain formations manifest in space and this in return enables them to exercise some functions.

Home can also be understood as a focal point for particular kinds of relations. The fact that a person has a necessary spatial extension leads to certain forms of relations gathering around this person (Simmel 1983: 229). By choosing a certain place (a flat, a room, or a house), a person creates a focal point of her or his relation to objects and persons. The choice of this focal point can be functional if not contingent, and does not depend on the essential qualities of a place. Simmel (1958: 701; 1983: 232) also stresses the role of physical distance or proximity in the form of social relations. Binding in a physical proximity induces a certain type of relations. For example, people living in a house can undertake certain activities and manage a household together in a way that those who are spatially separated cannot do. Fixation in a particular location has also another importance: a place, not as a commodity but as a location, is important to realize the idea of home (Simmel 1958: 700). Thus, home can be understood as secondary to social interactions, and as a dynamic process of localizing of a particular type of relationships. It does not exist prior to identities and their relations but is their integral part (Massey 2005: 10). Home is a space in-becoming and not a fixed, pre-established place.

The second important element of a new approach to home is to understand it as an open space. Home is often perceived as a closed entity with highly restricted access, a secure territory, separated from the space 'outside'. Yet, although entry to home-spaces is carefully controlled, they are relatively open and porous (Massey 2005: 179). This recognition opens up a new research perspective: homes should be investigated as open spaces, which borders are variable and permeable, and which therefore are heterogeneous entities that include elements of their environments. In consequence, research on home should also not presume that home-spaces are necessarily different in their nature from

any other spaces (such as offices, museums, or cities). While they might involve specific kind of relationships (for example of ownership, love, personal commitment, sentiment or nostalgia), their constitution as spatial entities can follow the same principles as the constitution of any other focal point.

The sample

The underlying idea for my research on mobility and space was to ‘follow the flow’, drawing on multi-sited and translocal fieldwork approaches (Marcus 1999; Hannerz 1998). I decided not to concentrate on a particular geographical place but on mobile individuals. I followed them to their places of work or living, I conducted interviews at the airports while they waited for their flights, or, when physical distance prevented personal meeting, we spoke by telephone. My sample consisted of 13 employees of an international organization (here referred to as the IO), which is a part of the United Nations system. Specific to this group is its functional disembodiedness from nation-states and inclusion in an extra-territorialized organization with over hundred offices, its own labour market and well developed independent communication systems. Its employees are not subject to national taxation or social systems. Some of them have diplomatic passes and enjoy privileges equal to those of country officials. When migrating they are not affected by crossing the borders between different nation-states, but they remain (usually even until retirement) within exterritorial structures.

I conducted in-depth problem oriented interviews with thirteen individuals and analysed them using the paradigm of the Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Glaser 1978, 1998). In the sample, there were six women and seven men aged between 31 and 62. Nine were married, two of them for the second time. There was one widow and one single person in the sample. One interviewee had a steady life partner and another had a girlfriend. Ten people had children; five of them had (also) adult children who do not live with them anymore. They are all highly skilled employees, with higher education degrees, most of them with an MA or MSc. They undertake diverse tasks related to economic analyses, project management or team and office management.

All the interviewees have had experience with moving out of their country of origin and settling down in a second, third, or even fourth country. Their destinations included various countries at all continents, Australia excepted. Due to the character of

their work, they travelled or lived in the so-called developing or transition countries. As a result of specific employment conditions in the IO, many swap assignments every three to five years, and this, in turn, often related to change in place of residence. In addition, some of them have frequently moved between houses within the same country of residence. Martin, for example, said that since he left his parents' home to study in a different city, he has never stayed in one place more than two or three years. Reiner moved houses 25 times in 20 years, while Sabah has moved 12 times between countries. All of the interviewees also have experience with short-term mobility from a fixed place of residence. Frequency and duration of business travel vary within the sample. The duration of travel depends on destination, work arrangements, stage of a project, relationship to the client, personal situation, and tasks to be performed. As a general rule, overseas destinations require longer travel for budgetary reasons. The interviewees combine travel to different destinations. They travel for about a week to one country, then go on to another. Such a trip then takes three to four weeks. Three of the interviewees travel regularly to neighbouring countries for less than a week, yet almost every week. Longer trips are usually less frequent. Depending on the year, Martin, for example, travels six to ten times per year. Lenka travels about 100 days a year, and Reiner spends one third of his time on travel. Ann used to travel about 170 days a year, and Diego was away from home for at least two weeks each month. The travel habits vary with a work assignment. For example, at the time of the interview Diego was less mobile than he had been two years before.

In general, the primary reason for their first change of place of residence was the wish to undertake studies or work assignment. It was a tool that enabled my interview partners to achieve a goal: attending interesting courses at a university, or undertaking a dream assignment, wherever those were. They were also all the first migrants in their families, and did not join any friends or relatives abroad. It can be concluded that the choice of destination was not related to the essential qualities of the place; rather, interviewees primarily chose it in the light of the facilities available (Nowicka 2006a). The individual decision about resettlement was driven by new professional aims, education opportunities, personal matters (the education opportunities for children, security for the family), and curiosity about the other culture. Over the course of life, all of these motives occur, and create the mobility career of the individuals. For example, Tolga's first move was related to study in a foreign country. Subsequently she moved to take up a job. Finally, she followed her husband on an overseas assignment. Diego's

decision to move was a mixture of career development and personal reasons: on the one hand, he was aiming at an interesting assignment, and, on the other, at the possibility of attaining a more stable life for his children. Earlier, he had returned to his home country for ideological reasons: he wanted to help to restructure the country's economy as a member of its government. Coincidence often determined the final destination. The last but not least motive to change place of residence is curiosity about new places, people, and culture. This factor remains, however, somewhat in the sphere of wishes and vague plans for the future, for example retirement. In general, mobility as resettlement is about taking opportunities – this is the clear message in all the interviews. It is about being in the right place at the right time, and about taking what life offers. The location of such an assignment or university is secondary, both in terms of an organization and a geographical location. 'Grabbing the chance' is a part of this general life-plan, and also makes it mobile. It is short-term planning, living always with the option 'we will see'. The interviewees assume that discontinuity, such as change of job or residence, is an integral part of a person's biography.

The institutional structure of the international organization enforces this way of designing one's own life. It also supports mobility of its employees in various ways. For example, the IO's employees' organization gives advice on how to make the process of moving household and family less frustrating and less time-consuming. The IO's advisory networks provide assistance in housing options, selecting quality childcare and schooling and job search for spouses. The interviewees thus have no difficulties bringing their families with them to a new place of residence. However, their families are constantly negatively affected by their frequent short-term travels. The interviewees complain that they are only 'part-time family members' (Nowicka 2006a: 79-118). They keep missing important family events like children's birthdays. The situation becomes especially demanding when a family member is sick, or when urgent and unexpected issues at home need to be solved. Especially women claim that they have no time to keep the household tidy. They have a feeling of not fulfilling their duties as wife or mother. Lenka believes that the more relations one has – to material objects and to people – the more difficult it is to travel a lot. Even renting a flat or owning a house makes a difference. The interviewees also feel that their regular absence is destructive to the relationships to people and their intimacy. Most of them just manage to 'keep chaos under control' – pay bills on time, sustain friendships, and keep the family together.

Home in construction

In the analysis of the empirical material I was interested at first in how mobile individuals establish their homes in a new destination. I asked them for their experiences with moving from place to another. They told me about their mundane activities and standard procedures, like arranging for movers, adapting to new tasks in the office, finding a house, or school for children. Secondly, they reflected on their experiences and the difficulties of changing the places of residence regularly. As I have already mentioned, the interviewees discussed the consequences of mobility on their daily life and spare time, and the relationships to friends and family. This aspect drew my attention to the key questions of this paper. I wanted to understand how they establish home under condition of temporality of their residence in places, and whether and how mobility influences the way they construct their homes.

Without prompting, the interviewees pointed to the need to construct home:

You have to create your home ... I guess you need to create your own home when you leave the house of your parents. And then depends - it can be very easy if you don't live very far from the rest of your family your parents and grandparents. Depends...and it's like mixture it is the same thing more or less because you live so close but when you live far and when it is over the ocean then it becomes quite difficult...

The interviewees reflect on the role of geographical distance which underlines the need to find one's own model of home. The natural development, which is to create one's home after leaving the parental one, becomes a conscious process which is more difficult when lacking geographical proximity to the parents. On the other hand, residence in a distant place offers new ideals and patterns of what 'home' means. It opens new horizons, allows adapting different models of furnishing, organizing objects and subjects, which are to become home. The spatial distance, and the embeddedness in an environment different to the origin necessitates conscious organization of home.

The above interview quotation points to a certain dualism in the understanding of home. Home can be at the same time an emotional place of origin, the place where one grew up in a family, and a point of departure for the rest of one's life. At the same time home is something that one constructs, not a particular place, not a location but an entity

in becoming.

Many refer rather to a point or a focal point. As Cecile explains, ‘so what it ends up to is that yes, you need a focal point, you need the point which for you is a point of stability, which makes it easier, at least for me, to deal with all the difficulties of mobility, when I travel I like to come back to my apartment’. Her words indicate the role of home as part of mobile lifestyle. For her, home – the focal point – fulfils a particular role. It offers stability, and it is a turning point amid constant movement. In this story, home is also not a location. It is not (or not only) an affectionate place, and not the source of identity. It has more to do with the issues of dwelling, organizing, arranging your life. It is a way of dealing with mobility, a strategy of managing constant interplay of absence and presence, a counterpoint to the movement and also its constituent part.

Having a focal point, a point of reference to which you come back and from which you can depart for your next travel becomes an urgent need when children appear in the family. All the interviewees who are parents note that their children need a stable point in life, which is necessary for the correct development of their personality. Mobility can be exciting for children but it is the obligation of the parents to provide them with a home-base. Cecile confirms this and adds another aspect: ‘Now the point of reference is here but we all miss a little bit a point of reference there because it used to be for all the years the point of reference for my children.’ It has to be a shared point of reference to become home. It is not a place which makes home but social relations, which orbit round this focal point. Immediate family, spouse or partner and children, situated and physically present in a certain place, all constitute a focal point for mobile individuals. Immediate family is so important because it gives a feeling of stability, an unchanging element in the life full of changes. It marks a point to which one can always come back after a voyage.

Where is such a point? Many interviewees when asked where their home is do not give an answer localizing their home in geographical terms. Most of them, when asked where they feel at home, talk first of all about their families. Martin, in his thirties, has a small son and his wife is expecting another baby soon:

I mean my home is where I and my family are and why I don't know just the way it feel so ... when we lived in Geneva I felt at home when I lived in Austria I felt home in Austria here when we moved here and I feel home here

Despite her strong feelings towards her country of origin, Ann says:

Well, it's my home too because it is where my husband is, it's where my pictures are, it's where my current set of clothes is, it's home and I think about when I am coming back think about coming home when I am arriving at the airport I always exhale – I am back

What is interesting is that women first mention their close family, but then name objects, thanks to which they feel somewhere at home. For example, Lenka says 'home it is your house it your own place that you furnished the way you wanted that you share with your family that's the home'. Tolga does not really feel at home in her new place of residence. Although her husband and both children are with her, the cargo weight limit prevented her from she bringing with her all those things that are important to her from her former house:

we couldn't bring our things which would make it roomy and homey for us, and our personal things like clothes and books and kids' toys. So...it didn't make it feel homey.

She misses her little house, which she furnished herself, where she was surrounded by carefully selected paintings, kitchen equipment, etc. It is evidently the task of women to construct the materialities of home (Asis et al. 2004; Chaplin 1999; Oakley 1974), and this role remains the same under the conditions of migration and absence from home, even if the wife is more mobile and more frequently absent than the husband. Men take the 'consumer' role. They develop emotional relationships to objects because of what they stand for and not an object 'in itself'. Reiner mentions, for example, a table around which his family gathers for a dinner to talk about the events of a day. This table is the central object for him, as a symbol of being together with the family. It can be any table, not this particular one, which allows them sitting together, eating and chatting. Because objects are media for relationships which focus around them, men seem to bother less about moving with them – objects are replaceable by other objects which can play the same function. Transportation of objects to a new place is a task of women, though there are exceptions: Diego's case is such an example:

in our case it was a very conscious decision that we are not going to move around with many things so we tend to be very pragmatic practical people when it comes to that and we basically move around with our clothes

He says that he has not found a piece of furniture yet that he would like to always have with him and, to make moving easier he and his wife have decided to rent a furnished house. Their home is solely structured around family.

Mobile individuals thus organize their homes primarily around people or people and objects. When asked where their home is, they speak about family and daily life – family rituals, like cooking together on the weekend, and objects around which the family gathers or which one selected that accompany her or him and their family in their mobile dwelling. To have the last with you helps to feel homey even in a hotel room. Some of the interviewees take with them for a trip things that remind them of daily practices at home and about their family, for example a thick pajama, pictures of the nearest and dearest, their laptop, etc.. The same is achieved thanks to daily routines when on travel. My interview partners said that they always have their routines which help them to bridge the spatial distance to home and feel similar well as at home during the stay abroad. For example, they power-walk or exercise in a gym. These same mundane activities performed in any place help them to attenuate spatial distance. In a sense, they connect places by ignoring any differences between them. This makes them different from their immobile colleagues. The ‘immobiles’ do not understand them, they claim. When the immobiles travel, they enjoy the non-routine: the new place and all what is unusual there in comparison to their place of residence, and do exactly something different from what they do at home everyday.

At this point, spatial distance once again plays a significant role. Home is not seen by these individuals as a particular location. It is defined by the relationships connecting the mobile individuals with people and objects. It is not the location which defines home. Both people and objects need to be in proximity, and need to directly surround the mobile people so that they feel at home. It is the spatial gap, the distance which decides on where home is – the distance to people and objects, the fact that they are separated. This is the exclusive aspect of home construction – homes are defined by excluding distant elements. In this respect, there is nothing transnational or border-crossing about the homes of the transnationally mobile people, who perceive their home as centres of family as any other people do. On the other hand, the individuals use routines to bridge the spatial gaps and

to feel like at home in distance places where they stay shortly. These 'routines' connect distant places and times, yet they do not 'stretch' homes across borders.

The 'non-transnational' aspects of home construction are also found when mobile individuals reside for a longer time in one place which is then the basis of their family and from which they travel to other countries. Steven, for example, felt like New York was home because he had lived there for over twenty years. Reiner, residing for over fifteen years in the US, says 'I feel home here because I know the place ... and I know it because I spent there so many years'. Familiarity is a key element of feeling at home, also in a new place of residence. Steven says about Hungary, where he had been for three years at the time of the interview:

Well, over a passage of time it became home here: you get used to place you're living, you get used to shopping and the places that you shop and you meet people and your work is here

He says he also felt at home in other countries in Asia when he resided in each for a couple of years. However, now Steven would not call the whole of Hungary his home. In this respect, he distinguishes between home as homeland and the private home-location. To be in Hungary means to him being in a foreign country and at home at the same time. He might develop different types of attachment in each place (Nowicka 2006a, b), yet the way he establishes his home in each of them, and how any place supports this process do not vary according to geographical location.

Such descriptions suggest that homes are small and limited units. Yet further analysis shows that home cannot be limited to a single point, a place, a site like a house, a room, a flat, an apartment. Being at home trespasses the boundaries of 'four walls'. Not only are the objects in a house important to feeling at home, but its surroundings are equally significant. At this point the interviews reveal another side of home construction which opens up towards the 'transnational' connections. When residing in a new place for only a short period, the role of time in enforcing familiarity can be taken over by the infrastructure. After moving to Hungary, Steven's life did not change much because there was the infrastructure he was used to from New York. The period of adapting to Hungarian conditions was considerably shortened owing to this similar infrastructure and already after a year, Steven talked about being at home when living in Hungary.

The respondents frequently mention the role of infrastructure in enabling them to feel well in a place. For example, they would not like to move to places where certain things are missing. Home is a larger space defined by the infrastructure which is available there. The presence of schools, restaurants, parks, places to exercise one's hobbies (for example fitness studios), cinemas and theatres, generates the feeling of familiarity and security. Places all around the world, in which these institutions are at hand as they were in the place where the individuals used to live, are like a landscape in which one can move freely. The networks of infrastructure constitute the feeling of homeness exactly like objects at home moved around by the mobile individuals from one place of residence to another.

Steven's comments about living in Hungary also indicate an understanding of home as a place where interaction is the most important. They stress the collective aspects of home. Home also embodies social relations that stretch beyond direct proximity. These social networks assist the feeling of familiarity. As Steven says about a town in the USA, 'I lived there for twenty two years before moving here so it was my home, it was where all my friends were'. Cecile emphasises that home is where you have friends to interact with and it is so important to her that 'it is the personal relations that make the decision' whether to move and where to locate her home next time. She has friends almost everywhere all around the globe and feels comfortable everywhere. She is able to produce familiarity and similarity for herself everywhere based on her social network. Having friends around her, interacting with people she know well makes any place not much different from another where she has resided for a certain time. It means that no matter where she is she can spend time in the way she is used to: go to the cinema or theatre with her friends, have a dinner with them, invite them to her house for a party, etc.

To feel at home means to be in a familiar immediate environment, to have your own and known objects around and to interact with family; therefore, one can create a feeling of being at home at any time in any place as long as one can move together with people and objects. However, it also means being surrounded by larger networks of people and infrastructure. Again, the presence of these larger networks allow mobile people to feel home everywhere in the world.

Such networks span and connect localities. To feel at home means to feel comfortably in the networks - to be surrounded by familiar elements. They are familiar because they are already known or because they are similar to what the individuals had experienced previously. Similarity and familiarity are the links to the past, they bind time

and they bind places. For someone who has never lived in a community of expatriates, a new place of residence in which social contacts are limited to this particular group does not provide the feeling of being at home. For someone who had a small house furnished with care, a new large and luxurious but rented house, equipped with modern commodities to which one has no emotional relation, is not a home. Both situations break into the continuity of practices, including home constitution; they constitute ruptures and they are disjunctive. They demonstrate the limits of this particular way home is constituted and the influence of mobility on home-making.

Mobile locations

Under the conditions of extensive mobility, the practices of mobile individuals are geographically dissolute and constantly interrupted. The frequent resettlements force individuals to constitute home anew in a new place of residence yet it does not seem to be a problem. It is because home is being established around particular relationships to people and objects. Further, achieving a feeling of being at home does not require much time if familiarity is offered by social networks or known infrastructure. Thus, the feeling of home is achieved in broader contexts and home is not limited to a particular, single place.

These findings can be interpreted to reflect on how ‘transnational’ elements, defined as spanning the localities, are involved in the construction of home, and on the question of how homes happen to be defined geographically. We need to look at such homes as being at first socially but not territorially defined – they are socially embedded. If we do not follow the temptation to conclude that such socially embeddedness requires geographical proximity and if we are willing to see homes as closed entities, we open up the perspective to see how such primary social embeddedness opens home-spaces to the outside, and how they involve non-local elements. What I mean here are not objects – for example, souvenirs brought from distant countries – but network relationships. Relationships connecting mobile people with their family members and selected objects constitute a focal point which is localized in the broader networks of people and things which can be geographically spread. Importantly, these relationships in proximity and in distance are not opposed to one another, they are both important and necessary elements of home.

I draw on the concepts of the actor-network theory to show that such locality-spanning homes equally involve humans and non-humans (Law 1992). Home is not a closed entity, it is open towards its outside and linked to its environment; it is a part of a heterogeneous network, in the language of ANT. To imagine home as a part of a heterogeneous network opens up several perspectives. To begin with, we can look at homes beyond human agency (Hetherington 1997: 184). Individuals may intentionally involve various elements in their construction of home: for example, they may select people whom they invite home, or decorate home with objects from elsewhere. The constitution of home can also be without intentions influenced by various actors, among them policy-makers at all levels, from nation-states to local administration or neighbourhood associations. Yet the making of homes also happens unintentionally because boundaries of home in network are always permeable, as networks do not end where people would like them to end (Massey 2005). Meaning is also given to homes by the way people consider landscapes, architecture or infrastructure around them as sufficient and friendly or inadequate and inhospitable, which has rather to do with social norms and cultural *habitus* rather than intentional acts.

Secondly, the network perspective is complementary to Simmel's idea of a focal point. As Simmel pointed out, relationships or sets of relationships gain a particular form of social formation by relating to space. Localization in space allows them to develop in a particular way. This process is universal and relates to any social formation – of a city, or a home. To look at homes as sets of interactions or relationships is to look at them as parts of networks. Both perspectives deprive homes of their privileged position as a special type of space, much different than other spaces, like cities. At first, home is not a site or place – it is a set of relationships between multiple elements. For Ludmila, for example, it is very important to own things – her home is where the objects are her property. Similarly, for Tolga, home is full of her pictures, her furniture, and her pots. Family is also about relationships to the people, which make them different to any other people. First home arises out of sets of elements and relationships. Then home becomes localized and this localizing has further effects. The social sciences have focused on homes which have already been localized without asking how this process took place. They bind homes to particular sites and people to these homes. Exploring homes in networks allows us to comprehend them before their spatial localizations and asking how they relate to space.

To consider home to be a heterogeneous part of a broader network means to comprehend it as a network as well and thus to look at the effects it produces. For example, it is possible to look at homes as mobile locations. At this point I draw also on the works in human geography, notably the writings of Doreen Massey and Nigel Thrift, and I understand space as relational and produced through practices, multiple and dynamic (Nowicka 2006a: 60-79). I look thus at homes as such spaces, which are not necessarily limited in scale (Amin 2002), which can span beyond one locality, involve diverse elements at a time, to abandon them later or re-involve repeatedly. Such an approach can help us to understand why the interviewed individuals have so much difficulty in locating their homes in geographical terms. Many of the informants when asked where their home is, answered like Cecile:

I don't know, I think my home is in the middle of Atlantic. I feel home in the US and in Europe

Home localized in a network is not a territorial entity. Its material components have spatial extension, but home is not a place, nor an object but a network. It can be manifested in one particular territorial location or in many:

I wouldn't move to one place. I would until my ... I could sort of physically afford it and financially afford it I would start with three places where I would spend a few months each

These elements constituting home – people, objects, and relationships – are movable, though they have their spatial extension. The focal point is thus localized territorially in particular places. These places are, for example, residential areas, or towns. These places encompass other relationships, between people and objects, which are parts of social and material networks. These networks stretch beyond one locality, and therefore the location of home is determined by places and their qualities as well as networks transgressing these places.

Home, which is a part of a network, can be geographically located anywhere and everywhere and, what is more important, it can move with you. It does not have to be constructed anew in every new place of residence but it can move with an individual. It can be easily transported in the networks in which travel is performed. This is possible

because networks are constituted by relationships connecting otherwise separate elements (Mol and Law 1994). It means that geographically measurable distance is not an obstacle to mobility in a network. Network binds times and places. In a network, proximity and distance are not metric but have instead to do with identity and relations between the elements (Mol and Law 1994: 649). Places with a similar set of elements and similar relations between them are close one to another, and those with different elements or relations are far apart.

Home is being re-configured in every place. It travels with to a new geographical site, where it is involved in another parts of networks. For the transnational professionals, home connects many locations, the past, the future, and the current in its geographical (proximity) and temporal (presence) sense.

Conclusions

Basing on the interview material, and the works of the sociologists and human geographers like Simmel, Massey, Amin and Law, I proposed examining homes as a set of relationships, both to humans and non-humans. I developed a remark made by one of my informants that home is a focal point. I restrained from considering such focal points as territorially defined entities, and instead I opened up the interpretation to see how the mobile individuals reflect on further elements like people and infrastructure which enables them to feel in a new place of residence at home. Drawing on the actor-network theory, I understood these elements as heterogeneous networks. Such networks have their territorial extension so that finally home is territorially defined. To see home in the networks also helped me to comprehend it as a mobile element and understand why my informants have problems to geographically locate their homes.

I focused on the spatial aspects of home construction. Exploring how mobile individuals create their home in the new places of residence reveals a great complexity of the spatial organization of transnationalism. There is spatial proximity involved – immediacy of family members and favourite, selected objects. At the same time, however, homes involve spatial gaps; in the definition of home, spatial distance matters equally as proximity. Homes are defined by inclusion of various elements but also by what is absent. Furthermore, homes span beyond single localities because they involve globally stretching, heterogeneous networks, which are always potentially close. Such networks

bind times past and present, and they bind places. The spatial complexity necessarily involves time. Homes of transnational people are not only where they are at the moment, they are also where and when they potentially are, and they reflect and bind the past as well. They involve geographical and temporal proximity and absence. The transnational connections – the private home-spaces of transnational people – can hardly be drawn on the map alone, just as the individuals cannot indicate the geographical location of their homes.

This study tries to understand how the transnational professionals ‘feel in the world at home’, contributing to the ‘geography of transnational spaces’ (Voigt-Graf 2004), and moving them away from simply drawing connections between fixed locations and understanding transnationalism or transnational ‘lifespaces’ (Robins 2006) as simple, linear topologies.

Notes

1 All the names are fictitious as to assure anonymity of the interviewed individuals.

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