

Searching for an Appropriate Research Strategy on Transnational Migration: The Logic of Multi-Sited Research and the Advantage of the Cultural Interferences Approach

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Abstract: In analyzing current methodologies of transnational migration research, the article proposes to incorporate the cultural access into transnational methodology. Referring to the ideas of Andreas RECKWITZ, Ulf HANNERZ and Homi BHABHA it defines "culture" as a discursive and sense-making activity that guides respective social practices. This perspective allows defining transnational formations such as cross-border networks, families, organizations and diasporas as entities that are continuously confronted with interference of cultural orders. Moreover, the article develops a methodological proposal that facilitates research on actor's strategies, which deal with a variety of cultural scripts. First, this proposal suggests including the multi-sited ethnography in the procedure of data collection. This would enable to avoid methodological nationalism in designing transnational units of analysis. Second, the proposal suggests incorporating scientific hermeneutics within the procedure of data interpretation. In particular, it argues that scientific hermeneutics enables to observe the plurality of meaning patterns within actor's meaning horizons. Third, the methodological proposal suggests organizing the research work in cross-cultural and interdisciplinary organized scientific teams in order to increase the extent of research reflexivity. This modification provides a possibility to observe complex cultural dynamics and their effects on the cross-border social practices.

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1. Introduction: Lack of Cultural Perspective in Transnational Research

Over past ten years, the development of the transnational approach on migration (BASCH, GLICK SCHILLER & BLANC, 1994; FAIST, 2000; PORTES, 2001; VERTOVEC, 1999) was accompanied by the formation of new methodological positions (BECK & SZNAIDER, 2006; PRIES, 2008; WIMMER & GLICK SCHILLER, 2003). The most important methodological argument refers to the impossibility of restricting sociological and anthropological research on migration to the boundaries of nation states. Social scientists, who analyze cultural and

social practices of collectives only within nation state frames, would disregard the existence of different forms of social life and thus establish a homogenized view on social reality. This has been the main point of criticism against previous migration research. [1]

Although this critique argues for modifications of methodological positions and rules in a significant way, it does not stress on the cultural perspective of transnational migration. Thus, contrary to postcolonial studies, the interest in culture within the transnational perspective is rather restricted (KIVISTO, 2001). In addition, it is proposed here to distinguish between the three ways in which cultural aspects are regarded in transnational research. First, culture is often described in the essentialist way¹. This view refuses to recognize the constructivist character of such phenomena as ethnicity and nation. Moreover, the reference to these categories within transnational activities of immigrants suggests their almost objective nature. Second, even if social scientists consider cultural factors as important in shaping transnational migration, they avoid developing theoretical connections between cultural and other spheres, like economic and political (PORTES, GUARNIZO & LANDOLT, 1999). Third, transnational researches refer, in particular, to the creolization approach of Ulf HANNERZ (1987, 1996). This theory points out the specific non-constant nature of "culture." It conceptualizes the development of new cultural patterns which emerge on the basis of different cultural orders under global conditions. [2]

However, the aforementioned conceptual ways of taking "culture" into account are not acknowledged in methodological work on transnational migration. But, especially the genuine cultural access would give a new perspective to transnational phenomena and to the methodological ways of studying them. It can be particularly useful for clarifying this specific methodological question: How to conduct research on transnational practices of migrants, which take place in multiple cultural orders? Put in other words, it reads thus: Which methodological strategy is appropriate for research on transnational formations (such as transnational networks, families, communities, organizations and diasporas) under conditions of cultural interferences? Therefore, the methodological proposal developed in this article focuses exactly on this point. The article aims at combining both cultural access and transnational approach to develop a suitable methodology for conducting research on transnational migration. This proposal could be of interest for researchers who are looking for new techniques of data collection and data interpretation which allow them to study transnational activities, transnational life-worlds and transnational forms of mobility. Thus, the term culture can be equated with such terms as meaning patterns (SCHÜTZ, 1981), symbolic codes (LEVI-STRAUSS, 1958) or discursive narratives (FOUCAULT, 2002). "Culture" can also be described as a sense-making and a signifying activity (HANNERZ, 1996; BHABHA, 1994). The term also refers to the idea that social structures are always embedded in cultural interpretations. Put differently, social practices are always incorporated in settings of culturally rooted knowledge patterns. In addition, the term cultural interference, or cultural overlap,

1 For criticism on the essentialist concepts of culture, see BUSCH (2009), who works out the central differences between the primordial and constructivist approaches on culture.

is related to settings in which actors or certain collectives are confronted with the simultaneous presence of different meaning patterns regarding the same "object" or "situation." The point of interest here refers to the methodological strategies of research on transnational action patterns that result from cultural interferences. However, this article does not discuss methodological assumptions related to all kinds of overlaps of cultural models², but only to forms which occur in frames of cross-border formations, such as transnational diasporas, communities, families, networks and organizations. Thus, the methodology presented here intends, on the one hand, to organize data collection on the basis of a multi-sited research technique (MARCUS, 1995) and on the other, to use the method of scientific hermeneutics (REICHERTZ, 2004) for an appropriate analysis of data. [3]

First, the main assumptions of sociological research on culture and the possible actors' strategies of dealing with cultural overlaps are outlined (Section 2). Second, three transnational research strategies are examined: the criticism of methodological nationalism (WIMMER & GLICK SCHILLER, 2003), the cosmopolitan methodology (BECK & SZNAIDER, 2006) and the relational concept of transnational space (PRIES, 2008). This involves examining how the respective methodologies can be connected to culture-oriented transnational research (Section 3). Third, the multi-sited research technique which changes the procedure of data collection is discussed. The technique of scientific hermeneutics which is important for data analysis is also described (Section 4). Fourth, the "problems of representation" within transnational studies are addressed. That is why the extent of reflexivity of transnational studies is proposed to be increased by organizing the research into cross-cultural and interdisciplinary scientific teams (Section 5). Finally, the conclusions are drawn briefly (Section 6). [4]

2. How to Include the Idea of Cultural Interference in Transnational Methodology?

Classic migration theories (ALBA & NEE, 2003; GORDON, 1964) focus on reasons and consequences of international mobility within one nation state setting. In contrast, theories of transnational migration are interested in analyzing the formation of new social contexts which are simultaneously situated within two or even more nation state frames. In this regard, transnational migration is understood as a form of mobility which enables continuous involvement of migrants within different cross-border formations, such as networks, organizations, diasporas, and institutions (FAIST, 2000; PRIES, 2008). These continuous cross-border practices of migrants create specific social fields which span between the sending and receiving countries and form alternative social realities (LEVITT & GLICK SCHILLER, 2004). Various case studies on transnational migration do not only shed light on the transformation of kinship relations (HONDAGNEU-SOTELO & AVILA, 1997) due to cross-border mobility, but also on the formation of pluri-locally organized political (ØSTERGAARD-

2 The combination of different cultural drafts is also usual within the nation state context. For instance, one can find an example for the transformation of different habitual orders to new ones within one nation state frame in Pierre BOURDIEU's *Distinction* (1984).

NIELSEN, 2003), economic (PORTES, GUARNIZO & HALLER, 2002), and religious (LEVITT, 2007) fields. [5]

I argue that transnational actors (individuals and collectives) are confronted with various cultural orders. To put it in other words, cultural interferences or cultural overlaps are the core feature of transnational settings, because pluri-local oriented actors and collectives regularly experience a variety of meaning patterns. This is why the methodological strategy proposed here is strongly influenced by cultural sociology. Consequently, this section discusses the fundamental assumptions of cultural theory which permit to outline the thesis of cultural overlaps. [6]

According to ALEXANDER and SMITH (2002), the only productive way to analyze cultural processes is presented by theories that define culture as a sphere which is not determined by social structures. While the "sociology of culture" tends to explain cultural phenomena by referring to particular socio-structural facts or causes³ the "cultural sociology" aims at describing cultural elements as tools which direct patterns of action. From this perspective, "culture" is understood as an "independent variable" within the relationship of social structure and cultural sphere (ALEXANDER & SMITH, 2002, p.136). Similarly, Andreas RECKWITZ (2001, 2006) points out that the "strong version" of cultural sociology defines social practices as guided by cultural patterns. In this case, the theoretical distinction between culture and agency is replaced by the distinction between cultural patterns and respective types of social practices. However, cultural orders cannot be empirically observed independently of social practices, that is, as separate entities. Instead, cultural drafts are always expressed by meaning patterns situated *within* social practices (RECKWITZ, 2006, p.589). Using the theory of social practice RECKWITZ refers to the "doing culture"-perspective (OTTEN & GEPPERT, 2009) which enables the disclosing of complex processes of cultural transformation: "Practice theory assumes continuity and persistence of social practices through routines but not through determining scripts and structures. Routines are by definition uniform, but they also anticipate interruption and irritation, which then cause changes and negotiation on social order" (OTTEN & GEPPERT, 2009, p.30). [7]

The logic of cultural sociology, as opposed to the abovementioned sociology of culture, requires avoiding the so-called homogeneous notion of culture (RECKWITZ, 2006, p.619). This access is partially included in different approaches⁴ and primarily based on three assumptions. First, it presupposes that cultural orders are characterized by internal consistency and closure. Second, it refers to the specific understanding of cultural reproduction, which claims that, in contrast to cultural innovation, the unmodified transmission of cultural patterns is

3 Citing examples of such inconsequential cultural approaches, ALEXANDER and SMITH (2002) mention the neo-structuralist approach and its further developments by Michel FOUCAULT, the Cultural Studies approach of Stuart HALL, and the cultural sociology of Pierre BOURDIEU (ALEXANDER & SMITH, 2002, p.140).

4 For instance, in the approaches of Pierre BOURDIEU (1984) and Charles TAYLOR (1993), the boundaries of meaning patterns, in some statements, are the same as those of collectives, i.e., social classes or particular "ethnic" groups (RECKWITZ, 2006, p.543).

the common logic of cultural dynamics. And, third, it suggests that cultural orders are strictly connected to particular social groups of representatives. From this point of view, cultures can only be studied in particular collectives and cannot simultaneously be shared by different groups. [8]

Andreas RECKWITZ, who has worked out the weaknesses of the homogenized perspective on culture, pleads for more attention to the globally spread processes of cultural overlaps (RECKWITZ, 2001, p.189). According to him, one needs a new, more open definition of "culture" today. First, one has to regard cultural phenomena as internally fluid and inconsistent. Second, one has to assume that identical cultural models can be shared through different collectives. Consequently, this access offers one the possibility of imagining the "simultaneous existence of different cultural models in the mental structure of singular collective" (RECKWITZ, 2006, p.628). Third, the current cultural approaches have to develop terms for conceptualizing the innovation dynamics of culture(s). Moreover, they have to disregard the idea of cultural reproduction as a continuous reiteration of uniform cultural patterns.⁵ [9]

This criticism of the homogeneity approach of culture is directly linked to the idea of cultural overlap. Especially, the second aforementioned thought hints at the crucial role of interpretative activities of actors who are confronted with a variety of different meaning patterns regarding the same "object" or "situation"⁶. Thus, the term "meaning pattern" refers to the common meaning of a respective social interaction or communication; the meaning pattern combines different aspects of meaning into specific drafts. Such interpretive frames can be observed in linguistic and non-linguistic expressions (REICHERTZ, 2004). [10]

In this regard, it is argued here that situations of cultural overlaps are a crucial attribute of transnational spaces, because cross-border circulation of commodities, artifacts, ideas and people potentially increases the dynamics of cultural transfer, translation and exchange. To put it more precisely, cross-border mobility enhances the probability of cultural encounters. But, this thesis does not stress that "cultures" are directly linked to nation states. On the contrary, cultures, as mentioned above, are non-homogeneous and non-territorialized entities which are always embedded within patterns of action and framed by specific historic contexts⁷. [11]

Concomitantly, it is proposed here to consider the thesis of cultural interferences as a key guideline for developing a new methodological proposal that can be

5 Terms, such as "cultural drafts," "cultural models," "cultural orders," "knowledge patterns" and "meaning patterns" are used in this text interchangeably.

6 The sameness of the "situation" or "object" is perceived by actors and not only by researchers.

7 One can also assume that actors or collectives without a transnational background can be confronted with the overlaps of cultural orders. For instance, the members of respective social milieus within national settings can perceive the plurality of culturally rooted habitual orders. The cultural overlaps in transnational settings, in contrast to cultural interferences within the national context, are influenced by an inconsistent and pluri-locally organized cultural apparatus, such as education facilities in different nation states, cross-border epistemic regimes of truth production, religious institutions and media representations.

used for research on transnational formations. But, before focusing on this, the three possible strategies available for actor's dealing with cultural overlaps are outlined (RECKWITZ, 2001, p.192)⁸. The first strategy refers to situations in which actors combine different cultural schemes with a new one. The production processes of such innovative meaning patterns are well-known as creolization (HANNERZ, 1987, 1996). The second strategy also relates to the context in which people or groups have access to multiple cultural schemes referring to the same "object" or "situation." Thus, in this case, actors try to redefine the usage criteria of meaning patterns⁹. Concomitantly, actors modify the validity contexts of cultural models and tie their usage to the new contexts. In other words, different cultural drafts are not modified into a new draft, but are used depending on their new usage criteria¹⁰. The third strategy is that one can observe situations in which ambivalent frames of action become constant. Under such circumstances, actors, whose meaning patterns are characterized by multiplicity, continue to be uncertain about the respective usage rules and contexts. This cultural position is discussed within the cultural approach of Homi BHABHA (1990, 1994), who uses terms like *hybridity* and *cultural translation* to clarify ambiguous situations in multiple cultural contexts. [12]

To sum up, the central idea of the cultural overlaps approach is that different ways of dealing with cultural interference, in consequence, condition different types of social practices. This access enables a specific cultural-sociological explanation which describes transnational patterns of action as a result of cultural dynamics. That is why a study of cultural drafts and their application by actors becomes the focus of culturally oriented transnational research. Besides, all the three strategies for dealing with cultural overlaps outlined above are only temporary arrangements. One has to mention that, under specific conditions, the second and the third strategies can be transformed to the first and vice versa. [13]

By describing different ways in which actors deal with cultural overlaps, I follow the interactionist approach on intercultural encounters by OTTEN and GEPPERT (2009), who conceptualize overlaps of "cultures" as dynamic processes. In contrast to the essentialist view on intercultural encounters, which tends to describe the clash of separate meaning patterns, the interactionist approach points out that in situations of intercultural encounters "culturally divergent viewpoints and social worlds become crucial for communication" (OTTEN & GEPPERT, 2009, p.43). Consequently, I agree with the interactionist argument

8 Actors do not have to be understood as subjects but as "carriers of social practices" (RECKWITZ, 2006) or as "imaginary constructions" (SCHIMANCK, 1988). This thesis is rooted in the idea that the same actors can participate in different kinds of social practices.

9 The term "usage criteria" was developed in the context of the ethno-methodological theory. It hints at the fact that cultural knowledge is always bounded by specific contexts and that actors always have an implicit knowledge about suitable application of meaning patterns. The ethno-methodological term "framing" refers exactly to the usage criteria of meaning patterns (GOFFMAN, 1959, 1974; GARFINKEL, 1967).

10 For instance, Ghanaian-British transnational migrants, who have two different cultural drafts concerning the function of medicine and healing methods, use some of these knowledge patterns only in the context of medical facilities of their home country and others in the context of the country of destination (KRAUSE, 2007).

that methodology of cultural interferences has to enable the "observation of emergent cultural processes" (OTTEN & GEPPERT, 2009, p.43)¹¹. [14]

Thus, this article focuses on developing a methodology which makes it possible to study action routines, life-worlds and mobility trajectories which result from overlaps of knowledge patterns. The methodology so developed would make some assumptions concerning actor's ways of dealing with the plurality of cultural orders. For achieving this objective, the method of scientific hermeneutics is being combined with current transnational research methodologies. That is why in the next section of the article an overview of current methodological strategies used for the research on transnational migration is given. [15]

3. How Can Transnational Methodology Consider Ambivalent Socio-Spatiality?

Current research on migration is characterized by an increasing use of various qualitative methods¹². However, my special interest in transnational migration requires additional methodological concepts and techniques which consider the complex quality of the socio-spatial dimension. This is why this section explores new methodological assumptions which focus on socio-spatiality. It also aims to combine these techniques with the cultural interferences approach. Therefore, my argumentation evolves along questions such as: How do transnational methodologies consider the idea of cultural overlaps? What important claims concerning techniques and units of research do they offer? [16]

First, an overview of the criticism of nation-bounded research ways and their methodological consequences is given (WIMMER & GLICK SCHILLER, 2003). This criticism has stimulated the formation of the cosmopolitan approach (BECK & SZNAIDER, 2006) and of the relational concept of transnational space (PRIES, 2007, 2008), which are analyzed below. [17]

Andreas WIMMER and Nina GLICK SCHILLER (2003) are among the first researchers to criticize the so-called methodological nationalism. This modus of research restricts theoretical and empirical analyses to the borders of nation states. The main assumption of methodological nationalism is that social reality consists solely of nation states. Besides, it is based on the notion that nation states are founded around nation collectives with common history and traits. Within migrational research, Andreas WIMMER and Nina GLICK SCHILLER differentiate between three types of methodological nationalism. First, they argue that classic migration studies do not pay attention to nationalism and its effects

11 Very useful methodological proposals conceptualizing intercultural encounters are included in the FQS special issue "Qualitative Research on Intercultural Communication" (OTTEN et al., 2009). Please consider contributions of ANEAS and SANADIN (2009), BARINAGA (2009), BUSCH (2009) for methodology of intercultural research. For elaborated methodological concepts referring to intercultural encounters in the context of migration additionally see SHERIDAN and STORCH (2009), who refer to the use of grounded theory in migration research. Besides that, TEMPLE and KOTERBA (2009) argue for paying more attention to migrants' language practices in situations of intercultural encounters.

12 For manifold contributions please see the FQS special issue "Qualitative Migration Research in Contemporary Europe" (BORKERT, MARTÍN PÉREZ, SCOTT & De TONA, 2006).

on nation-building processes in current societies. According to them, sociology defines "the limits of society as coterminous with the nation state, rarely questioning nationalist ideology embedded in such founding assumption" (WIMMER & GLICK SCHILLER, 2003, p.579). Second, they point out that nation states are often understood as natural entities. This analytical limitation is conditioned particularly by the relationship between nation state authorities and social science. On the one hand, funding programs of social science are generally governmental and thus, nation state related topics are in the focus of the research agenda. On the other hand, teaching programs of universities remain state-dependent because generally universities cooperate with the government's education authorities. Third, they assume that social research focuses primarily on territorial boundaries of nation states. But the "territorial limitation' of power relations is a historically new phenomenon that emerged in the process of nation state establishment, whereby the latter itself was determined by cross-border power dynamics and activities. The origin of nation state formations is not rooted within geographically limited territorial entities but can be found in the cross-border transformations of imperial and colonial power (WIMMER & GLICK SCHILLER, 2003, p.581) [18]

Although this criticism does not directly refer to the idea of cultural interferences, it stresses the possibility of plural or even multiple memberships conditioned by cross-border activities of transnational migrants, families, organizations and diasporas. It forces research to acknowledge at least the possibility of a simultaneous sharing of different ethnic, national and religious belongings. To conclude, from the perspective of cultural sociology, the proposal developed by Nina GLICK SCHILLER and Andreas WIMMER can be interpreted as a statement against an equation of cultural models and the frames of nation states. Cultural drafts cannot necessarily be connected to selected nations. On the contrary, meaning patterns can be shared by different groups and, in this sense, virtually cross borders of nation states. [19]

Although the criticism of methodological nationalism is recognized in migration studies, it does not offer a detailed improvement. Ulrich BECK and Natan SZNAIDER (2006) strive to achieve exactly this progress by developing the concept of methodological cosmopolitanism. The advantages of a cosmopolitan methodology are established in three ways of argumentation: first, in the examination of philosophical origins of cosmopolitanism¹³; second, in the empirical diagnoses of world transformations, which, according to BECK and SZNAIDER, can only be described as "cosmopolitanization"¹⁴; third, in the

13 The origin of normative cosmopolitan notions is in Hellenistic philosophical teachings which include the core ideas of Stoicism and neo-Platonism. The central notion, therefore, is related to the possibility of plural memberships of social actors: "Every human being is rooted by birth in two worlds, two communities: in cosmos (that is, nature) and in the polis (that is, the city-state). Being part of the cosmos means that all men and women are equal by nature, yet part of different states organized into territorial units (polis)" (BECK & SZNAIDER, 2005, p.159). These thoughts first influenced the universal-oriented Christian dogma and later the ideas of the European Enlightenment.

14 This term describes the dynamics which are caused by "really-existing relations of [world-] interdependence" (BECK & SZNAIDER, 2006, p.9).

methodological procedure itself. Therefore, special attention is being paid to the last point. [20]

The methodological principle of cosmopolitanism refers to the ambivalence of multiple identities. It acknowledges that, under the new global conditions, individuals hold several memberships in different spheres to which they affiliate themselves with multiple ethnic, national or religious belongings. The methodological recognition of the "both/and"-principle refuses the old-fashioned "either/or"-principle of methodological nationalism, which reflects the nation-bounded perception of a social world. [21]

BECK and SZNAIDER argue that a new methodological position may help to deal with some of the current difficulties of globalization and transnational studies. One of the main research problems is a clear analytical differentiation between the global/local and national/international research levels. This problem is conditioned by the old nation bounded research perspective which determines the necessity to think in "clearly differentiated oppositions" (BECK & SZNAIDER, 2006, p.18). In contrast, the new "both/and" logic of methodological cosmopolitanism allows the structuring of the research in "multi-perspective" ways: first, by focusing on multiply-located strategies of actors and, second, by referring to multiple ways of observation. [22]

Thus, the inclusion of two perspectives—actor and observer—within the methodological assumptions forms the basis of methodological work. This new access allows simultaneous examination of similar phenomena from different analytical angles. For instance, the transnational lifestyles of migrants can be analyzed by focusing on different levels: a) the local level, observing migrants' participation in their places of living b) the national level, the research and comparison of transnational life-worlds in different nation states c) the transnational level, researching the mobility of persons, goods and ideas from one national context to another and back d) the global level, observing global changes of nation state politics caused by transnational political, economical and cultural practices of migrants. However, this methodological proposal is in the early stage of development. Consequently, there is no answer yet to the question that arises here: "How can (...) [the] politics of perspectives be made transparent and methodologically tractable?" (BECK & SZNAIDER, 2006, p.18) [23]

To sum up, the methodological strategy developed by Ulrich BECK and Natan SZNAIDER includes the idea of plurality of personal identities and social roles across nation state borders. Consequently, the cultural sociology approach can use such an access and design a picture in which individuals or groups can simultaneously share different meaning patterns regarding the same "object" or "situation." That is why the assumption that current transnational practices are guided by the both/and—rule of dealing with cultural drafts has to be in the center of cultural oriented transnational methodology. [24]

Although BECK and SZNAIDER's proposal offers the multi-perspective oriented technique which seems to gain importance for future transnational studies, the

authors' information about appropriate research units remains limited. In contrast, Ludger PRIES has developed a more suitable strategy for the selection of transnational "units of analysis" (PRIES, 2007). PRIES, who does not use the philosophical foundation for his argument, understands the "units of analysis" as analytical items about which scientific declarations are formulated. Previously, when "container" oriented methodology was taken for granted, the appropriate "units of analysis" in social sciences were restricted to the frames of nation states and were not called into question. Nowadays, this access has become more and more unacceptable. That is why PRIES uses analytical differentiation between the relational and absolutistic understanding of social space (PRIES, 1999)¹⁵. Thus, he defines transnational units of analysis as "transnational social relation[s]," which can be understood as "relatively dense and durable configurations of transnational social practices, symbols and artefacts" (PRIES, 2007, p.2). PRIES insists that absolutistic geographical categories can no longer be used as socio-spatial references (i.e., counterparts) of scientific statements. Because the quality of space can only be described as relational and discontinuous, the socio-spatial references of analysis have been transformed into pluri-locally situated topographies which are produced by transnational practices. [25]

Searching for appropriate units of analysis, PRIES suggests comparing the transnational research strategy with the research methods of other types of international studies, such as world society studies and cross-national comparison studies (see Table 1).

	Cross-national comparison	World system research	Transnational studies
Units of reference	nation-states, national societies, boundary fixed containers	macro regions, world system, entire globe	border crossing, pluri-local, societal spaces
Units of analysis	social classes, values, institutions, identity	center-periphery structures, social classes, values	biographies, families, organizations, institutions, identity
Units of measurement	individuals, households, rituals, texts, practices	flows of goods and information, organizations	individuals, households, rituals, flows of goods

Table: 1: Types of international studies (PRIES, 2007, p.7) [26]

To sum up, the peculiarity of PRIES' approach results from the analytical relationship between the unit of analysis and the unit of reference. While cross-national comparison studies directly relate units of reference to the "container-model" of nation states, the units of reference in world-society studies are

¹⁵ While the absolutistic concept of socio-spatiality assigns a geographical "container" to every social formation, the relational understanding of socio-spatiality presupposes the fluidity and inconsistency between social formations and their geographical references. Consequently, different types of social formations can hypothetically share the same geographical container; alternatively, the selected social formation can be spread over different geographic-spatial units.

restricted by macro-regions and their long-term transformations. According to PRIES, both the approaches presuppose the convergence of geographical space and social formations. To put it in other words, the social formations (be it a nation state or a core/periphery-structure) are restricted by geographical boundaries. In contrast to this "absolutistic" understanding of social space, the transnational approach uses, as mentioned above, the relational concept of socio-spatiality. Consequently, "(t)he units of reference, by definition, are considered as pluri-local and geographically dispersed, distributed and non-contiguous, but socially more or less homogeneous and coherent societal units" (PRIES, 2007, p.9). [27]

In contrast to the cosmopolitan approach, the methodological proposal of Ludger PRIES gives reasonable orientation for an appropriate design of transnational units of analysis. It can also specify the units of transnational oriented research on cultural overlaps. Judging from this position, not all kinds of dealing with cultural overlaps have to be examined but only those forms that arise in the context of cross-border activities. [28]

The overview of transnational methodologies points out the need for continuous transformations of one's research methods and techniques. In particular, three points have to be stressed in this regard. First, it is increasingly accepted in social science today that one cannot use the nationally bounded research strategies, which according to WIMMER and GLICK SCHILLER (2003), are expressed in different forms. One also has to be careful particularly in the field of diaspora studies and to avoid a homogenized perspective on this type of transnational formations. Second, one needs a methodological access to "multi-perspectively" constructed societal realities. That is why, the methodological proposal of BECK and SZNAIDER (2006) offers a new possibility to differentiate between "multiple strategies of actors" and "multiple observation ways." According to BECK and SZNAIDER, both angles have to be taken into account simultaneously. But, unfortunately the cosmopolitan approach does not give enough hints at how to realize such a multiply oriented program in research praxis. Also, no precise selection strategy of suitable research units is explored in detail. In contrast to the cosmopolitan approach, the methodological concept proposed by Ludger PRIES (2007) gives reasonable orientation for appropriate creation of transnational units of analysis. PRIES' definition of research units¹⁶ as relationships, which have their socio-spatial reference in pluri-local, non-homogeneous, "societal spaces," results from his theoretical assumptions about relational quality of socio-spatiality. [29]

The access of cultural sociology to transnational methodology can take hold of these ideas in a specific way. It suggests changing both the methods of data collection and interpretation. First, according to Ludger PRIES' (2007, p.7) definition of transnational "units of reference" as "border-crossing, pluri-local societal spaces," the collection of data has to be conducted in various localities on the basis of multi-sited research technique (MARCUS, 1995). Second, it is proposed here to use scientific hermeneutics to modify the way of interpreting

16 Here the phrase "units of research" is used as a synonym to the phrase "units of analysis."

data. It is necessary to transform this technique in accordance with the cultural overlaps approach, which is conceptually similar to BECK and SZNAIDER's methodological proposal described above (see Section 4). Third, the need for multiple research angles stressed by BECK and SZNAIDER (2006) can be understood as the need for increasing methodological reflexivity. Also, this point has to be added to cultural oriented transnational methodology by organizing the research into cross-cultural scientific teams (see Section 5). Further elaboration on these important points is given in the following pages. [30]

4. The Combination of Multi-Sited Research and Scientific Hermeneutics Enables Analyses of Ambivalent Practices

One possibility to avoid methodological nationalism and to consider multiply oriented actors' strategies is to add the idea of cultural overlaps to transnational methodology. Hence, it is proposed here to apply this idea to the method of scientific hermeneutics¹⁷. [31]

The hermeneutic sociology of knowledge¹⁸ is consistent with the cultural approach described above, because it is based on the idea that action patterns are always embedded in processes of sense-making and interpretations of meaning (HITZLER & HONER, 1997; REICHERTZ, 2004; SOEFFNER, 2004). This assumption is also the reason for the interest of scientific hermeneutics in the reconstruction of meaning patterns, which, on one hand, guide action and, on the other hand, are expressed in action. Additionally, this approach aims at studying processes of interpretation of meaning patterns, that is, the usage and acquisition of cultural drafts by actors. Although the research has to be conducted from the actor's perspective, the approach does not seek to interpret the intended meaning subjectively. Therefore, for this approach it is not important whether the meaning patterns are consciously perceived by actors or not (REICHERTZ, 2004). [32]

In general, this procedure can be applied to "all kinds of social interaction and all types of cultural phenomena" (REICHERTZ, 2004, p.290). But, the question of interest here is, how can scientific hermeneutics be opened for research on cultural overlaps under transnational conditions? First, the process of data collection has to be reorganized in accordance with the multi-sited research approach currently used in the transnational research (HENDRY, 2003; MARCUS, 1995; MAZZUCATO, 2008). Second, data analysis has to take into account possible overlaps of meaning patterns in transnational contexts. Before describing this, a brief overview of the procedure of scientific hermeneutics is considered necessary. [33]

17 The theoretical and methodological ideas of the hermeneutic sociology of knowledge are confined mainly to German-speaking sociological communities in Germany, Austria and Switzerland (REICHERTZ, 2004).

18 The terms "hermeneutic sociology of knowledge" and "scientific hermeneutics" are used interchangeably in this text.

The procedure of scientific hermeneutics includes four stages. First of all, the research team starts with data collection, which needs to be done in a mainly non-standardized way¹⁹. The aim behind this action is to avoid possible bias of research assumptions in data collection, because most researchers collect data that matches the theoretical background but does not offer new insight into social reality. In the second stage, after data collection, the research team starts analyzing the data by using the so-called sequence analysis, which begins with the selection of text passages that are important for the research question. Afterwards, every sentence and even every word of the selected passage have to be analyzed with the aim of extracting the meaning pattern within the text. During the second stage, the researcher tries to develop as many versions of potential meaning patterns of the respective text parts as possible. In the third stage, the researcher validates the appropriation of previously developed versions of knowledge patterns and rejects them if they are not reasonable. The versions that are congruent with the text structure will be selected as appropriate meaning patterns. Afterwards, this technique is applied to the whole passage and then to the entire text. In ambivalent cases, repeated data collection is recommended. In the fourth stage, the knowledge patterns, which are accepted as proven, have to be grouped into one pattern and described in the research records. This concluding configuration of meaning is accepted as the result of data analysis (REICHERTZ, 2004). [34]

It also has to be added that such analyses are carried out by researchers in groups, because the group interaction allows a more or less valid exclusion of unsuitable meaning drafts. In this context, the term "suitable" refers to the meaning pattern that reconstructs the text passage in the most appropriate way, in comparison to other formulated interpretive versions. The extensive development of different meaning drafts aims at excluding subjective prejudices from the analytical process. Apart from this, strategies of self-reflection have to be considered during the analysis. On the one hand, the researcher needs to have an inner distance to his/her own cultural and historical background and on the other, the background of the respective "life-world" has to be precisely described in the research records²⁰. [35]

The proposal presented here aims at modifying the ways of data collection of scientific hermeneutics. Therefore, data collection has to be organized in accordance with the multi-sited research technique, which suggests collecting data simultaneously in different geographic localities. I argue that the consideration of multi-sited research is consistent with the relational understanding of socio-spatiality stressed by Ludger PRIES (1999, 2008). This form of data collection allows creation of transnational units of analysis as analytical items whose spatial reference is rooted in geographically spread and pluri-locally organized spaces. Thus, multi-sited ethnography was originally

19 Data can be gathered through interviews and participant observation, and also by analyzing the content of documents and official files.

20 The proposed methodology can be applied not only to studying cultural scripts within social practices of the less institutionalized life-worlds, but also to research on formally well-organized institutional spheres of politics, economy, education, etc.

developed in anthropological research and referred to the difficulties in finding plausible reasons for the research on small and traditionally rooted groups in a contemporary, globalized world in transformation (CLIFFORD & MARCUS, 1986). Consequently, the problems of constructing a suitable research field were discussed (NADAI & MAEDER, 2005). In this context, the strategy of selecting plural localities for research work became one of the appropriate solutions for anthropological field construction (MARCUS, 1995). [36]

The multi-sited research method changes the core procedure of anthropological research deeply. First of all, multi-sited research assumes that ethnography should not focus on the description of face-to-face interactions of small groups in one locality, because such interactions take place in the "global" "emergent" context. Consequently, it aims at observing social practices that are produced and followed in different geographic locations simultaneously. Second, this method reduces the role of traditional fieldwork in anthropological research. The classic anthropological research took it for granted that researchers have to stay in their respective fields for two or more years to "dip" into the culture they are interested in. But, applying this procedure to fieldwork in plural localities would take innumerable years or even decades. The limitations of fieldwork, which consequently arise, can be solved by splitting up the research activities: for instance, the research activities at the first site can be comprehensive, and those at the second or third site restricted. Thus, such limitations depend on the research question. [37]

The construction of multi-sited fields can follow different modes or directions. Apart from the focus on the circulation of metaphors and stories, the reference to biographical narrative or to conflict is also possible (MARCUS, 1995). Especially, the focus on people's mobility is a preferable research access in transnational studies (GUPTA & FERGUSON, 1999). The multi-sited research technique widens the social scientific methodology by considering complex transnational linkages. Different "trajectories" of action, for instance, of transnational families, communities, organizations and diasporas, can be indicated by the study of social practices in different localities (LAUSER, 2005; MAZZUCATO, 2008). [38]

Apart from changing the methods of data collection, it is proposed using here a modified form of data interpretation. According to BECK and SZNAIDER's (2006) methodological access to transnational practices, one has to bear in mind that pluri-locally organized strategies of actors are guided by the so-called "both/and"-rule of social interaction. To put it in other words, actors develop routines of action which allow them to simultaneously participate in different meaning systems regarding the same "situation" without having to make a final decision of preference. This idea is even better expressed in the cultural interferences approach. Its incorporation within the procedure of scientific hermeneutics improves the ways of data interpretation. As described above, the aim of scientific hermeneutics consists in specifying one extensive meaning pattern which is used by respective groups of actors. Thus, meaning patterns or knowledge patterns are understood as frameworks which guide processes of understanding or interpretation in the respective social contexts (REICHERTZ, 2004). Using the

access of the cultural interference approach, the methodological procedure of scientific hermeneutics is sought to be changed here by producing not one singular knowledge pattern as an analytical result but by extracting a variety of meaning patterns. This modification refers to the assumption that in situations of "intercultural" contact, overlaps of meaning patterns are probable. Subsequently, the overflow of meaning becomes a decisive attribute of this setting. Faced with an overlap of meaning patterns, actors and collectives are confronted with interruption in action routines; however, action can only be continued in the case of successful sense-making. In other words, the reproduction of action is possible only when actors manage to reduce contingency. [39]

The aim of this interpretation procedure consists not only in the extraction of a variety of meaning patterns regarding the same "object" or "situation" but also in describing actors' applications of respective cultural drafts. As described above (Section 2), one can differentiate between at least three ways of dealing with contingency caused by cultural overlaps. The first option refers to the possibility of a fusion of meaning patterns and is, therefore, described in the creolization approach. The second option refers to the possibility of re-defining the usage criteria of the cultural drafts. Finally, the third option, which is theoretically specified in BHABHA's hybridity approach, refers to the stabilization of insecurities regarding the appropriate application of meaning patterns. Consequently, the contribution of scientific hermeneutics to the study of transnational migration consists in researching on ways that actors deal with various meaning patterns regarding the same "object" or "situation"²¹. In other words, one has to focus on these questions: In which ways do actors apply different meaning patterns? What social practices result from situations of cultural interferences? [40]

5. Organized Reflexivity: Cross-Cultural Scientific Teams Increase the Degree of Skepticism

Apart from modifying the methods of data collection and interpretation, the proposed methodology has to take into account the reflexive turn within current sociological and anthropological research (CLIFFORD, 1988). That is why this section focuses on suitable forms of research organization. According to the procedure of scientific hermeneutics, one of the usual ways to increase reflexivity of previous individual and scientific knowledge is to conduct empirical research by a *group of scientists*. Mutual questioning among the members of the scientific team enables specification and subsequent avoidance of previous convictions. In the methodological strategy proposed here, the reflexivity will rise if transnational research is conducted by cross-cultural and interdisciplinary scientific teams. Thus, the term "cross-cultural" refers to the ways scientists are socialized and not to their national or ethnic status. These ways do not aim at re-essentializing research strategies but at enabling mutual control of participants. [41]

²¹ It is actors and not only researchers who perceive the similarity of situations, to which different meaning patterns are applied.

At the same time, this form of research organization deals with the "representation problem," which is primarily a topic of discussion in current anthropology (CLIFFORD, 1988; CLIFFORD & MARCUS, 1986). This claim is rooted in anthropological self-reflection of "representation" ways of "foreign" cultures by "western" scientists. Therefore, the discussion of "crisis of representation" reveals central dichotomies of anthropological perspective as divisions between "us" and "them" and their inherent interest in the "disclosure" of "sameness" and "otherness," which are rooted in their colonial past (ARGYROU, 2002). However, this debate thwarted the anthropological ambition to produce universal knowledge, and instead encouraged the aspiration for new modes of representation. Two new strategies are to be named which aim at re-negotiating the dialectics between the researcher and his or her counterpart. The first, the so-called "dialogic methodology," tries to overcome the distinction between the ethnographer and the "native." That is why, the transcriptions of participant's observations and interviews, which are marginally loaded with scientific comments, are the result of data collection (DWYER, 1982). The second, the so-called "collaborative methodology" aims at including the "native position" within anthropological text and equalizes it with the researcher's position. While the "native" interviewer produces the text by speaking, the ethnographer records it with a few scientific comments (CRAPANZANO, 1980). In a similar way Norbert SCHRÖER suggests to include a "culture-native" co-interpreter within the process of data interpretation (SCHRÖER, 2009). Both methodological notions emphasize, on the one hand, the need to avoid the over-generalization of research results and, on the other, the problems of overall questioning of the data. "Local voices" are the final results of the research, which is based on "dialogic" and "collaborative" methodology (SMITH, 1989). These examples point towards the aim of the proposal presented here, which is to organize transnational research into cross-cultural and interdisciplinary teams. First of all, this research form intends to increase mutual questioning in the process of data interpretation. Second, it enables to restrict the production of "universal knowledge" by incorporating the "Other" within the scientific context. Third, it enables to limit the problem of positionality within migration research, which arises because of a continuous pressure to define the insider/outsider relationship between the researcher and the group of interest (GANGA & SCOTT, 2006; DE TONA, 2006). This organized group reflection can disclose silent gaps and power imbalances within the research process and stimulate debates concerning the researcher's "positionality in relation to his or her (...) subjectivity" (SHERIDAN & STORCH, 2009, p.32). [42]

At the same time, one has to acknowledge that the new modes of representation of "Other" are also the result of scientific communication. That is why, self-reflection of social and anthropological research continues to be unavoidable. Thus, the "problem of representation" cannot be solved either the "modernist" way by aiming at a "better" representation, or the poststructuralist way by sacrificing authorship²². Instead, one can only be aware of it and at least try to increase the extent of reflexivity. [43]

22 This was proposed by Jacques DERRIDA (1976), who sometimes refused authorship.

6. Conclusion: Core Steps for a Flexible Methodology

What advantages does the theoretical basis of cultural sociology offer for designing a transnational methodology? First, it enables a specific view on transnational formations and describes them as entities which are developed from a confrontation of various cultural drafts²³. Because the cultural access presupposes a specific relationship between "culture" and "agency," it offers a specific description of transnational practices. [44]

The research based on this methodology does not regard transnational practices as a result of cross-border circulations of people, commodities and ideas. Instead, it analyzes social trajectories and dynamics of cross-border circulations of people, commodities and ideas as a consequence of actors' dealings with the interferences of knowledge orders. From this point of view, transnational social configurations are, under specific conditions, the result of continuous negotiations between, and transformation of, diverse cultural patterns. Consequently, in contrast to a pure description of different kinds of transnational practices, the proposed methodology provides explanatory advantages by disclosing different cultural schemes that actors are confronted with and by shedding light on the ways actors manage cultural ambivalence. [45]

To sum up, the cultural oriented methodological strategy opens up new vistas for research on transnational formations and practices. It aims at widening the procedures of scientific hermeneutics in an appropriate way. First, the data collection has to be organized in such a way as to suit multi-sited ethnography. This strategy enables one to avoid methodological nationalism, to consider the relational quality of transnational settings and to design the transnational units of analysis. Second, the interpretation procedure of the scientific hermeneutics, described above, is proposed to be applied with one change: In accordance with the cultural overlaps approach, the procedure can be terminated with the formulation of not one, but several meaning patterns. This change permits the study of actors' strategies which are oriented to the "both/and" rule of social interaction described by BECK and SZNAIDER (2006). Third, to increase the extent of reflexivity, reorganization of research work into cross-cultural and interdisciplinary-organized scientific teams is suggested. This change would increase the probability of observing complex cultural dynamics and their effects on cross-border social practices. [46]

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²³ It is not argued here that all transnational formations are confronted with cultural overlaps; instead, it is stressed that a confrontation with cultural plurality is more likely within transnational frames.

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