

**TRANSNATIONALISM, HOME AND IDENTITY: PERSONAL ESSAYS**

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Through a collection of personal essays, this dissertation examines transnationalism as a contemporary mode of migration. The essays draw from my personal and professional experiences, as well as academic and literary sources, to create a collection that addresses significant aspects of the transnational experience, such as issues of identity, language, space/place and family, and explores the ways in which transnationalism as a postmodern phenomenon has transformed the perspective on those categories.

The essay “Identifying Transnationalism and Transnational Identity,” introduces the problem of identity for transnationals, both in the literature and in my personal life. The essay also examines how transnationals negotiate national/ethnic and cultural identity. “Essay as Inquiry” is a discussion on the research method and a rationale for using the essay as a mode of inquiry when studying transnationalism. “International Students and Identity” suggests that the concept of transnationalism could be utilized to better illustrate and understand the experiences of international students in the United States. “Transnationalism and the Concept of Home” discusses the ways in which transnationals conceptualize space/place. In “Translating the Translator: Language, Poetry and Identity,” the author draws from her experiences as a poetry translator to investigate issues of language and identity. Translation becomes a metaphor for understanding my own existence across two cultures. “Transnational Families” focuses on the changing family dynamics and the intra-generational relationships among transnational family

members. The final essay, “Global Souls: Pico Iyer, Gogol Bordello and the Art of Academic Travel,” discusses transnationalism as a source of global worldview and creative power.

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за мама и тато



## **THIS IS WHERE I LIVE**

I used to be from letters and phone calls.  
Now I am mostly from keyboards,  
missed weddings,  
green customs declaration forms.

I am a pendulum  
swinging in 6-hour intervals.  
On my two-dial watch  
my future is my past is my future again

Mine is the language of postcards and luggage tags,  
of apple pies and roasted pepper spreads.

I live on the Avenue of Mispronunciation.  
I am Huckleberry Finn,  
written in Cyrillic.

Natasha Garrett, 2007

## **1.0. IDENTIFYING TRANSNATIONALISM AND TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITY**

My interest in transnationalism developed as I was thinking, as I often do, about my own life as a Macedonian living in the United States. Even after close to two decades of living abroad, the connection to my home country is very strong, both in terms of visiting and maintaining contact with people there, as well as the level of emotional attachment.

While I consider myself to be firmly established in the United States, complete with a husband, child, citizenship, a house, professional life and a circle of friends, I have occasional moments, (the 3 a.m. voices, as a friend calls them) when I come to a distressing realization that I will likely never be completely at home here. At the same time, my long physical absence from Macedonia erodes my confidence that I would fully fit in there, should I decide to move back. I never thought of myself as a transnational, nor have I ever heard another migrant talk of transnationalism. However, a closer reading of the academic literature on transnationalism, as well as some recent poetry and fiction on modern migration, began to offer a context within which to think about questions of belonging and identity for contemporary migrants in the globalized world.

Rather than being only an academic category, transnationalism is an experience that is a part of the daily existence of a large group of people that live outside their home country. Even when the move is voluntary, it tends to complicate the relationships these migrants have with their country of origin and settlement; the experience changes profoundly the way migrants think about themselves, their family and their country. Through a collection of personal essays, I will address significant aspects of the

transnational experience, such as issues of identity, language, space and place, and family, and discuss the ways in which transnationalism as a postmodern phenomenon has transformed the perspective on those categories. I will also use transnationalism as a concept to help analyze the experiences of international students in the US. Even though transnational students are often only temporary migrants, their experiences of living abroad are often transnational in nature.

Choosing the essay as a mode of inquiry addresses the need for focusing on lives of the actual migrants, which transnational literature somewhat neglects (Voigt-Graf, 2004). To use my own experience as a former international student, a current international student advisor, and a person who lives a transnational life, is not meant to be an exercise in self-indulgence, though the motives may be somewhat self-serving. The questions I am struggling with in my professional and personal life are ones that are shared by many other transnational migrants: how does life across two (or more) countries, languages and cultures shape one's identity? The essay offers a particular, situated knowledge on a subject that can benefit from fewer generalizations (Vertovec, 1999). The essay can capture the nuances and the richness of the transnational experience, while offering a broader commentary on the contemporary immigration practices and their implications in politics and culture.

### **1.1. DEFINING TRANSNATIONALISM**

Traditional definitions of immigration—migration for settlement—provide a limited picture of the processes and experiences that contemporary migrants engage in.

Historically, elements of impermanence have been frequently present in migration practices; Feist (2000) outlines the processes of “back migration,” “circular migration,” “return migration,” and “transient migration,” as examples of impermanent migration. The concept of “guest worker” has also been used for certain economic migrants. Starting with the early nineties, migration literature began including transnational migration and transnationalism as new ways of understanding contemporary migration practices.

The term transnationalism was first used by Randolph S. Bourne in his 1916 article “Transnational America,” in which he emphasized the importance of the American immigrants to maintain their culture. Connor (1967) used the term in his political science piece: “Self-Determination: The New Phase.” However, the term began to be used with an increased frequency in the 1990s, and specifically to describe new trends in immigration patterns. Gustavo Cano’s (2005) examination of the *Social Science Abstract Database* indicated that almost two-thirds of the articles that mention “transnationalism” or “transnational” were published between 1998 and 2003. This increase in the term usage coincides with the increased inquiry into the phenomenon of globalization (Vertovec, 2007). Stiglitz (2002) defines globalization as follows:

Fundamentally, it is the closer integration of the countries and peoples of the world which has been brought about by the enormous reduction of costs of transportation and communication, and the breaking down of artificial barriers to the flows of goods, services, capital, knowledge, and (to a lesser extent) people across borders. (p.9)

The relative ease of communication and travel, allowed by the modern technological advances, propelled the era of globalization and influenced the way

migrants lived. Migrants became increasingly more able to travel to their home country, communicate frequently with people back home, or engage in cultural and business ventures, while at the same time integrating into the host society. The possibility of living across two (or more) countries, languages and cultures changes the way new migrants position themselves in relation to their home and host country, and the way they understand the concepts of home, language, family and identity. The re-conceptualization of these categories in the context of globalization will be the focus of my essay collection.

The anthropological work of Nina Glick Schiller and her colleagues was critical in establishing the concept of transnationalism as a valid theoretical contribution to the study of immigration. In “From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration,” Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc (1995) challenge the traditional understanding of migration as permanent relocation from one country to another, a process that was assumed always culminated in full assimilation. The authors suggest that a better way of understanding migration in the context of globalization is by reconceptualizing it as transnational migration, which they define as: “process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (p.48), a definition that is widely used in the literature on transnationalism. Transnational migrants are people who are active participants in the social and cultural lives of the host country, the authors emphasize, while “at the same time, they are engaged elsewhere in the sense that they maintain connections, build institutions, conduct transactions, and influence local and national events in the countries from which they emigrated” (p.48).

As to the position of transnationalism within migration studies, Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2003) argue that assimilation and acculturation, as two dominant perspectives of migration theory, are not sufficient to capture and explain the range of migrant experiences and their impact on the social, political and cultural lives of the migrants. Portes (2001) outlines the guiding principles that distinguish transnationalism as a separate field: “establishing that the phenomenon in question actually exists; delimiting its scope and distinguishing it from related phenomena; describing its principal types; and identifying the necessary conditions for its emergence and growth” (p.181). Portes et al (1999) define transnationalism as “occupations and activities that require regular and sustained social contact over time across national borders for their implementation” (p.181). The intensity and regularity of contact with the home country differentiates this from other types of impermanent migration.

While technological advances in communication and travel contribute greatly to the maintenance of transnational ties (Glick Schiller, 1995; Vertovec, 2001), Vertovec (2001) warns against ascribing technology the role of sole creator of the phenomenon of transnationalism: “Technological determinism is not a very strong argument. We need to understand the ways in which technology has combined with and perhaps facilitated or enhanced, rather than caused, transnational networks” (p.577). There has always been some sort of communication between the host and the home country, whether through written correspondence or via other compatriots who were traveling. Some critics of transnationalism go as far as to say that modern technology plays a minor part in today’s transnational connections: “earlier, a simple letter knitted together transoceanic migration networks with remarkable effectiveness” (Waldinger & Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 1188).

It may be true that in the past, communication did not cease between the immigrants and their families back home. However, it is important to emphasize the “regular and sustained” cross-national contact that differentiates transnationalism from other types of migration patterns. Portes (2001) draws attention to the fact that “transnational activities could never have acquired the density, real-time character, and flexibility made possible by today’s technologies” (p.188). The speed, as well as the *relative* availability and affordability of communication technologies allows for individuals to maintain meaningful relationships with their home countries. Regardless of how advanced technology gets, it can never replace face-to-face contact. Being physically present for major events, for example, promotes what Urry (2003) calls “meetingness” or a personal contact that is necessary in order to develop mutual trust and commitment. O’Flaherty et al. (2007) argue that personal visits play a significant role in shaping migrants’ identities (p. 820), a topic I will address later.

I chose to use the term transnationalism in my study, as opposed to diaspora, as diaspora is often used synonymously with transnational community, and much like transnationalism, is somewhat overused or used inadequately (Vertovec, 1999). Several other authors address this problem of the frequent mislabeling transnational communities as diaspora. Levitt (2001) defines diaspora as “groups who were forcibly expelled from their homelands and who remain socially marginal in societies that received them as they waited to return. Classic examples of this are Jews, Greek and Armenians” (p.202). She goes on to clarify that a transnational community may become a diaspora “out of real or imagined connections between migrants form a particular homeland who are scattered throughout the world. If a fiction of congregation takes hold, then a diaspora emerges”

(p.203). Appadurai and Breckenridge (1989) echo the sentiment, when they write that “diasporas always leave a trail of collective memory about another place and time, and create new maps of desire and of attachment” (p.i).

Faist (2000) argues that the term diaspora is appropriate only if the group has suffered a traumatic experience. Diaspora can become a transnational community only if they develop an attachment to the host country. Otherwise, Faist argues, the group is in exile (p.197). The term continues to be used more broadly (Tololyan, 1996). Chaliand and Rageau (1995, p.xii) note that when the term diaspora is applied to groups other than the Jews, it is problematic to distinguish between migration and a diaspora.

In an effort to narrow down the definition of transnationalism, Guarnizo and Smith (1998) distinguish between “transnationalism from above” and “transnationalism from below.” The former refers to cross-border activities conducted by governments and corporations, while the latter encompasses activities of immigrants and grassroots entrepreneurs. Transnationalism from below is often viewed as a subversive, liberating force (Appadurai, 1990; Bhabba, 1990; Kearney, 1991), as opposed to the corrupt oppressive transnationalism from above; however, the authors warn against this domination/resistance dichotomy. Portes (2001) argues that not all border-crossing activities are transnational. Some of them, such as diplomatic activities, cultural exchanges among institutions or global corporation activities are simply international or multinational in nature. Portes reserves the label “transnational” for activities of individual immigrants, i.e. transnationalists “from below.” That is the level of transnationalism I will be investigating in my collection of essays.



## 1.2. TRANSNATIONALISM AND IDENTITY

I know a fair number of foreign-born people living in Pittsburgh and other US cities, and at times we go into discussions on how we ended up living in the States. Interestingly, it always seems to be a matter of circumstance rather than a planned choice; more a matter of how than why, perhaps because most of us never planned to stay here for good, or won't admit to it, even though I imagine most of us will. Phrases often heard during those conversations: how long, status, visa, green card, attorney, citizenship test. We speak in code: H1B, I-20. Phrases absent from the discussions, even from the very late, wine-tinged ones: transnationalism, transnational.

Transnationalism, while generally absent from the vocabularies of transnational migrants, is alive and well in the research literature, as a way of introducing new language in immigration studies. If the language of the transnationals does not coincide with the literature that studies them, how do they understand, describe and identify themselves? Is there such a thing as a transnational identity? Sanou (2006) argues that the socio-political changes of the world drive the need for revision of the traditional understanding of identity: "postcolonial transnationalism focuses on movements of ideas about the self, the other, culture and identity in a new world situation marked by fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture and politics" (p.145). A world that allows for a transnational life also requires a new understanding of one's place in it.

Nobody I know has ever called themselves a transnational. I don't use the term unless I am discussing my dissertation topic, and I am not fond of being called an immigrant, either. Only Americans, British, Canadian, Australian and Japanese are

expatriates when they live abroad; everyone else is an immigrant. Expatriate and immigrant are terms with a lot of class baggage: “An immigrant is an unwanted job-stealer, while an expat is a foreigner who could be leaving any day now. An immigrant is on a desperate search for a better life. An expat is on an adventure” (Kureth, 2007, para 5). While “expatriate” may evoke a certain worldliness—Hemingway and his writer friends sipping wine by the Seine—and better luggage, most of today’s expatriates are what Kureth calls economic migrants, i.e. people who live outside their home country because they or the company they work for are interested in what is phrased as “expanding business opportunities,” or making more money. Madison (2006) argues that some people’s plans to move are not economically driven: “Moving to a foreign place and international travel are archetypal situations for protecting and expressing the need for freedom and independence“(p. 247). People get motivated to travel or live abroad for reasons other than money. I suppose it would all depend on how one defines “better life.”

Foreigner is another term that can swing unpredictably towards the unknown (undesirable) or the exotic (attractive): foreign cars are considered to be a good thing; foreign neighbors—perhaps.

Any discussion of identity requires a Sisyphean effort. The term has come to mean too many things, from how we see ourselves, how we are seen by others, and what groups we belong to or feel attachment to. It can indicate one’s country of origin or nationality (Polish), ethnicity (Arab), or a group membership (I belong to a Facebook group “Europeans in Pittsburgh”). As Brubaker and Cooper put it more eloquently: “Conceptualizing all affinities and affiliations, all forms of belonging, all experiences of commonality, connectedness and cohesion, all self-understandings and self-

identifications in the idiom of ‘identity’ saddles us with a blunt, flat, undifferentiated vocabulary” (p. 2). As a concept, transnationalism by itself is not without problems, because it has been used to describe too wide a range of immigration activity, including tourism (Vertovec, 2001, p. 576). Similarly, identity has been somewhat overused by psychologists and sociologists alike to include various constructions of individual sense of self as well as group associations. When we talk about identity in the context of transnationalism, however, the discussion gravitates towards national or ethnic identity.

The refrain of the literature of globalization is that the world is experiencing unlimited movement of information and people across the globe. International travel is not always easy. To apply for a US visa, I had to stand numerous times in a 100-yard long line in front of a gated American consulate at 6 a.m., led through a metal detector, have the content of my purse emptied out, led to the smallest waiting room imaginable, in which I wait, along with forty other people, for an interview conducted through a glass partition. Due to technological advances and the relative ease of travel, geographical locations are no longer limiting in terms of people’s professional and personal lives. This mobility has caused national boundaries to be losing their past significance, if not gradually dissolving. Along the same lines, national identity is becoming a thing of the past, as individuals are adopting cross-national and multicultural identities. The reality for most people is perhaps a bit more complicated. I can’t imagine thinking of myself as anything but a Macedonian, regardless of where I live or how often I visit my home country. Despite these processes of “unification,” nationalism and ethnic conflict are still an unfortunate part of the current reality. Europe is a fascinating case from a national identity perspective. On one hand, the European Union is promoting strengthening of the

political, economic and cultural ties among the member states; on the other hand, not every country on the continent can become a part of the Union, and some of the member states are concerned that such unification will compromise their national identity and cultural uniqueness. Some Eastern European countries are in an even more delicate position. For example, the Republic of Macedonia, my home country, having relatively recently gained independence, is caught between maintaining its own identity while fulfilling the demands of the European Union for potential EU membership. Glick Schiller et al. (1995) write: “The paradox of our times, and one that must be central to our understanding of the identities and dilemmas of current day immigrants is that the ‘age of transnationalism’ is a time of continuing and even heightened nation-state building processes”(p. 62).

Johann Gottfried Herder in the late 1700s conceptualized the nation as a group of people born into the same *volk*, which shares linguistic and cultural connections, a common past, heritage and a territory—*volk-land* (Gledhill, 2005, p.357). Herder’s view of the nation as an extended family, and the insistence on blood and cultural ties are considered to be pointing at the origins of ethnic nationalism, especially since his *volk* theory combines the ethnic and the political and supports the strengthening of *volkstaats*, or nation-states. For some countries, such as France, the nation has a political connotation, while for many Eastern and Central European countries, the nation carries a strong ethnic flavor.

Arts and Halman (2005) question the idea of nation as a legitimate group: “the identification and attachment a person feels towards his or her nation are based on the social and cultural representations he or she has formed of the nation,” because “the

nation is an imagined political community”(p.74). Most nations do not have their own nation-states: there are about 200 independent states and about 8,000 linguistically – defined nations (Arts & Halman, 2005, p.73). Benhabib (2003) agrees that national identity can not be sharply defined:

defining the identity of a sovereign nation is itself a process of fluid, open and conscious public debate: the lines separating ‘we’ and ‘you,’ ‘us’ and ‘them,’ more often than not rest on unexamined prejudices, ancient battles, historical injustices, and sheer administrative fiat. (p.177)

I have a friend—we’ll call him Martin-- who was born in Macedonia at the time when the country was a part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Being a little older than the rest of the Macedonians with whom we socialize here in Pittsburgh, he grew up in a time when the attachment to Yugoslavia as one’s home country was emphasized over a strong sense of Macedonian identity. For example, Serbian was the official language in federal politics and the unofficial language on the three public TV channels, the only channels available. One night, as many other nights, our conversation turned to politics, and national identity. To everyone’s surprise, Martin was hesitant to say that he was Macedonian. Having grown up in Macedonia, being married to a Serbian woman, and speaking Serbian at home, one can understand why he may still think of himself as a Yugoslavian rather than a Macedonian, even though Yugoslavia no longer exists.

I caught up the tail end of Yugoslavia, so to speak—Yugoslavia’s decades-long President, Josip Broz Tito, died on my sixth birthday—so naturally it was easier for my generation to embrace the Macedonian identity. As Brubaker and Cooper (2000) write:

“How one identifies oneself—and how one is identified by others—may vary greatly from context to context: self- and other-identification are fundamentally situational and contextual” (p.14). Martin’s circumstances and context for his national identity are different from mine, much like my context for identifying him is different. My logic goes: Martin was born in Macedonia, grew up there, was raised by Macedonian parents, hence, no dilemma, he is a Macedonian. Apparently, Martin’s logic is different from mine.

The concept of fluid identity is to be approached with caution. The strong feelings of attachment to one’s nation, however imagined, are anything but fictional. As Canagarajah (2004) asks:

should we abandon group identities because they are fluid and hybrid? However they are formed, groups and identities are socially real. Some would go further to argue that while group identities may be imagined, they do not totally lack basis in objective constructs like language, history and territory. (p. 142-143)

The complexity of conceptualizing transnational identity, according to Vertovec (2007), comes from the fact that people normally form their identity based on a common place of origin and culture—i.e. a particular space, as in home country. Transnationalism, on the other hand, intrinsically embraces more than one place. In a sense, “transnationalism and identity are concepts that inherently call for juxtaposition” (p.573). Place and space emerge as frequent themes when discussing transnational identity; rather than a physical, geographical place, transmigrants create a *transnational space* out of their social relations. (Voigt-Graf, 2004) This network of social relations serves as a basis

for creating “personal social fields that stretch across boundaries” (Nowicka, p.70, 2007). However, as As Dirlik (2002) points out:

The term “transnationalism itself derives its meaning from the continued existence of nations, which is built into its semic structure. The notion of “deterritorialization” ignores that even transnationals live in places (though they may move from one place to another); and what they understand as transnationality (if they, in contrast to scholars, indeed understand their situation as such) or their cultural self-identification may be impossible to grasp without reference to the particular places they inhabit and particular trajectories of “transnationality.” (p. 228)

The United States’ transition from a melting pot into a multicultural society has changed how immigrants identify themselves. With the lack of actual communication with it, the connection with the country of origin can turn into a sentiment (Glick Schiller et al. 1995, p.52), which could be particularly visible with second-generation immigrants.

One needs to keep in mind that immigration processes are not theoretical concepts happening in a vacuum; they are enacted by real people with rich life experiences. If we speak of transnationalism as “the experience of tension, of living bi-nationally, of being in-between” (England et al., 2003, p.114), it’s important to know and remember that it can be a challenging position to be in. Not fully belonging to one place and one community risks not belonging anywhere. The literature talks about the number of trips home, the amount of remittance sent to the families, or immigration status. Future research could focus on the second generation—the children of transnationals—and the families that are left behind in the home countries, whose lives also change as a result of

their children or other close relatives living abroad. The voluntary aspect of immigration sometimes makes it more difficult to fully grasp the challenges that accompany it: “The assumption seems to be that *choosing to leave* makes the migration less evocative, less distressing, less interesting, and in fact less meaningful” (Madison, 2006, p.329). It is not so. Children often complicate things; my two-year old boy is currently navigating between English and Macedonian words, between peanut-butter sandwiches and roasted pepper spread. Just giving him a name that both sets of grandparents can pronounce was an exercise in cultural adaptation. However, some very powerful experiences are hidden among the challenges; it is fascinating to see the Macedonian in him and the American in him. We both wonder how Oliver will see himself in the years to come.



## 2.0. ESSAY AS INQUIRY

What do high-tech refrigerator manufacturers and the philosopher W.T. Adorno have in common? They are both proponents of marriage between brains and beauty. A magazine advertising for a refrigerator from a few years ago showed a young couple, possibly newlyweds, standing in a brand-new kitchen featuring a stylish stainless-steel refrigerator. The one opened fridge door revealed a built-in wine cooler, vegetable crispers, a water filtration system, and ice dispenser; I wouldn't be surprised if the fridge made its own wine and grew the carrots—organically--in the bottom drawer. Despite all the details and many functions, the appliance still maintained its streamlined look. The young couple in the photo are holding hands and grinning. The man is a shortish, bespectacled, nerdy-looking type in a lab coat; his new wife is an attractive, statuesque woman in high heels. The caption for the ad goes: where brains marry beauty. (I had seen similar ads for this company that get playful with the man/brains, woman/beauty stereotype, so I didn't find this one terribly offensive).

In his classic "Essay as form," Adorno (1984) argues that writers and readers generally take one of the two conventional approaches when dealing with a subject matter: "technician or dreamer, those are the alternatives"(p.152). The former categorizes and organizes without analyzing; the latter overinterprets. We associate the "technicians" with the hard sciences: numbers, formulas and hypotheses to be proven in a predictable order of events. Then there are "the dreamers," the types who don't think twice about reading *Waiting for Godot* while lying on a Caribbean beach, and gladly write a fifty-page paper on the meaning of a single passage in *Paradise Lost*. There is a danger of

literary extremism in either position: “Once one lets oneself be terrorized by the prohibition of going beyond the intended meaning of a certain text, one becomes the dupe of the false intentionality that men and things harbor of themselves”(Adorno, 1984, p.152). Of course, the world is wide enough for both the scientist and the artist. I am willing to sit next to that *Godot* fan on a long flight, but I’m counting on the pilot to be one of those technician types who insist on precision and predictability. Can one be both a technician and a dreamer, creating pieces of work, (like written texts or refrigerators), which embrace both substance and beauty? Moreover, can beauty and substance, science and art, form and function, exist independently from each other?

I will never forget one flight across the Atlantic, when I was woken from my nap by the captain’s voice urging the passengers to look out of the right side of the plane. BI can’t help imagining worst-case scenarios when flying; I panicked, expecting to see one of the engines on fire, as if the captain would advertise a pending disaster via the PA system. I was surprised by the most majestic view of Greenland. For that pilot, as well as for the essay writer or reader, form and function do not cancel each other out; they coexist.

The essay has long suffered, some may say enjoyed, an ambiguous status between non-fiction and literature. Most essays are classified as non-fiction in a sense that, unless the author says otherwise, the understanding is that the people in the essay do exist and the events did happen: “From its inception with Montaigne, the essay purports to disclose the reflections of an actual person in response to actual events or to the reflections and beliefs of other people” (Spellmeyer, 1989, p.256). This classification may be practical in the library, where non-fiction lives on separate shelves; however, a good essay, like any

good non-fiction, is a piece of literature. Consider Truman Capote's (1966) *In Cold Blood*. Capote was intrigued by the three hundred-word article in the *New York Times* on the slaying of the Clutter family in Holcomb, Kansas, and headed for Kansas to further investigate the story. He left New York City a reporter and returned a novelist. His story of the crime, complete with rich depiction of the small town, psychological portrayals of the killers, and a level of emotional immediacy, redefined journalism and officialized the existence of non-fictional novel.

The essay's bond with literature is in form as well as in spirit. An essay freely borrows literary techniques, such as storytelling or digression:

The essayist must be a good storyteller. This is a point rarely made, perhaps because of the classifying urge to keep the two genres neatly fenced off. True, the essayist happily violates the number-one rule of short story workshops: "Show, don't tell"; the glory of the essayist is to tell, once and for all, everything he or she thinks, knows and understands. (Lopate, 1994, p.xxxviii)

Telling or retelling a story is not the ultimate goal of the essay; the essayist uses the story as an instrument in order to illustrate a point. Writing about my flight above Greenland, for example, helps me explain, to myself and my readers, how I understand the interaction between form and function. Good storytelling also injects the essay with vibrancy and liveliness, to maintain the reader's engagement with the text.

The essay relies upon digression as a literary technique and demonstrates a high tolerance for fragmentation of structure and lack of chronology. This should not be interpreted as a lack of discipline; it is a reflection on the essay's worldview: "It thinks in fragments just as reality is fragmented and gains its unity only by moving through the

fissures, rather than by smoothing them over “ (Adorno, 1984, p.164). The essay resists the scientific approach of organizing the universe into a coherent, harmonious unit. As humanities, and everyday experience, teach us, life is rarely linear. Minor events end up changing our lives forever, while what we think is significant at the time (one’s high school crush, for example) can fade away in its importance. The essay takes a democratic approach to its themes, and treats them in relation to one another, rather than hierarchically, “it co-ordinates elements, rather than subordinating them; and only the essence of its content, not the manner of its presentation, is commensurable with logical criteria” (Adorno, 1984, p. 170). The essay does not mistake chronology and compulsive organization with logic: “The digression must wander off the point only to fulfill it” (Lopate, 1994, p.xli). Meandering among several minor themes, the essayist creates a rich context in which to develop his or her main theme.

Some of the choppiness typical of the essay comes from its experimental nature. To essay, after all, means to try out, to test, to experiment. The essay serves to open up the topic for discussion, to tinker with it, to try ideas out. Such approach asks of the essay writer a willingness to speculate and take risks. Lopate (1994) writes: “There is something heroic in the essayist’s gesture of striking out toward the unknown, not only without a map but without certainty that there is anything worthy to be found” (p.xlii). The experimental elements give the essay the opportunity to open itself up to possibilities, much like in science different hypotheses need to be tried and tested. Think of the essay as a literary equivalent of a scientific laboratory, with the difference that the experiment *is* the product. As Good (1988) writes: “the essay aims, in other words, to preserve something of the *process* of thinking, whereas a systematic thought presents a

fully finished and structured product” (p.20). Seeing the metaphorical dirty Petri dishes is part of the point of the essay, not just backstage preparation.

There are many ways to study transnationalism, based on what aspect of the phenomenon one is to investigate. The subject matter resonates with me because of my background and personal experiences; the same could be said about the method. As someone who has studied literature for many years, I naturally gravitated towards a method that allows for strong literary elements in its epistemological and aesthetic approach. More importantly, I was looking for a method that is compatible to the subject I am researching. As Guarnizo and Smith (1988) write:

Positivist taxonomies can lead to erroneous conceptualization of transnationalism is a set of “things” that can be readily “measured” such that a person or group may be conceived as being “more” or “less transnational.” Transnationalism is neither a thing nor a continuum of events that can be easily quantified. (p.16)

The highly individual, almost intimate nature of the experience needs a way of inquiry that can capture the nuances of a transnational life. I am organizing the essays around topics such as place, home, language, identity, family, and culture, situated in the context of transnationalism.

The first time I consciously addressed it was when, after giving a brief presentation on my potential topic, I was asked what my intended audience for the study would be. “The *New Yorker* readers, I hope,” was my answer. A regular subscription to a weekly magazine is not a prerequisite for writing a dissertation as an essay collection. Working somewhat backwards, I began considering how the essay can work with the theme of transnationalism. The reason why I chose transnationalism in the first place was

obviously because of my own transnational existence. I've been living in the United States for fifteen years, yet I still refer to my country of birth, Macedonia, as my home. I thought that being a transnational could provide my work with authenticity and insight that may not be available for someone who does not have a similar experience.

The essay not only allows for a strong presence of the writer; it thrives on it. A discussion about essays often brings up memories of college composition courses, where students, myself included, were taught to refrain from using the pronoun "I" or to use personal opinion in our papers, while writing on such complex topics as affirmative action or gun control. The students then are forced to hide behind what Recchio (1989) calls a "mask of objectivity" (p.273) and pretend for page after page that there is no human being behind the piece of writing. The passive mode is the standard in composition courses: It is widely believed, assumptions can be made, it is unacceptable...and so on. But then again, these are not personal essays.

If the essay is to be used in academia, it is relevant to talk about what kind of knowledge the form claims. Primarily, the essay's knowledge claim is the one of the personal experience of the author. Personal experience can be understood, on a most basic level, as events in the author's life that have some relation or significance in relation to the essay's main topic. The essay is thus different from autobiography in its selectiveness as to which autobiographical episodes it uses; it does not have the autobiography's chronological linearity and inclusion. Essay writers are at liberty to use episodes of their lives as much or as little, and in whatever order, depending on what they deem pertinent to the subject at hand. The personal experience inclusion may sound like a self-indulgent endeavor, with the author's experience on display to show off or impress.

Why would the reader care? One can listen to fishermen's stories for only so long; bragging is never attractive. In the essay, however, the direction is outward, from the individual towards the universal. The essayist starts from one particular event and develops it to give it a collective dimension: "the trick is to realize that one is not important except insofar as one's example can serve to elucidate a more widespread human trait and make readers feel a little less lonely and freakish" (Lopate, 1994, p.xxxii). If a fisherman, for instance, can let go of the bragging about how big of a trout he caught, he may be able to create an opportunity for discussion about human relation with nature, or even bragging as human nature. That way, even a reader who has never held a fishing rod can recognize herself in the story and gain some motivation to at least continue reading.

The essay thrives on the author's active presence. Gordon Harvey (1994) suggests that when we talk about personal experience, we often mean presence. The author's use of personal experience as a claim of knowledge may be the most obvious form of presence, but there are others. It is the particular angle or point of view, a distinct perspective, conviction with which the subject is being considered, details, interpretation, sense of humor—they are all parts of the author's signature. As Harris (1996) writes: "The explicit reference to the personal experience of the person writing about a work is of little importance compared to the value of that person's perspective and the intelligence with which the insights stimulated by that perspective are pursued" (p. 942). The reader is not interested in colorful details of the writer's life, at least not all of them; many a personal essay has been written on a non-personal topic.

The position of the author in relation to the essay is just as ambiguous as the essay position between non-fiction and literature. In the context of literature, the essay writer is the protagonist; his quest through the writing process to get understanding *is* the plot, *is* the adventure” (Good, 1988, p.173). The author’s centrality in this process gives the essay a distinctive mark, further manifested by her voice: the personal element comes from not only what is said, but how it is said. Consider this passage:

I had entered at the moment it happened a kind of shock in which the only thought I allowed myself was that there must be certain things I needed to do. There had been certain things I had needed to do while the ambulance crew was in the living room. I had needed for example to get the copy of John's medical summary, so I could take it with me to the hospital. I had needed for example to bank the fire, because I would be leaving it. There had been certain things I had needed to do at the hospital. I had needed for example to stand in the line. I had needed for example to focus on the bed with telemetry he would need for the transfer to Columbia-Presbyterian. (p. 28)

This is from Joan Didion’s (2005) *The Year of Magical Thinking*. If you have read only one essay by Didion, you will most likely recognize any other piece of her writing. Her deliberate style, repetitions, her often deadpan humor, and her way of rearrangement of sentences and phrases may not impress you, but they point very clearly to who the author is. The voice is a way of establishing the essayist’s authority, a guarantee that the writing comes from somebody that we have met before and trust that he/she will deliver.



However, “the first person singular is too narrow a gate for the whole writer to pass through” (Sanders, 1988, p.39). However vital to the essay, the writer’s presence is not to be taken literally; she is perpetually in the doorway, so to speak, peeking in and out of the text when she deems appropriate. Different essays reveal different parts of the author, and even the visible parts should be eyed with suspicion. The actual flesh-and-blood author and the persona in the essay may have overlapping qualities, but one should not confuse the two. To reveal one’s self completely in a single essay is neither practical nor possible. There are many facets of one’s personality, and not all of them push the topic forward or provide a unique vantage point. Many essay writers: “have elected to follow an additive strategy, offering incomplete shards, one mask or persona after another: the eager, skeptical, amiable, tender, curmudgeonly, antic, somber” (Lopate, 1994, p. xxviii). The persona gives the essay a particular angle and point of view; it is this distinct perspective that puts the “personal” in personal essays. Personal need not be understood as confessional.

What kind of truth does the essay represent? The author is relying on personal experience as a knowledge base, with some help from other sources, yet we are not to assume that the author and the persona in the essay are one and the same. If the essay is a non-fictional yet literary form, do we look to literature or to non-fiction for direction as to the type of knowledge the essay comes to? Good (1988) answers that: “the kind of truth offered in the essay is not that of the witness stand or the scientific laboratory, both of which require fixed and consistent *evidence*, but a mixture of anecdote (perhaps heightened and “pointed” for effect), description (again selective), and opinion (perhaps changing)” (p.13). The knowledge the essay offers is not final; if anything, it is a

beginning of a longer conversation, possibly to be picked up at a later time, and the reader is certainly a part of the dialogue. This may be discomfoting for the academic world, where the tendency is to pose big questions and look for conclusive answers. The essay “must pay for its affinity with open intellectual experience by the lack of security, a lack which the norm of established thought fears like death” (Good, 1988, p.161).

I recognize that using the essay as a mode of inquiry is a non-typical choice, even within the qualitative research tradition. The goal is not to be anti-establishment; as Adorno (1984) writes: “bad essays are no less conformist than bad dissertations. Responsibility, however, respects not only authorities and committees, but the object itself” (p.154). Schubert (1991) makes a strong argument for using the essay in education, particularly curriculum studies. He outlines a brief history of the essay’s use in education, starting from the fifteenth century. Dewey, Schubert reminds us, wrote some of his most influential pieces as essays” (p.62). Within the University of Pittsburgh School of Education, Marjorie Barrett Logsdon’s (2000) dissertation, *Pedagogy of Authority: Speculative Essays by an English Teacher*, have been both instructive and inspiring when thinking about writing my own.

I use the essay as inquiry as a way to go about illuminating some of the many intricacies of what it means to be a transnational in the US, beginning with personal experiences, with the hope of offering a broader commentary on navigating the multicultural milieu of the world. The essay allows for combining personal, fictional and scholarly sources, to reflect the very subjective, complex, rich cultural experience of this growing group of people. As Lopate (1994) notes:

Another opportunity (*for the personal essay*) comes from the growing awareness that the United States is a pluralistic, multicultural society, that this is our future as a society, and that we need to listen carefully to the intellectual voices of minorities and immigrants (such as Gayle Pemberton and Richard Rodriguez).(p.li).

The essay lends itself to the topic in a sense that it can transform highly subjective, idiosyncratic experience into a broader discussion that would resonate just as strongly with others. As Sanders (1988) explains: “I choose to write about my experience not because it is mine but because it seems to me a door through which others might pass” (p.38). The challenge of using the personal experience wisely is to neither discredit nor be enamored by your own story.

I chose the essay as a method of inquiry in my study of transnationalism for the following reasons:

Transnationalism is a new concept of immigration that was not possible prior to the modern ways of transport and communication and the dawn of globalization. As a relatively new addition to the research field, transnationalism can benefit from being studied by some non-traditional approaches that are able to address its intricacies and complexities. (Vertovec, 2007). Korhonen (2004) writes:

When we speak about the essay, we speak about borderlines. Situated on—and playing with—the borderlines between philosophy and literature, argumentative science and poetic imagination, personal confessions and intertextual play, the essay is a marginal zone where there are no self-evident contracts between the author and the reader. It is both literature and philosophy,

or neither literature and philosophy. There is an indecidable between them, marking the difference. (p. 31)

Transnationalism, in many ways, is a study of borderlines; between identities, citizenships, affiliations or belongings. As a field, it strides the borders between political science, cultural studies, linguistics, sociology, and even psychology. The multidisciplinary nature of transnationalism is in accord with the essay's ability to provide "integrative, imaginative, and speculative leaps of interpretation that are still soundly grounded in a variety of other research traditions" (Schubert, 1991, p. 65).

Several transnationalism scholars have drawn attention to the fact that the field often neglects to focus on the major players in immigration—the people who migrate: "When we study migration rather than abstract cultural flows and representations, we see that transnational processes are located within the life experience of individuals and families, making up the warp and woof of daily activities, concerns, fears, and achievements" (Glick Schiller, 1995, p.51). The transnational experience is an individual experience, and as such, highly personalized and contextual. The essay, with its reliance on the personal, emotional, almost intimate presence of the author, can be an effective vehicle for dealing with illuminating the transnational experience: "Applied to the essay, readers would want to sense that the essayist knew and loved the topic under inquiry" (Schubert, 1991, p.66). The literature on transnationalism needs to be mindful of the generalizations researchers impose on individuals and groups, especially when they migrate from the same country (Guarnizo & Smith, 1988). As a postmodern way of knowing, the essay promotes a particular, situated knowledge that recognizes that there is not a single transnational experience, and not a single transnational theory. Additionally,

the aesthetic and rhetorical qualities of the essay contribute to its ability to address transnationalism; the aesthetic connects with the rich and evocative nature of the transnational experience. The rhetorical qualities of the essay, such as humor, irony and sarcasm, emphasize the emotional presence of the author and bring the reader closer to the text. The rhetoric gives the subject matter an immediate and intimate feel, while also serving as a subtle commentary on a particular issue.

There are unifying aspects to any human experience, and this is the case with the transmigrant experience. I don't claim to speak for all immigrants of the world. However, each individual experience, whether my own or someone else's that I would be using in the essays, can contribute towards understanding the phenomenon as a whole. As Barrett Logsdon (2006) writes: "The public nature of writing essays turned my inward gaze outward toward others, and I brought other voices into the text beside my own" (p.162). While the essay does concentrate on the contextual/particular knowledge, the ultimate goal is to move from the individual to the universal, bringing out the common human element among those experiences, with all its intricacies and layers of meaning. The essay lends itself to the topic in a sense that it can transform highly subjective, idiosyncratic experience into a broader discussion that would resonate just as strongly with others. As Sanders (1988) explains: "I choose to write about my experience not because it is mine but because it seems to me a door through which others might pass" (p.38). The challenge to using the personal experience wisely is to neither discredit nor be enamored by your own story.

The essay allows for combining personal, fictional and scholarly sources, to reflect the very subjective, complex, rich cultural experience of this growing group of people:

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Ultimately, the transnational experience is a very powerful, exciting, challenging and life-changing, and the essay has the tradition, the mechanism and the capability to bring out and highlight some of that density of meaning. As Sanders (1988) puts it beautifully:

one writes, in essays, with a regard for the actual world, with a respect for the shared substance of history, the autonomy of other lives, the being of nature, and the mystery and majesty of a creation we have not made. (p.41)

### 3.0. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AS TRANSNATIONALS

I never intended to live abroad, at least not to a degree that I purposefully sought out opportunities to do so. I was already a freshman at the Skopje University in Macedonia, studying English Language and Literature, when I was recommended by one of my professors to be interviewed for an academic scholarship to a college in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I hadn't heard of Pittsburgh before, let alone of the small suburban college that was offering the scholarships. I went to the interview, out of politeness more than out of any real conviction that I would get the scholarship. I thought thousands of dollars get awarded only to other, luckier or better connected, people. The news that I actually received the scholarship took me by surprise, as if I hadn't willingly took part in the process of getting the opportunity in the first place. Three weeks later, I was on a plane, heading to the States.

Two things propelled me to vote in favor of this move: age and language. At nineteen, not yet burdened (or blessed, I would now say) with a need for long-term planning, and not having stronger ties to home, like a spouse, children or a profession, it appeared easy to imagine myself living somewhere else and even easier not to consider all the implications of moving across the ocean. Four other students from my city were a part of the same scholarship program, and to all of us the prospect of studying abroad sounded like a wonderful adventure. If we didn't like it there, we could always go back, we told each other.

Language was a more subtle but perhaps a stronger factor. Taking English classes for the better part of my academic life, I was fascinated by the sounds and cadence of a

foreign language, but also with the people who taught it. The various English teachers I had throughout the years were mostly British or Macedonians who had lived abroad extensively. They talked of lost luggage, eating strange meals in strange places; they knew and actually understood all the Beatles' lyrics (all of my language teachers used song lyrics as a vocabulary lesson). They made me think that there are people whose lives are somehow bigger than mine, both my current and my future life. I subconsciously understood that there is only so much you can see, do or learn in one particular setting, and if I wanted to do more seeing, doing or learning, I would need to go to visit other places. So, I came to Pittsburgh.

The general opinion in Macedonia is that studying and living abroad is a wonderful educational and economic opportunity. Macedonians have a long history of immigrating to Western Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand to search for employment or, in recent decades, to obtain higher education, the popular belief being that a US diploma is much more valuable than a Macedonian one. I didn't think about living abroad as a prestigious or economically beneficial venture, because those things are normally not that relevant to a teenager.

Years later, I read Greg Madison's (2006) article "Existential Migration," and the way he identifies some voluntary migrants as *existential migrants* spoke to me. According to Madison, these migrants "are seeking greater possibilities for self-actualizing, exploring foreign cultures in order to assess their own identity, and ultimately grappling with issues of home and belonging in the world generally" (p.238) even though on the periphery it may seem that they have migrated for economic reasons, much like the rest of the migrant population. While I don't know whether I could define/ diagnose



myself as an existential migrant, (Dr. Madison is a psychotherapist and counseling psychologist), I find it relevant to consider that students come to the United States on various grounds, the most visible one being to obtain a college diploma. However, other reasons may include financial prosperity, status, family pressure, independence or cultural exploration. I suspect that the motives for migration will affect the way a person experiences the new environment. Involuntary migrants, such as refugees, are in a more vulnerable position, socially and economically, then voluntary migrants (professionals, students). However, Madison points out: “the assumption seems to be that *choosing to leave* makes the migration less evocative, less distressing, less interesting, and in fact less meaningful” (p.239). Most students, like myself, chose to move away from their home countries. The deliberate aspect of my move meant that I could always go back home, a luxury that a refugee may not have. Still, migrating to a new country was an enormous challenge.

It was difficult to breathe. My first memory of the US is inhaling the hot, humid New York air as we stepped out of the terminal at JFK to catch a connecting flight to Pittsburgh. Once at the college, we found the classrooms and dorm rooms frigid (all foreigners I know to this day comment on the Americans’ treatment of the AC dial as an extreme sport) and the weather outside too hot and humid. It may sound trivial in retrospect, but the inability to achieve some level of physical comfort was very disconcerting at the time. Every daily action, every contact, every place was rich with newness and information that I had no way to anticipate; the first weeks on campus were all about observing and figuring out what the locals do: the way they talk to each other, how they behave in the classroom or in the dining hall, where they shop or how they

make an appointment. Kim (1988) describes this state of heightened awareness as a common component of a foreigner's initial stage in the new country.

Those initial days for being at a new school are beautifully described in Sherman Alexie's (2007) *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, a semi-biographical story of Arnold (Junior) Spirit, a Spokane Indian who leaves his home town of Welpinit, to go to the better high school in the area, in nearby Reardan. Upon hearing the news, Junior's best friend Rowdy punches him straight in the face. Junior remembers: "I stayed on the ground for a long time after Rowdy walked away. I stupidly hoped that time would stand still if I stayed still. But I had to stand eventually, and when I did, I knew that my best friend had become my worst enemy" (p.53). To leave the reservation was an act of arrogance, a way of saying that he, Junior, was better than his own people.

The welcoming committee at Reardan High School consisted of Roger, the most popular kid at the school, and his buddies, who greets Junior with names like Tonto, Redskin, Chief and Sitting Bull. To end the bullying, Junior punches Roger in the face. According to the unofficial rez fistfight rules, Junior expects the fight to continue after school, but Roger refuses and just walks away. This is foreign behavior for Junior; if someone on the rez punches you, you punch back. Strangely, this didn't happen: "I was absolutely confused. I had followed the rules of fighting. I had behaved exactly the way I was supposed to behave. But these white boys had ignored the rules. In fact, they followed a whole other set of mysterious rules where people apparently DID NOT GET INTO FISTFIGHTS" (p.65). Utterly puzzled, Junior asks Roger what the rules are, which in turn confuses Roger: "What rules? It becomes clear to Junior just how tough being at Reardan High will be: "I felt like somebody had shoved me into a rocket ship and blasted

me to a new planet. I was a freaky alien and there was absolutely no way to get home” (p.66). I suspect many international students can relate to that feeling.

The literature on foreign people’s transition to the new environment is not in agreement as to what adjustment means and how one goes about the process of adjusting. Lysgaard (1955) studied Norwegian Fullbright scholars on a two-year stay in the United States, and proposed the U-curve model of adjustment. He describes the scholars’ initial experience as one of euphoria and excitement, followed by frustration and sadness. In the final stage, people emerge from the lowest point of their experience and reach a level of relative comfort. The U-curve model assumes that culture shock occurs in the second stage of the process. Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1960) further extended the model to a W-curve, to reflect the experience of the students reentering their home culture and going through another U-curve period. Oberg’s model (1960) describes four stages in the adjustment process: honeymoon stage of exhilaration, crisis stage of hostility towards the new culture, recovery stage of getting used to the new setting, and adjustment stage. Mohamed’s model (1997) also identifies four stages: orientation and autonomy, transitions of self-worth, consolidation of role identity and competence and integrative maturity. Looking back, I suppose I was an Oberg girl; as a freshman, the College made sure that I kept busy with new student orientation, pizza socials, and sports events for the first month. It was practically November when it occurred to me that I didn’t like it here (at the time) and that I really missed home.

All the above models share two assumptions: that the initial stage of the adjustment process is a positive one, and more significantly, that there is an end point to the adaptation process. Ward (2004) and Brown & Holloway (2008) challenge the first

assumption and state that the initial stage of the transition process is the most stressful one, with a reduction of the stress level as time goes by. The sudden exposure to a wealth of new information, such as physical places, people, food and climate, combined with the absence of familiar cues as to what is considered acceptable conduct can be overwhelming for some. Several students who were a part of the same scholarship program as I left within a week of their arrival. They said what they saw so far did not coincide with their vision of studying in the United States. Unable to consolidate their expectations with the actual environment, they decided to return. I remember admiring them for their ability to foresee very quickly that they did not make the right choice. Their actions, however, may have been a result of culture shock rather than a strong sense that studying in the States was simply not for them.

The assumption that the transition from home to host culture is a goal-oriented process is also problematic. Burnapp (2006), who has been working with foreign students in the UK, proposes that: “for each international student, hybridity rather than complete acculturation is going to result, and further that this is not fixed but is itself in constant change” (p.91). Burnapp uses Grossberg’s (1996) definition of hybridity as adding new knowledge and practices to the already existing body of tradition that every student possesses. The acculturation process, then, is not a total replacement of one’s culture with another, but rather a combination of both. Paulston (1992) uses the term “bicultural eclecticism” (p.125) to describe the process through which individuals pick and choose elements of the two cultures that best suit their particular circumstance, preference or personality. Students will make their own choices as to what aspects of their home and host cultures to adopt, and these choices can not be predicted.

New international students are encouraged to adjust to the new academic, social and cultural environment as quickly as possible, and most of the time they do. Their student visas come with rigid immigration requirements that demand completing an academic program within allotted time, while maintaining full-time status. They simply do not have the time to properly ease into the new situation. At the same time, there is an expectation that the students are cultural ambassadors on campus, and they are tapped into as diversity resources, both in the classroom and outside of it. These two processes, one of adjustment to the new culture, and one of maintaining and celebrating the original one, are not mutually exclusive, and often run parallel to one another.

The concept of transnationalism, as a process through which people adjust to a new culture but maintain social and cultural ties to their home countries (Glick Schiller, 1995), could be helpful in understanding the delicate position these students find themselves in. While international students are not transnational migrants in a sense that that their stay in the United States is temporary (even though some of them, like myself, end up staying longer), their experience is marked by a great degree of negotiation between their original and host culture. The college experience should ideally be transformative no matter in which country the school is located. When students come to live and study in the United States for a few years, the question is not if they change, but to what degree. Their transnationality comes out of the cross-cultural state in which they conduct their daily lives; the fine balance between who they were, or thought they were, and who they are becoming.

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For the past ten years, I've been working as an International Student Advisor at a college with a significant international student population. The fact that I had been an international student was a favorable part of my resume and provides me with a perspective that perhaps a domestic individual would not have. At the same time, it is often a challenge to consolidate the two viewpoints, the one of a (former) student and an administrator. For instance, as an administrator, I have to insist that the student is registered full-time in order to maintain a legal immigration status; however, I understand how sometimes students have legitimate reasons for attending part-time or not at all. So, I practice the cultural eclecticism that Paulston writes about; in the example above, I have to act as an administrator in the best interest of the student's and the college's legal status. In other cases, I may be inclined to support the student's perspective more strongly. Being able to use both viewpoints in my professional life has been a great asset in terms of being able to be a more effective advocate for the students.

In conversations with colleagues in the field, it has become apparent that the concept of diversity and its enactment in practice is often problematic. The term diversity has been so overused in the past decade or so that it has ceased to mean anything of substance. I recently participated in a panel discussion titled: "Is Diversity a Dirty Word?" which addressed the issue of whether there is any practical need for engaging in so-called diversity initiatives. Some have suggested that we are in a post-diversity world. As a part of an educational institution that makes a conscious effort to expand international recruitment and international faculty exchange, I am in no position to ignore the diversity efforts. I am often asked to recruit international students for admissions

brochures, open house events and anywhere where a different-looking face signals to the public that the college takes its diversity seriously.

Educators sometimes emphasize difference for the sake of promoting diversity, or for thinking there should be one. A common assumption is that all international students are significantly different from American students by the virtue of geographical distance or national origin. Chavez (1994) addresses the fallacy in this kind of thinking: “multiculturalists insist on treating race and ethnicity as if they were synonymous with culture. They presume that skin color and national origin, which are immutable traits, determine values, mores, language and other cultural attributes, which, of course, are learned” (p.27). Sometimes prospective students from the Virgin Islands or Puerto Rico need the assistance of the International Student Office, even though they are US citizens. At the same time, students from Jamaica, who are in theory international students, are not at a complete loss when it comes to US culture and need very little assistance, if at all, with the processes of cultural adjustments, which I suspect is a result of the fact that many of them have close contact, in person or otherwise, with relatives in the United States.

Insisting too much on difference can result in an opposite effect; within the eagerness to promote diversity, we end up generalizing, if not stereotyping. Yi (2003) advises that a less general approach is needed: “To better understand the complexity of their experiences and differences related to their country of origin, there is a need to focus on subgroup differences among international students” (p.335). The eye-rolling when we ask our African students to bring an “African dish” to an event is not surprising; our African students come from, among other countries, Ethiopia (East Africa), Namibia

(South Africa), Burkina Faso (East Africa), Central African Republic (self-explanatory), all with a wide range of culinary influences, and I am certain, infinite varieties in recipes among families. A Polish student shared once that she had never eaten pierogies in Poland, because they didn't make them in the region where she grew up. The collective metaphorical gasp heard across Pittsburgh, which prides itself on its Polish population which makes excellent pierogies, was deafening.

And then there is always the question of the traditional dress. Traditional outfits typically have the colorful, ethnic flair that visibly marks the individual as foreign, thus making the place or group of people around him "multicultural." When I was a student, I was always asked if I could wear a traditional outfit for events. Robbing a museum or joining a folk dance company would be the only two ways to acquire a Macedonian costume nowadays; they are not available otherwise. As an International Student Advisor, I am expected to ask the students to wear their traditional garb during some events, which I am uneasy to do, because I feel as if I am planning an exotic bird show rather than a student event. I am reminded of a Martin Espada (2004) poem, "My native costume." Espada, whom Sandra Cisneros called "Pablo Neruda of North American authors," is a Puerto Rican born and raised in New York City, "the largest Puerto Rican city in the world," as he calls it. When reading the poem, I had difficulties deciding whether I should identify with the teacher or the lawyer:

When you come to visit,  
said a teacher  
from the suburban school,



don't forget to wear  
your native costume.

But I'm a lawyer,  
I said.  
My native costume  
is a pinstriped suit.

You know, the teacher said,  
a Puerto Rican costume.

Many international students are excited that people take interest in their native culture and customs, but there are more ways in which they can contribute to the educational process than wearing a colorful outfit. The faculty and staff working with these students have a delicate task of motivating them to share their cultural knowledge in a way that does not reduce them to their nationality or ethnicity. As Ping (1999) observes:

international students and faculty are a largely untapped but invaluable resource of intellectual and cultural ambassadors. International students come with their own agendas: they want to complete degrees, increase their English language competency, or pursue particular courses of study or research while in the United States. They also frequently come with eagerness to share their culture, language, and national concerns. How to use their natural pride and interest in sharing, without interfering or offending, is a challenge. (p.20)

My roommates in college routinely introduced me to their friends with: “This is Natasha and she is from Macedonia,” all in one breath. I suppose it was a good ice breaker, but after I discussed the circumstances of my coming to the States and answer a few questions about my home country, there wasn’t much time to say anything else. I was defined by my nationality.

Nationality or ethnicity may be most visible, or most interesting detail of my identity, but there is more to who I am than my origins. At the end of *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, Junior makes friends with the kids in his new high school, and even acquires a girlfriend. He also reconciles with his best friend Rowdy. On the reservation, he is an exception because of his bookishness; at Reardan High School he is an exception for being an Indian and poor. But neither place is a perfect match for Junior: “I realized that, sure, I was a Spokane Indian. I belonged to that tribe. But I also belonged to the tribe of American immigrants. And to the tribe of basketball players. And to the tribe of bookworms” (p.217). Or, as Martin Espada says in one of his interviews: “If I were ice-cream, I’d be mango beef flavor. Something exotic” (Urrea, 2007, under Latino, Hispanic or what?).

The rest of Espada’s poem goes as follows:

Like a guayabera? The shirt? I said.

But it's February.

The children want to see

a native costume,

the teacher said.

So I went  
to the suburban school,  
embroidered guayabera  
short -sleeved shirt  
over a turtleneck,  
and said, Look kids,  
cultural adaptation.

Much like the lawyer in the poem, most international students I've encountered seem to be willing to participate in diversity programs as a way of introducing themselves and their culture to the wider student population on campus. Thankfully, much like the lawyer, they often take their role as cultural ambassadors with mild amusement and a sense of humor. Perhaps that's the secret to a successful cross-cultural communication.

International students are the fastest growing student group in the United States (Davis, 2001). Colleges and universities attended by international students become places that offer much more than a degree to the students. It is becoming increasingly important for universities to give the students a global perspective, because, as Kitinger (1991) writes: "To produce good citizens you have to produce, if not citizens of the world, at least citizens aware of and in tune with the world in which we all now—and future generations even more—will have to live and earn their living" (p.35). Such education comes both from the academic component, but also from extra-curricular activities, formal and informal exchanges among students and faculty, and the overall commitment of the institution to prepare students for the world.

Institutions of higher learning would do a great service to their students, both international and domestic, if they carefully choose educators who are up for the challenge: “above all else, leadership in this educational role requires a sensitive and open spirit and a developed capacity for empathy. Although such a willing spirit can be nurtured or even trained to a certain extent, this quality of person and life is largely a rare and wonderful gift, given to only a few, of a capacity to enter into the experience of others, to see the world and the self through the eyes of others” (Ping, 1999, p. 21). My hope as someone who works with international students is to live up to those recommendations. In the meantime, I am outlining several observations that may help both groups understand better the challenges of studying and living in a foreign country.

Even though some students may feel influenced/pressured by their family or their socio-cultural surrounding to study abroad, I suspect that the decision to study in the US for most students is personal and deliberate. As such, students have a great degree of openness and flexibility about the new experiences, which does not eliminate all the difficulties associated with being in a new country. The voluntary aspect of the move does not make the experience any easier (Madison, 2006).

On the onset of their arrival, students face a variety of logistical challenges that make everyday life complicated. Things like food, weather (Okorochoa, 1996), transportation, banking, shopping, or health care may be routine issues for domestic students, but they create a high level of stress for newcomers. Strict immigration regulations and language issues are problems specific to the international student population. Naturally, the more fluent international students are in English, the more likely they are to have a smoother transition into the new environment (Poyrazli, 2003).

However, even fluent English speakers may find the immersion in the language of academia challenging.

Most universities have orientation programs for international students. However, culture shock can affect a student at any time. It is best to understand adjustment to a new culture as an ongoing process that extends beyond the first weeks of the student's stay in the US, and does not have a definite end point. Ongoing orientation sessions and support may be better suited to the needs of the students as opposed to one-week sessions in the beginning of the program. More importantly, transition and acculturation are personal processes; no two students have an identical experience, even if they share a common cultural or ethnic background. Naturally, there will be commonalities in the way students adapt to and adopt the new culture, but "being bicultural is an individual matter which does not lend itself to stereotyping. Nor can it be taught" (Paulston, 1992, p.128). Dahlia, a former student of mine from the Middle East, once told me that during the last leg of her flights home during summer, she would squeeze into the plane restroom and change out of her jeans and sleeveless shirt into her traditional outfit. She would do the reverse on her flights back to the US. She compared her experience as an international student to spending time in the airplane toilet—metaphorically speaking: "some days I emerge a little more American, on other days I'm more Middle Eastern. And once in a while, I think I need a revolving door on that changing room."

#### **4.0. FINDING ONE'S PLACE IN THE WORLD: TRANSNATIONALISM AND THE NOTION OF HOME**

Five years ago, my American husband and I bought our first house. On bulk garbage night, he dragged out on the curb in front of his old apartment all the leftover and hand-me-down furniture from several generations of roommates: the obligatory Papasan chair, a velvet couch, several side tables, a leaky air conditioner, a plaid pet bed and a mauve recliner. After the furniture purge, he set up the slow cooker in the new house and anointed the place with the scent of pork and sauerkraut, which some people may find nauseating, but we happen to love: a practical as well as a symbolic move to feed the family and mark the new territory as his new home. My husband took a total of 24 hours to make himself at home. For me, it's a work in progress. Of course I consider the new house my home. I take offense when a well-meaning relative suggests that the kitchen needs an update. I proudly give friends a house tour. I gaze at the freshly-painted ceilings, my first serious home-improvement project, as if I were in the Sistine Chapel. It's true love. And still, some very subtle forces seem to hold me back from fully settling in. I can barely bring myself to drill new holes in the walls for our artwork. I've been living in the States for almost two decades, but when a friend asks me, let's say after a movie or a concert whether I'm going home, I promptly reply: not until next summer, much to the friend's puzzlement. This is only if the friend is American. When a foreign friend asks me the same question, and I give the same answer, there is never any confusion. Despite the house, complete with a husband, a child, mortgage payments, independent choice of

furniture and the aroma of simmering dinner, when I say “home” I most often refer to my home country, Macedonia.

The globalization process, marked by increased frequency and ease of travel and communication, has changed the nature of immigration. Most immigrants, including myself, establish their host country as a permanent base, while still maintaining strong political, social and cultural ties to their homeland. Immigration has come to mean transnational migration, “the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous, multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Glick Schiller et al., 1995, p.x). This process allows the transnational migrants to fashion a cross-national existence that engages them in the political and social life of both their home and host country.

The redefined concept of immigration has pushed for reconsideration of the concept of home. Home has been traditionally conceptualized as a fixed place; being at home means being stationary, centered, bounded, fitted, engaged and grounded (Rapport & Dawson, 1998). In the context of transnational migration, the connection between “home” and “place” becomes problematic. This is not because transnationals travel a lot (many of them don’t) or live in more than one place (most of them live full-time in their host country), with the exception of the so-called “astronaut families” (Ong, 1999) of Hong Kong businessmen living in several different countries for economic or educational purposes. The challenges of conceptualizing “home” in a transnational context comes from the new understanding of what constitutes a space or a place. As Voigt-Graf (2004) observes, transnational literature uses spatial metaphors that link “the construction of transnational spaces and the more general reorganization of space in the current era”

(p.26). Much like an office can be any coffee shop, park bench or commuter train where one works on a laptop, the postmodern notion of home goes beyond the understanding of home as simply shelter, or a place that is geographically situated, like a particular house. A softer concept of home as a space, whether physical or metaphorical, where one feels the comfort, security, familiarity and belonging may be more appropriate for someone whose life gets conducted in a place other than her native country. The literature on transnationalism identifies several ways in which home can be conceptualized: home as social relations, home as familiarity/family, home as identity, home as freedom, and home as a symbolic/idealized place.

#### **4.1.HOME AS RELATIONS**

I couldn't possibly be the only person to have nebulous feelings about home, I thought. In order to prove it, mostly to myself, I arranged to interview other transnationals about their views on home, both here in the United States and in their home country. Nora is an Eastern European woman who has been living in the United States for more than seven years. She came to the States as a college student, and is presently working in the medical field. She mentioned that she often came to my neighborhood for dinner or drinks, so I suggested we meet at what at the time was called *Your Inner Vagabond World Lounge*, currently known as *Istanbul*. This coffee shop turned out to be an ideal place for conducting an interview with a foreigner and her views of home. The Lounge's web site and its interior (think Marrakesh tea house, not that I've ever been to Morocco) is aiming for a neo-nomad vibe; there are objects of vaguely Middle-Eastern and Asian



origin on the walls and window sills—camel and horse figurines, paintings in deep red, boxes of incense. Heaps of brightly-patterned pillows are piled on top of layered Persian rugs, inviting the visitors to recline, sip tea and snack on some pistachio pastries soaked in rose water, brought to them by a waitress with holes in her fishnet stockings and ear piercings so wide I can see daylight through them.

After the preliminaries, I asked Nora whether she considered Pittsburgh to be her home. Without hesitation, she answered: “I have lots of friends here. They are my family. My boyfriend is here. We are a group of maybe 10-15 people, from Portugal, India, Croatia, you name it. We travel together; we get together at least once a week. They make me *love* Pittsburgh.” These social relations are central to Nora’s idea of Pittsburgh as her home. Reinders & van der Land (2008) suggest that the “subjective notions of home can be studied in the visible and audible world of social interactions and relations, rather than in the impenetrable realm of personal and individual feelings” (p.6). In a sense, the construction of home becomes a group effort, even though each person experiences it individually.

Out of all the social relations, the ones among immediate family members are central to the lives of most people, for better or for worse. For transnational individuals, having the immediate family members in the new country can transform the new dwelling into a home : “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 a life full of changes” (Nowicka, 2007, p.77). That was certainly true for Marco, a fellow Macedonian, and a recent US permanent resident. He suggested I visit

him and his wife at their new house. I parked in his driveway, next to his green Ford Explorer, which had a Macedonian flag license plate. Both of them greeted me at the door with the typical three kisses, and led me to their living room. The wall opposite to where I was sitting was adorned with a large photo of his parents in formal clothing (it was taken at his brother's wedding) and a Christian Orthodox icon of Mary. Underneath the icon, on a small table, there was a heavy glass bottle of what looked like homemade brandy and four small glasses on a silver tray. Religion and drinking seem to go hand in hand in the Balkans; I remember my in-laws being offered brandy while visiting a XII-th century church at Lake Ohrid, Macedonia. They obligingly sipped some. Marco, a newlywed, volunteered: "Now that I am married, it is easier for me to live here. I have my own family. Especially when children come along, I don't think I will miss home as much. Wherever my family is, I'll be happy." If a better job opportunity came up, they would be willing to move within the US or Europe, but he could not see himself living away from his wife and his (future) children.

A few months after our son was born, my parents packed up their essential possessions and came from Macedonia to stay with us and help with the baby. They didn't go back home until he was almost two and a half. Our guest bedroom (guest floor, really) is currently unoccupied, but you wouldn't know just by looking at it. There are clothes hanging in the closet, shoes, photos, reading glasses on the nightstand, extra pieces of luggage, etc., in case we have any doubts that they are planning to return soon. Ever since they became grandparents (the ultimate life achievement of any Macedonian parent), they simply ran out of reasons as to why they should live in Macedonia. During the time they were here, they picked up a little bit of English, made friends with the

neighbors, figured out the bus schedule, and, to complete their emersion into Pittsburgh life, bought matching Steelers t-shirts. If their grandson's home is in Pittsburgh, they are making Pittsburgh their home as well, ignoring age or language or whatever real or imagined barriers stand between them and the States.

The family can be an emotional center for the transnational individual, providing the feelings of comfort and support typically associated with being at home. However, this transnational individual in question, soaking up all the comfort and family support, is usually a male. Lam & Yeoh (2004) make an interesting observation that “while notions of ‘home’ become understood as mobile and non-place specific concepts, it must be noted that they continue to be gendered terms, where the idea of the portability of ‘home’ is construed to fit better with male rather than female pursuits” (p.143). More often than not, families move because of the husband's professional engagement. The wife ends up setting up the new home, finding schools for the children, and organizing the logistics of the new life. Women, in many cases, end up shouldering most of the emotional burden associated with living transnationally (Aranda, 2003). I recall the media's endless discussions around Mrs. Obama's proclamation that her role during the First Family's move from Chicago to the White House is to be a Mom-in-Chief, handling the details of the family's relocation. The commentaries ranged from disapproval of Mrs. Obama's alleged reversal of the progress made by feminism to questioning the value system that assigns greater significance to work outside the home.

The presence of the immediate family allows for reestablishment of everyday life rhythm in the new environment, a significant part of the process of creating a home. Doing everyday tasks, whether it is exercising, cooking, or practicing one's hobbies

infuses the new life with recognizable, well-known routines, bringing the familiarity of the old home into the new one. As Burnapp (2006) observes: “the journey taken by expatriate workers or international students can be thought of as a movement from a known *place* into something at first unknown—a *space*—which with time itself becomes known as a *place*” (p.83). Usual and routine activities combined with the presence of favorite objects (photos, home articles, pieces of furniture, etc) allows for what Wiles (2008) calls “performing home away from home” (p.127), namely conducting life in the habitual and regular tempo, but in a new location. My Macedonian clay pot, an equivalent of my husband’s slow cooker, follows me wherever I go, even though I rarely cook in it. I am afraid I would have my Macedonian citizenship revoked if I didn’t make a batch of beans in it once in a while. As Nowicka (2007) writes:

to be at home means to be in a familiar and immediate environment, to have your own and known objects around you and to interact with your family; therefore, one can create the feeling of being at home at any time in any place as long as one can move together with people and objects. (p.80)

I recently got a chain e-mail titled: “You are a true Macedonian in the States if...” One of the items on the list was: “you own at least five Macedonian flags.” I mentally counted three in my house, only two technically in my possession, the third one on my husband’s soccer jersey. Perhaps I am just two flags away of achieving perfect harmony with my new home.

## 4.2. HOME AS IDENTITY

The process of creating a place that one would call home, setting up an immediate dwelling where one conducts daily activities, may be logistically challenging, but ultimately straightforward. This is what Magat (1999) calls Little Home. Most transnationals are relatively successful in establishing Little Home. Big Home could be a physical location, like one's country of origin, but often it is "where one belongs, the place of ultimate return" (Magat, 1999, p.120). Big Home equates home with nation, national identity and belonging.

I'm speculating that some of the uneasiness regarding "home" for transnationals, including myself, comes from the conflicted relationship between Big Home and Little Home. Here are two excerpts from my conversations with Marco and Nora:

*Me: So, where would you say your home is?*

*Marco: I don't want to use a cliché, but my home is where my heart is (Big Home). My home country is in my heart (Big Home). But it doesn't always feel like home (Little Home). My life is here (Little Home).*

*Me: I see.*

*Marco: You know, it doesn't mean my country stopped being my home (Big Home), it is just...I have another home here (Little Home).*

*Me: When you say 'home', what do you mean?*

*Nora: It's where I come from; it's who I am. Nothing can change that. Some people would say it's where I belong. (Big Home)*

*Me: Where is your home?*

*Nora: Still [home country]. No matter what. Nothing can take its place. (Big Home). But when I travel, I look forward to coming back to Pittsburgh. Then Pittsburgh feels like home (Little Home).*

Both Marco and Nora gave me very nuanced answers to my imprecise question. They distinguished between their home as a place where they conduct life and home as in “home country”, a source of (national) identity. Little Home can be replicated; Big Home is in the bones.

Magat writes that “the emotional set of a given national identity is irreversible, thus actions are not directly related to feelings” (p.137). Does this mean that every transnational acquiring citizenship of the host country acts only out of self-interest, to protect his/her civil rights? Saram (1993) calls this type of citizenship “passport identity,” being a citizen of a country on paper only. Citizenship can work in the opposite direction as well, as a way of legitimizing Big House and giving the transnational individual a formal way of establishing herself in the new country. My personal experience as a recent US citizen falls somewhere in between. Gathering endless paperwork and paying high filing fees are actions that do not evoke deep patriotic feelings for future citizens. At the time, I did not have a clear sense as to why I was applying for citizenship, a haziness that still somewhat persists, beyond not wanting to deal with immigration issues any longer.

The citizenship ceremony, however, caught my cynical self by surprise. The judge presiding over the ceremony invited each new citizen to stand up and tell her the name of his/her country of origin. Several speakers spoke about the importance of maintaining one’s cultural heritage, being that everyone in the United States who is not a Native American has roots somewhere else. The Boy Scouts processed with their achievement

flags, giving the whole event an even more formal yet celebratory feel. At the end of the ceremony, I had my picture taken with the judge. Obtaining citizenship seemed like a final step in a long bureaucratic adventure. Having an American passport means never having to wait in line at an embassy. What hadn't occurred to me before the ceremony is that it also served as a confirmation, to myself and my family (both immediate and extended), that I am here to stay. Of course, I could live in the US indefinitely without getting citizenship, but there was no sense in pretending that my stay here is not permanent.

Kastoryano (2000) makes an interesting distinction between the roles of one's country of origin and residence:

transnationalism leads, in any case, to an institutional expression of multiple belonging, where the country of origin becomes a source of identity, the country of residence a source of rights, and the emerging transnational space, a space of political action combining the two or more countries. (p.311)

For weeks after the ceremony, the question I got repeatedly from friends was: Do you feel American now? Well, no. But I must admit I like the benefits.

### **4.3. HOME AS FREEDOM**

Conceptualizing "home" as fluid and impermanent can be an unsettling thought, but it is not without advantages. While Western societies are generally inclined to equate living in a fixed location with stability, not being bound to only one place fulfills a romantic notion of freedom (Nowicka, 2007). The sense of freedom comes from both the

detachment from geographical constraints, as well as from the ability of people to create a home in a new environment, free from the expectations, familial constraints, or norms of their society of origin. My friend Marco was surprised to have realized that he could live anywhere in the world: “You know, the security of the everyday sometimes makes you feel at home. But I don’t think security is the only thing that should make you feel at home. You make your own home. You make your own life here, as you would make it anywhere else--it could be in the US, or Sweden or who knows where--and that’s what makes it home.” When I asked Nora about some of the positive aspects of living in the United States, she said without hesitation: “It’s great to live here because I can be who I want to be. I got my own home. Whatever I want to do, I do it. If I want to travel, I travel. If I want to invite friends over, I do it. I can be somebody here. I feel free here.” Nora felt that moving to the United States made her more open to possibility of future moves: “I like Pittsburgh, but I’m open. I can see having a future here, but I don’t know. I hope I can find a good job here, so that I can be truly happy here. That’s one of my priorities.” As Madison (2006) reminds us, “moving to a foreign place and international travel are archetypal situations for protecting and expressing the need for freedom and independence” (p.247).

The notion that home as self-constructed can be a liberating thought, so liberating that one may think about constructing more than one. In their research of Chinese Malaysians living in Singapore and their views on “home,” Lam and Yeoh (2004) found out that some transnationals had a highly practical and dynamic view of home as changing as their lifestyles change. Some of the participants in the study had decided to have a home in Singapore, because that’s where they lived and worked, but also have a



home in Malaysia for when they retire. Going beyond the need to think of their home as a singular location, they could be pragmatic about planning the future and the future homes.

Home can also be a process, a project in the making. As Nowicka (2007) observes, “home is something that one constructs, not a particular place, not a location but an entity in becoming” (p.77). Among the challenges of setting up a home in a foreign country, many transnationals seem to enjoy the sudden sense of freedom and independence to build a life and create a home that best fits their needs and their personalities, not the expectations or the customs of their home countries or their families.

The sense of freedom can come not only from the self-designed nature of the new home, but also, unexpectedly, from the home one leaves behind. The knowledge that there is a permanent base somewhere else, always available, always willing to take you back, allows for a greater willingness to experiment with new homes: “knowing that this place exists unchanged, even in another part of the world, offers a base for venturing out into the world” (Madison, 2006, p.248.) Interesting how the original home is both a source of security and a source of freedom, both roots and wings.

#### **4.4. HOME AS SYMBOL**

Finally, for many individuals, “home may be a place in which one does not prefer to live in” (Lam & Yeoh, 2004, p.152). The longer people live outside their home country, the

more immersed they become in their current lives; their trips back tend to be less frequent, the relationships even with their closest friends ease up in intensity, if not fully fade. Distance and time do their part in slowly transforming a literal bond--physical visits and active communication-- into a more emotional connection with one's native country. Home then becomes a symbolic place, an idealized place, a perfect place that exists only in the memories of the person who had left it. This is all Big Home territory.

This concept of home that lives in the imaginations of the transmigrants, encompasses both "ideals of an abstract nostalgic past and utopian future" (Wiles, 2008, p.134). The time spent living there, the people they knew, the place they lived in, acquire a certain patina, a beauty that may have never existed or went unnoticed before. Same with vacations; no matter how boring, or ridden with logistical problems they are, a few months later, you are thumbing through your album, looking at those tanned, relaxed versions of you smiling at the camera, and you begin making plans to go back there. Some transmigrants often talk about or dream of returning to their original home ('utopian future') without ever taking any concrete steps to do so. The home remains a "nostalgic illusion" (Kong, 1999, p. 578), a place that is created and maintained only in the memory and imagination.

When we talk about our childhood homes, whether they are on the same continent or not, we mostly dwell in nostalgia. Nostalgia is, as Vladimir Jankélévitch (as cited in Aksoy & Robins, 2008) observes, 'awareness of something other, awareness of somewhere else, awareness of a contrast between past and present, and between present and future' (p.5) - and migrations have created the conditions for its most intense and elaborated forms of expression. Nostalgia creates an image of a place fixed in time,

unchanged, a “mental geography” (Reinders & van der Land, 2008, p.3) to which we return for comfort and security. When my usual group of Eastern European friends gets together, we listen to music that was popular in Former Yugoslavia when we were in high school (which is the last time we lived there permanently). It reminds us of the parties we used to attend back home, and in a way, makes us feel “more” Macedonian, or Serbian, or Croatian, even though none of our friends in Macedonia or Serbia or Croatia really listens to the music from twenty years ago. I tend to keep all my Macedonian music in my car and turn some of my commutes into mini-escapes into my imaginary home. A guilty pleasure; I would deny owning those CDs if I lived in Macedonia.

Nothing kills a warm, nostalgic feeling for a place like visiting it in real time. As Madison (2006) writes: “though there seems to be a desire for the home country to remain frozen in time and unchanging, the inevitability of change means that home also becomes a foreign country, while simultaneously deeply familiar (stranger in a familiar land)” (p. 248). Every time I visit Macedonia, this alien, panicky inner voice comes out of nowhere as I am going from the airport to my house (my house!), and keeps repeating: “I want to leave, I want to leave.” It is an unsettling feeling; this unexpected and irrational reaction to what I always think would be a happy moment. It is a reverse culture shock, Big Home meeting Little Home, a sudden immersion into a place and culture that is supposed to be my own, but ends up being as unfamiliar and overwhelming as if it is a foreign one, even for a brief moment.

If a personal visit is not possible, a second-best way to ruin the idealized vision of home is by watching television. While studying a group of Turkish immigrants in Germany, Aksoy and Robins (2008) noticed the increased popularity of Turkish satellite

channels in their homes. The rise of what they call “transnational television” is significant in two ways: first, it provides linguistic and cultural connection to the country of origin, and second, it bridges the gap between what is present (the ordinary) and absent (the ideal): “the ‘here and now’ reality of Turkish media culture disturbs the imagination of a ‘there and then’ Turkey --thereby working against the romance of diaspora-as-exile, against the tendency to false idealisation of the ‘homeland’. We might say, then, that transnational Turkish television is an agent of cultural de-mythologization” (p. 312). With disillusionment comes critical thinking. However disappointing initially, the disenchantment with the native home can make me see the place with a fresh eye. I need the distance in time and space to gain perspective on the realities of the old and new home; the former suddenly losing the sheen of perfection, the latter gaining some credibility as a decent place to live. And once in a while, a thought enters my head that perhaps it is not such a terrible thing after all to have more than one place that I can call my home.

## **5.0. TRANSLATING THE TRANSLATOR: LANGUAGE, POETRY AND IDENTITY**

I am not a stranger to translation. Every family dinner with both my parents and my in-laws tends to be an intense translation exercise. I have a sandwich before every meal as a precaution, because once the din of clanking silverware and the deluge of words simultaneously pouring out of people's mouths begins, there is little opportunity for eating. No subject is spared: history, travel, cooking, family relations, politics. I go back and forth, English to Macedonian, Macedonian to English, and quite often English to English or Macedonian to Macedonian, inserting footnotes for clarification as a professional courtesy. By the time the last piece of bread mops the bottom of the plate—we love to eat-- I am exhausted. The family happily goes on to dessert and coffee while I quickly do voice exercises in the kitchen before this international team addresses the economic development of Eastern Europe. I've resigned to the reality that I rarely participate in the conversation as far as sharing a perspective. Eliot Weinberger (2000), a writer and a translator, has written that translators are invisible people. I'm developing a fondness for Weinberger.

I've conducted translation work in more formal settings as well, translating medical and legal documents and interpreting in several legal cases, business meetings and doctors' appointments. There was a sort of detached business efficiency with which I treated these assignments. I considered them a simple transaction: I provided services that were needed at the time, and got compensated for it. Then I stumbled into poetry

translation, an endeavor that not only challenged everything I thought I knew about translation, but also the way I thought about translation.

It all began as a casual conversation between my father, Stojmir Crvenkoski, a poetry enthusiast and a former language teacher, and my mother-in-law, Nola Garrett, a working poet. Eating dinner on my in-laws' patio in Florida, the two of them went into a long discussion on Macedonian poetry (with my assistance, since they don't speak each other's language). The conversation focused on Radovan Pavlovski, a prominent Macedonian poet. My dad suggested that perhaps Nola and I could translate a few of his poems. My dad had lived for a few years at the place of Pavlovski's birth, a fact he used as a way of introducing himself to the poet and later requesting from him, on our behalf, permission to submit the translated poems for publication. I was confident I had all the qualifications to do a reasonable poetry translation: I know both languages well, I have a degree in literature, I read poetry, and I am on good terms with my mother-in-law, a potentially crucial component of this new venture. The next morning, back in Pittsburgh, I e-mailed Nola a basic, line-by-line translation of the poem "Big Man, Small Country." Within an hour, she sent back a more polished version of the translation. I replied with a few more comments. By the end of the summer, we had translated the whole collection by Pavlovski, *God of the Morning* (1991).

What I thought of initially as a purely creative linguistic exercise touched me much more deeply. As a young country in what seems like a permanent process of affirming its identity, Macedonia takes its literature--poetry in particular-- very seriously. Pavlovski is truly a national Macedonian poet. Translating his poems required of me not just to know the languages—the easiest part—but also to be conscious of all the subtleties

of historical allusions, nature/rural references, imagery, metaphors. Weinberger asserts that: “good translations are always a form of advocacy criticism: here is a writer one ought to be reading and here is the proof” (p.4). The strength of Pavlovski’s poetry lies both in his poetics as it does in his role as a national poet. Here is a country one ought to recognize, and here is the proof. This connection between language, culture and identity speaks to me as a Macedonian, and as someone who lives a life across two continents.

While doing translation, I began to think of myself as a translation. I am a Macedonian, but I can be read in English as well. Contemporary migration is better understood as transnationalism, a process that allows for people to maintain social and cultural ties with their home country while at the same time establishing themselves in the host country. I see translation as an important transnational activity, for it creates a bridge between the original work (home country) and the translation (host country). This brought me to consider the connection between language and identity. What is the position of the translated text in connection with its home and host language? Is it a new piece of literature? Where is my identity positioned as a transnational? Does the host language ever become a home?

Joshua Fishman (1996) introduces the term “beloved language,” the language that represents “the throbbing link to one’s own formative cognitive and affective experience of ‘being at home’” (p.38), a language which in most cases is one’s mother tongue. The author explores the ties between “the beloved language” and ethno-linguistic identity by studying the positive attitudes people nurture towards their beloved language (p.48). The impact of the beloved language, which is never used merely for communication, is historical, psychological and emotional. It is historical in a sense that it is both a link to

personal origins (mother or father metaphors dominate descriptions of native languages) and a link among generations. The beloved language, Fishman discovers, is deeply personal and emotional: “we dream in it. In it we resist and accept ourselves. It is in our cries, our screams, our excitement” (p.50). It also satisfies a deeply-embedded social need, for it emphasizes “kinship with a slice of humanity” (p.33) in a way that other modes of social associations do not fulfill.

I used to have an unquestioned loyalty to my native language. I had grown so accustomed to it, that I hardly ever noticed it, like a birth mark or the color of my eyes. Moving to the United States changed that relationship to a degree. Even though I was relatively fluent in English prior to coming here, steeping my daily life in my second language was like entering a very cold pool on a hot day—a bit shocking. As Deutsch (2001) writes: “Because emigration, however right and necessary, permanently strikes the stage set where identity was forged, a role originated, dries up the sea of first language where one swam without having to give conscious thought to the act of breathing” (para. 33). Translation pushed me to further reconsider, if not disturb, my relationship with Macedonian as my “beloved language.” It brought forth this new awareness of language; from a translator’s vantage point, I recognized the language as my own, but the words somehow became less precious.

Rhina Espaillat (1998), an American poet from the Dominican Republic, who writes poetry in both English and Spanish, writes: “Having been taught to love words and take them seriously as reflections of reality, I felt it a loss to learn that, in fact, words are arbitrary, man-made, no more permanent than clothing: somewhere under all of them reality is naked” (p.69). Translation allowed for a more hopeful revelation that languages



may have different words for what is essentially the same human experience. Walter Benjamin (1923) observes: “the kinship of languages is brought out by a translator far more profoundly and clearly than in the superficial and indefinable similarity of two works of literature” (p.2). For example, Nola and I spent some time on translating the poem “Green Market.” We began with the literal translation of the original title as “Market people” or, “People who go to the market.” We also considered: “People going to the market,” but we found it too long and too descriptive. Finally, we settled upon “Green Market.” The color green is abundant at the open air markets in Macedonia—not only are there plenty of fresh (green) vegetables, but the actual metal booths and shelves upon which they are displayed are painted green. Perhaps Farmer’s Market may be more of an equivalent term, but “Green Market” preserved some of the original flavor while sounding natural, we hoped, for the American reader.

These types of negotiations were the essence of our translation process. Literary translation is often charged with the task of answering the unjust question of whether such an act is even possible, while a more appropriate question would be whether it could be done well (Grossman, 2010). Conscientious translators make decisions as to how close to the original text they need to stay, and to what aspects of the text—the form, the tone, the meaning, or some combination of those. Depending on those choices, there can be different versions of the translation (Laird, 2008).

Weinberger suggests that translation is often wrongly considered a failure when it departs from exact equivalence. This misjudgment of the quality of the translation, Weinberger argues, misses the purpose of a translation, which is: “not, as it is usually said, to give the foreign poet a voice in the translation language. It is to allow the poem to

be *heard* in the translation language, ideally in many of the same ways it is heard in the original language” (p.4). Benjamin writes that fidelity and freedom in translation are not conflicting tendencies. A good translation, according to Benjamin, lies in the capacity of the translator to find and release the meaning within the target language, thus creating new spaces and new meanings in the language. Therein lies the originality and creativity in the work of the translator.

Most poetry translation is done in pairs, one person a native speaker of the original, the other of the target language. The reason for that practice became obvious to us early on in the translation process. In a sense, I was in charge of “fidelity” while Nola was striving for “freedom.” Ultimately, we came to a realization that our responsibility lies to the poem itself. We became less territorial. Like concerned parents, we began thinking in terms of making decisions that would allow the poem/child to thrive in the new language environment. I developed a sense, however subjective, of how much improvisation the poem can take. I learned to recognize that not every departure from the literal translation compromises the original. Sometimes, a more creative, less literal translation helps bring the poem to life; it releases the poem *into* the new language.

The act of translation can be an invigorating experience: “Translation liberates the translation language. Because a translation will always be read as a translation, as something foreign, it is freed from many of the constraints of the currently accepted norms and conventions in the national literature” (Weinberger, 2000, p.1). Readers are more open to the strangeness, to the foreign quality in a translated work, because they are prepared to accept a departure from the literary standards to which they are accustomed. People “read” people in a similar fashion. They embrace the strangeness or difference if

they expect it to be there. I was hesitant to buy a pair of shoes, for fear they were too avant-garde. My friend Julie didn't think that was a problem: "You speak with an accent, Natasha. You can wear whatever you want." My foreignness makes it easier for Julie to accept my unconventional footwear choices. Other little freedoms become easier to achieve. Speaking a foreign language creates a subtle detachment. It gives me a quiet permission to say things I may not dare say in my own language, like someone who allows herself an oversized margarita and a loud floral print shirt only while on vacation.

Am I the same person in Macedonian as I am in English? Can a person be translated into a new language, and a new culture? Walt Whitman did not think so: "I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable" (p. 110). The poetry translation was to a great extent a dialogue between two translators as to where to situate the poem so that it conveys the original ideas, imagery, rhythm, feelings, etc. to the reader of English. The translated poem is a version of the original, but it is not the original. There is a level of independence the translation enjoys: "a translated work does have an existence separate from and different from the first text, if only because it is written in another language" (Grossman, 2010, p. 74).

When I speak Macedonian, I sit differently; I make plenty of hand gestures; I turn up the volume (it is what my husband calls "getting my paprika up"). Weinberger writes that translation means change—and things do change when I switch mediums. My English-language persona makes longer pauses between sentences; she uses less irony, more sarcasm; she uses phrases like "give him some space" and "I don't want to talk about it," and she doesn't yell on the phone. Every language has a sort of physical rhetoric attached to it. These may be changes on the periphery, but they ripple deep

down. Each language guides me to frame my thoughts differently, even though they may be the same thoughts. I am a version of myself in each language; the essence is still the same, but the contexts are different. Like a poem, I depend on my readership. My audiences differ in Macedonian and English; their existing frame of reference will direct the way they read me.

These two personas, two language worlds, do not live a separate existence. Their co-existence can get complicated, as Espailat knows first-hand. In several of her poems, she writes about the way her two languages, English and Spanish, interact within her. The languages may represent two different realms, but they don't separate a person in two. In "Bra" she writes: "If only the heart could be worn like the breast, divided/nosing in two directions for news of the wide world." Her poem "Bilingual/Bilingue" talks about her father's insistence that Spanish is the official household language while English is only for the outside world: "But who can divide the world, the word (mundo y palabra) from/any child?" I have a different relationship with English than I have with Macedonian. If the host language is not fully a home, it has certainly become a very comfortable rented house. On occasions when I say a clumsy sentence or when I can't quickly summon the right word for a concept I know so well in my native language, I am reminded that I'm still a tenant. Otherwise, I feel settled in.

Walt Whitman's readership expands far beyond the English-speaking audience. *Leaves of Grass* has been translated in more than 25 languages, such as Spanish, Russian, Finnish, Chinese and Hebrew. Some of the poems in this collection, though not the full book, have been translated in Macedonian. He too is translatable. The world would be a much smaller place if people only read literature in their native language. Literature,

Grossman (2010) writes, as well as translation, “is crucial to our sense of ourselves as humans” (p.32). Both literature and people have a strong social component; they seek a contact, an audience. Literature is a product of people with histories, ideas, and points of view. Translation is not simply a conversion of one language into another, but rather a conversation among people who otherwise may not be in contact: “Translation as a living bridge between two realms of discourse, two realms of experience, and two sets of readers” (Grossman, 2010, p.74). One’s initial thought may be that translation dwells in difference, that the need for it is driven by difference. But, as Benjamin (1923) argues: “languages are no strangers to one another, but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express” (p.2).

Translation enhanced my understanding of poetry and the power of the poetic language. It also pushed me to look at my own language both from a distance, from a standpoint of English, as well as from within. As Grossman (2010) asserts, translation “permits us to savor the transformation of the foreign into the familiar, and for a brief time to live outside our own skin, our own preconceptions and misconceptions. It expands and deepens our world, our consciousness, in countless, indescribable ways” (p. 14). My position as a translator in relation to both languages is one of flux.

That sense of movement, of going back and forth between places and between languages, is familiar to many transnationals. The languages become places, locations with their own geographies, populations and emotions. In “Translating the Self: Language and Identity in Iranian-American Women’s memoirs,” Babak Elahi (2006) conceptualizes language as one’s home, a concept that becomes particularly visible in the lives of immigrants. Elahi, whose family moved to the US when he was four, writes:

“though we had left the country, we continued to speak Persian in our home and at parties and dinners, and language itself became a home, the *andaruni* (inner, private quarters) of Persian, intimate rooms of conversation” (p.461). When living abroad, those private quarters can get smaller with time, and language, “the most portable and yet fragile piece of luggage” (p.462) takes a beating. As if reading my mind, Elahi asks the question that is possibly on the minds of many transnationals: “which one is the truer indication of who I am, the language I first spoke in childhood or the language I most commonly use in my daily life as an adult?...To what extent are our identities liminal, and to what extent is this liminality a function of language?” (p. 462).

What stood out in the memoirs Elahi read was the authors’ use of metaphor in their struggle to make meaning out of their bilingualism and biculturalism. Traveling back to Iran, the “oscillation” (p. 469) between the States and Iran became a significant element in the writers’ quest for understanding how language shaped their identity. One of the women, Gelareh Asayesh, the author of *Saffron Sky* (1999), compared bilingualism to a seesaw. As Elahi observes, the languages’ “access to truth and the richness of their texture can only be experienced in the alteration between one and another tongue, not in the space between or on one side alone” (p. 470). It is what Modaresi (1992) refers to as “accented identity,” which neither insists on a romantic notion of home nor supports a full assimilation.

I speak only Macedonian to my son, Oliver. It feels good to sing him the same songs that I heard when I was his age. It amuses me to catch myself using the same lines my parents used on me when they tried to discipline me. Keeping up with Macedonian is often tough, especially since I am the only one at home who speaks it to him (unless my

parents are in town), while his dad, teachers, friends, television shows, etc all stubbornly insist on English. Some days I get discouraged. I can't translate in Macedonian many of the terms that are such a staple of his daily life—play date, granola bar. Perhaps my motives for teaching him Macedonian are selfish. Espailat (1998) comments:

Nostalgia, a confusion of identity, the fear that if the native language is lost the self will somehow be altered forever: all are part of the subtle flavor of immigrant life, as well as the awareness that one owes gratitude to strangers for acts of communication that used to be simple and once imposed no such debt. (p.68).

I feel that if my son doesn't speak Macedonian, that generational link that Fishman writes about will be lost. He would not be able to speak to his Macedonian grandparents; would not be able to read my recipe notebook, or the legal documents that entitle him to an apartment at Lake Ohrid.

With his blonde hair, light complexion and blue eyes, Oliver stands in sharp contrast to my darker Mediterranean appearance. With the exception of his chin line under a certain light, he has inherited none of my physical features. My friends tease me that I have produced a little American boy. However, being able to communicate with each other in Macedonian is a bond that is unique to us. It makes him more a part of me.

Oliver cooperates—to a point. I speak to him in Macedonian; he replies in English. I greet him with “Здраво!” He responds with: “Hi, mommy.” I inquire: “Како помина денес?” He tells me: “I had a good day.”

The seesaw/oscillation of our daily conversations.

## 6.0. TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES

### 6.1. WEDDING

“But they are all divorced!” exclaimed my mother, after I told her that Channing and I were planning to get married in the summer of that year. By “they” she meant Americans. I rolled my eyes and assured her that I personally knew American couples that were not divorced. The rebellious, independent me dismissed my mother’s concerns as archaic: I was on speaking terms with a few divorced Americans who somehow still managed to conduct perfectly full lives. I also wanted to make my parents happy--the burden of being an only child. Of course we will never get a divorce, I promised my mom.

You don’t even buy a chicken from a bad family, an old Macedonian saying goes. My parents were about to acquire a son-in-law they had never met, from a family they hadn’t even seen pictures of, coming from a country only my mother had visited only once while I was still in graduate school. Channing suggested we should get married in Macedonia, so that my family could plan and enjoy a traditional Macedonian wedding. I was hoping that at least such a gesture would impress my parents, but one can never be sure. Not leaving them with much room to form an opinion, we arrived in Macedonia five days before the wedding. By the time his parents flew in from Florida, two days before the wedding, Chan had already become the proverbial son my parents never had.

Despite—or maybe because of—the language barrier, they got along wonderfully. Chan’s beer was always ice cold and accompanied by a dish of nuts to snack on; a freshly fluffed pillow was immediately placed behind his back whenever he sat down. I thought I was



supposed to be the spoiled one. In return, he obligingly sampled tripe soup, tolerated endless kisses on each cheek by relatives, both male and female, and endured numerous appointments in tiny, smoky offices of various bureaucrats (eating breakfast at their desks), in order for us to get a marriage license. It showed commitment and character, my mom proclaimed.

When people ask me how Macedonian weddings are different from American ones, I tell them that there are two major differences. The first one is that only the Justice of the Peace has the authority to officiate a marriage. It simplifies the planning, and everyone gets the same background for their wedding photos, as well as the same Gypsy children playing the drums in the parking lot in exchange for a few coins. Except this time, these children detected the presence of a foreign groom, and hoping for a bigger tip, exclaimed at him: *Mister! Mister!* Another difference is that *everyone* dances at the reception. The whiskey and wine bottle centerpieces certainly fuel the fervor with which the guests approach the dancing. The music is traditional Macedonian folk. All guests know every song and every dance step, so dance participation at weddings hovers around one hundred percent. My in-laws got a quick lesson from a cousin and happily joined the dancing crowd. Channing had attended numerous parties with the Macedonians in Pittsburgh, so his dancing was on a professional level. Towards the end of the evening, the band played “Oh Susannah” and “When the Saints Go Marching In,” possibly the only songs in English they knew, as their way of honoring the groom and his parents. That was the moment that truly connected both wedding parties, as they abandoned the traditional circle formation and improvised a human dancing train around the band. It was

a wonderful nod to the groom and his family—you danced with us all night, now we are dancing with you.

Perhaps there is a third difference between weddings in the US and Macedonia. While I find American weddings to be formal, solemn affairs, Macedonian weddings tend to have a Shakespearian-comedy quality, a celebration that signifies a resolution, unity and a new beginning. Crying would be out of place. The wedding was certainly a turning point in the lives of our respective families. It brought them together in a tiny Balkan country to celebrate the beginning of our marriage, which in turn transformed our family relations to account for the presence and influence of both our cultures on them.

## **6.2. HUSBAND**

“Any man that marries a woman marries an alien creature,” (p.51) writes Gabrielle Donnelly in her essay “Coming Home” (2000). Donnelly, an Englishwoman from Irish descent, moves from England to the United States, and creates a happy new life in Los Angeles. She finds the contrasts between England and the States exhilarating—the sunny weather, the famous American optimism, the openness and friendliness of people. “I can breathe in Los Angeles (p.48),” she writes. She marries Owen Gerald Bjornstad, “six feet tall and three hundred pounds (he’s trying to diet down to two-fifty) of mostly muscle, with hands like hams and forearms like thighs, a ruddy beard, a rafter-ringing laugh, and a personality to match his size” (p. 49). Her friends in Europe describe him as “very American.” Their different nationalities do not seem to be a cause of discord in the relationship, or at least not more than any other difference between a man and a woman.

Her marriage is yet another confirmation that in America, she has found her physical and spiritual home: “As I have embraced America, so I married an American” (p. 50).

I recognized myself in Gabrielle, and not only because I also married an American. My husband weighs less than 300 pounds (he would find it in bad taste if I revealed his true weight), but I imagine Owen Gerald Bjornstad is a little bit like Channing Nathaniel Garrett: a bearded, good-natured, funny, wholesome Lutheran man, married, literally, to an alien—the technical term for a foreigner in the United States. What resonated with me is Gabrielle’s enthusiasm about her relationship; her refusal to settle for a “tweedy type” because that’s what English women are supposed to do, her confidence that marrying Owen isn’t an assault on her own identity. I was eighteen when I came to the States, and I have been living here for eighteen years, so it felt natural to marry someone from these parts of the world. However, many immigrants look for a spouse in their native country (Panagakos, 2004). A quick mental survey of my foreign friends’ marital status reveals that they have overwhelmingly opted for a spouse of their own nationality or a nationality other than American. My Bosnian friend Mila, who lives in the States and is married to a Bosnian, once told me:

Look, if I married an American, he would never want to travel back to Bosnia. I would not be able to see my family frequently. He wouldn’t understand why I am paying so much money on plane tickets every year. My kids would probably only speak English. I didn’t want that.

The spouse’s nationality plays a significant role in the social and cultural life of a transnational. Scott & Cartledge (2009) have studied assimilation from a standpoint of mixed nationality relationships. Partners from different nationalities, they argue, create a

specific context, a “transnational family milieu” that accelerates the assimilation of the immigrant. According to these authors, first generation migrants experience what they call “extreme assimilation” if their partner is from the host country (p.61). Having a native partner increases the likelihood of the foreign spouse to “go native,” because the family milieu gets firmly grounded in the host country. Mila didn’t think Americans make bad husbands, even though she did share my mom’s concern with the divorce rates in the States. Coming from a very traditional family, she wanted a family structure that would preserve her cultural and linguistic heritage while living in the States, which she could only see possible if she chose a Bosnian husband.

Pesar (2007) observes that “immigrant women are often charged with the responsibility of transmitting and maintaining ethnic traditions” (p. 256). In my household, the transmission and maintenance of ethnic traditions, both American and Macedonian, happen mostly in the kitchen. Fortunately, Channing is a democratic eater. Polenta with feta cheese, tripe soup, spinach pies, aspic, Macedonian bean and smoked ribs stew, all are welcome. I regularly make my mother-in-law’s mac’n cheese, tuna noodle casserole, and scalloped potatoes; I have roasted numerous Thanksgiving turkeys, glazed Easter hams, and baked Christmas cookies. I came to understand cranberry sauce, overcoming my fear of serving fruit and meat together. And speaking of going native, I recently made my first apple pie, for fear that my American citizenship would be revoked if I didn’t. Clichés abound; when Channing told the owner of the New Way Deli, his main source of food, that he was about to marry a Macedonian, he told him: “you are a lucky man. An Eastern European woman will take care of you.” If I didn’t marry you, I would have gone hungry, Chan likes to say.

While Mina looked for a comrade against the invasion of foreign language and culture into her home, I chose to sleep with the enemy. As a result, the family center gravitates heavily towards the States. Every place dictates its own rhythm and routines; having lived in the States for a while makes me the spouse who adopts those routines. If we lived in Macedonia, the burden of adjusting to a Macedonian household would fall on Channing, although I suspect he would happily oblige to some of the customs, like snacking on a salad while sipping one's aperitif with a neighbor.

### **6.3. FAMILY**

Thomas and Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, published in 1918, is the first study of transnational families, long before transnational studies formally existed. However, transnational families have been generally neglected as a research topic in contemporary migration studies (Huang et al., 2008; Scott & Carthledge, 2009). Transnational families are a "specific social reality that deserves attention" (Skrbiš, 2008, p.242); the way these families change over time, as they routinely do, would be another point of interest for students and scholars of transnationalism (Huang et al, 2008).

Nesteruk and Marks (2009) draw attention to the fact that immigrant professionals in particular have become an "invisible" group of transnationals, because of their economic position and resolved immigration status, while transnational literature focuses heavily on lower-income immigrants. Part of the reason for their absence from transnational literature is the perception that they are a group whose choice to move abroad is not driven by economic necessity or desperation. They have the means to travel

and communicate with the family and friends in the home country, making the transnational experience less challenging. Having professional employment and a green card could alleviate, but does not eliminate, the emotional burden of being separated from one's home and family. As Falikov (2005) writes, "it is indisputable that the integrated economies of today allow for much greater transnational activity, and offer an attractive, and at times, deceiving, imagined possibility of living with two hearts rather than with one divided heart" (p. 399).

To understand transnational families better, one needs to consider the role emotions play in establishing a transnational family dynamic: "Migrant stories are linked with the experiences of adjustment, settlement, nostalgia, a shattered sense of belonging, renewal, loss, discrimination, abrupt endings, new beginnings and new opportunities—all potent sources of emotions" (Skrbiš, 2008, p. 236). The author argues that transnational families rely on "emotional labor," a term that was first introduced by Hochschild in her book *Managed Heart* (1983), and was originally used in sociology for face-to-face contact situations at the workplace. The term has later found its use in transnational literature, to demonstrate the emotional work "that allows the generation and maintenance of kin connection to occur across space and time" (Skrbiš, 2008, p. 237). Two key areas that require intensive emotional labor on the part of the transnational families are managing distance and maintaining connections across generations.

#### 6.4. DISTANCE

I attended neither my aunt's nor my grandparents' funerals; I have not attended any of my high school reunions; I wasn't there when my best friend was getting married; I have yet to meet two of my first cousins' children. I have not seen the new apartment my parents bought and moved into at Lake Ohrid.

I e-mail, exchange pictures, chat on-line, and make phone calls to friends and family in Macedonia almost daily. I felt radical this year and sent actual paper Christmas cards to a few friends from high school. They e-mailed me to thank me for the honor.

Transnational families rely on what Wilding (2006) calls "virtual intimacies" (p.126), maintenance of family ties by electronic communication. They make phone calls, write e-mails, use web-cams, send packages. No matter how frequent and how convenient those "virtual intimacies" are, they can not fully replace a personal visit (Urry, 2003). The effects of the trip last far longer than the trip itself. The anxiousness and excitement of booking a flight and packing, the long flight (three or four flights, really), the instant I leave the Skopje Airport building and smell the city air, waking up the next morning mildly disoriented and jet lagged—these are just a few instances that don't lend themselves to electronic transmission. The residual evidence of the trip prolongs the pleasure, but emphasizes the distance as well; unpacking in Pittsburgh a suitcase full of things that look foreign here, but not to me: a jar of ajvar, a bottle of homemade brandy, a few books in Cyrillic, chocolates for my US friends, "all the paraphernalia of separation and nostalgia" (Freed, 2000, p.65). The actual visits are an effective antidote against a sentimental notion of the home country, based on memory

and imagination (Falicov, p.401). Travelling unveils the less glorified picture of my home city; the inability of people to form a semblance of a line in front of passport control; the nosy neighbor; a dumpster brimming with garbage, not all of it in bags; the high school crush who has, let's just say, hit middle age a bit early.

The family members that remain in the home country often experience change in their lives as a result of having relatives abroad. Panagakos (2004) warns: "There is a danger in assuming that sending communities remain static and tradition-bound while migrants navigate more modern scenarios in the adopted country" (p. 300). After her first visit to the States in the late nineties, my mother returned to Macedonia and changed the mealtime at our house (their house?). The main meal in most Macedonian households has typically taken place between 3:30 and 4:00 p.m., after the end of the workday at 3 p.m. Neighbors or friends drop by for coffee and a chat, often unannounced, after 5 p.m. Then we would have a lighter meal around 7:30-8:00 p.m. Eating lunch at 12 p.m. and dinner at 6 p.m. made more sense for my parents, especially after they retired, since it eliminated the late supper. It did not make any sense to all their friends and neighbors, since they had to remember to delay their calls and visits until after 6:30pm, a major shift in the well-established social routine. While the family friends were coping with the schedule adjustments, my mom announced that she would start serving filtered coffee, another development influenced by her trip, and a serious departure from the usual Turkish coffee. Somehow, she still retained her friends. (Mealtimes and coffee rituals have changed in Macedonia since two decades ago—the work day does end later, and many varieties of coffee are readily available, yet another confirmation that home countries are not frozen in the past.)



Baldassar (2007) writes of the challenge transnational families face when managing truth and distance (p. 401). When studying Italian immigrants in Australia, she discovered that the inability of family members to see each other face to face makes them more cautious with the information they are exchanging. Some people tend to hide bad news from their relatives, because they are unable to be physically present to console the recipient of the bad news. I have never told my parents over the phone or e-mail that I am suffering from as much as a sore throat. As far as they know, I am at all times in perfect health, receiving top grades, having fulfilling work days, and getting along wonderfully with my spouse and all the neighbors. And still, every time I am on the phone with my mom, this is what happens:

Mom: Are you OK? You sound a little hoarse.

Me: It's 5 a.m., mom, you just woke me up.

Mom: Is it the sinuses again?

“The success of transnational families, therefore, usually depends upon sacrifice” (Scott & Cartledge, 2009, p. 67). Since the birth of our son, my parents have been staying with us a year at a time. They have recently become permanent residents. They are very happy to be with us, we hope, but at the cost of not seeing other family members and friends while they are in the States. It is a great act of courage for them to leave their own home and spend long stretches of time at our house, in which they are neither guests nor truly residents. It is not pleasant to watch my mom dig out my tulip bulbs so that she can plant tomatoes, because the great famine is coming and every square inch of the yard needs to be planted with vegetables. It is awkward to have my dad tell me that I should probably not sign up for Beginning Guitar when I have a dissertation to finish, and the

only response I have is to remind him that I am an adult while stomping out of the room. At the same time, it is quite satisfying to hear my son Oliver converse with his grandparents, in perfect Macedonian, about how you can't travel to Macedonia in a car. It is fun to have multi-directional, multilingual dinner conversations every night. When I was growing up, it was always just the three of us. This new dynamic, while more populated and a bit louder than I am used to, is lively and enjoyable; some things may be lost (privacy, independence), but what is gained is a new arrangement that benefits all of the family members.

## **6.5 GRANDCHILDREN AND GRANDPARENTS**

The year Chan and I bought our first house, my parents came to visit from Macedonia. This was my dad's first visit to the States; my mom's second. As new house owners, we took pride in having not only a guest bedroom, but practically a guest floor; we spent a week with my in-laws in Florida and took a trip to Washington, D.C. to visit my husband's Uncle Jerry and do some serious sightseeing, with Aunt Lisa as our personal guide. Seven weeks went by fast. Next time you visit, I promised my parents, we will go to Niagara Falls. Next time we visit, my mom retorted, there better be a grandchild in this house.

We obliged.

Three months after Oliver was born, it was time for me to return to work. My mom and dad flew back to Pittsburgh. This time they stayed for a year. “Your parents are staying with you for a year?”—a colleague commented. “I’m so sorry.” “But we want them to stay,” I usually have to clarify. “We come home to a baby that’s fed, changed and powdered up, the dinner is on warm in the oven, the yard manicured beyond recognition, and the laundry folded. They are not allowed to leave.”

Having unlimited assistance with domestic chores is an indisputable advantage, but that’s not the reason for my parents’ extended visits. It would have been unthinkable for them to see their grandson only once a year. Unlike the “recreational caregiving” (Nesteruk & Marks, 2009, p. 86) practiced by most American grandparents, the Eastern European grandparents’ involvement in the daily lives of the grandchildren is a significant part of their culture. In that sense, the Eastern European grandparents are closer to the African-American, Asian and Latino US community, rather than with white families (Nesteruk & Marks, 2009, p.86).

Cherin & Furstenberg (1986, in Nesteruk & Marks, 2009) have written that the most important factors for contact between grandparents and grandchildren are distance, distance, and distance. The physical distance is the most obvious, but not the only obstacle in inter-generational communication. Boss (1999) writes of “ambiguous loss,” a psychological presence of an absent person. For the longest time, my parents’ house was filled with an embarrassing number of photographs of me. “Tone down the shrine,” I would plead when visiting. Once they became grandparents, being away from Oliver for a long stretch of time would probably result in a similar photo overload.

Nesteruk & Marks (2009) also write of linguistic and cultural distance among generations. When choosing a name for our son, we were aiming for a name that would be pronounceable by both sets of grandparents. The strongest motivation to raise him bilingual is so that he can communicate with his grandparents. He has not been to Macedonia yet, but when he goes, I hope that it would be less of a foreign place to him because he will know what people are saying to him; he will be less of an “American boy” to his Macedonian relatives, too. Maintaining bilingualism could be an uphill battle. By age eighteen, second generation bilingualism becomes an exception (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). If the parents share a mother tongue, it may be easier to prolong or prevent the loss of language. In my house, the language gravity shifts—among the “core” group (Chan, Oliver and I), English is dominant; among the Macedonians (grandparents, Oliver and I) it is strictly Macedonian; in all other situations, there is a simply a lot of translation going on.

“As language is dying, children can become, in a sense, ‘strangers’ to parents, even more so to grandparents” (Nesteruk & Marks, 2009, p.89). While the parents are generally bilingual, the grandparents are less likely so. If the child doesn’t stay bilingual, the gap between them widens. That strangeness between relatives who don’t speak the same language was an inspiration for Maurice Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are* (1988). In an interview for *Newsweek*, Sendak explains that the monsters in his book are based on his three uncles and three aunts, “foreigners, lost in America, without language.” (Setoodeh, 2008, para. 4) Second-generation transnationalism is becoming a stronger focus in transnational studies (Levitt & Waters, 2002). Some of the allure of studying this group of transnationals is that they are unpredictable as far as how

“transnational” they will act as they get older (Wessendorf, 2007, p. 1099). Panagakos (2004) and Christou (2006) have written about “root migration” (Wessendorf, 2007, p. 1084), when second generation immigrants return to their parents’ homeland permanently.

The nature of the transnational experience is to change over time; transnationals tend to embrace their “liquid life” (Bauman, 2005) as a way of dealing with the unexpected changes. This flexibility is extended to the other family members: “Being a transnational migrant involves a reconfiguration, although not necessarily a rupture, of existing relationships with family and friends” (Skrbiš, 2008, p.238). Different family members may travel back and forth at different times; the intensity of communication may change over time and among individuals. The very definition of family may expand over time, to a point that “the transnational community is elevated to the pedestal of a national “family member” (Skrbiš, 2008, p.241) and “transnational migrants are transfigured into an imaginary family” (p.241). Even in my everyday life, blissfully devoid of serious fluctuation, the family seems to align and realign repeatedly. I tend to spend most time in the center field of the Venn diagram of my family. I am frequently a part of the “core” family, i.e. my husband and son; other times, I gravitate more towards my parents, to form “the Macedonians,” as my husband calls us, a group that may or may not include the other eight or so Macedonians living in Pittsburgh. The practices and identities of family members also change over time (Huang et al., 2008). These changes are perhaps most visible in my immediate family, but they extend to the grandparents and other family member. My parents have themselves become transnationals. The frequent travels back and forth, our bilingual household, the traditions associated with

Macedonian holidays—those are some parts of our lives that have changed, in however small way, the lives of our family members.

## **7.0 GLOBAL SOULS: PICO IYER, GOGOL BORDELLO AND THE ART OF ACADEMIC TRAVEL**

When I began seriously thinking about transnationalism as a dissertation topic, I turned to contemporary immigrant literature as a way of exploring the emotional aspect of the migration experience. Immigrant literature seems to have a moment in the United States, expanding the usual repertoire of Hispanic-American novels with some emerging voices from Asian-American and Middle-Eastern-American authors. I pored dutifully through books by several authors, such as Jhumpa Lahiri and Ha Jin, among others. Both the subject matter and the often masterful execution of it made the novels a satisfying read, yet I felt that many of them were mainly a variation on Tolstoy's line about unhappy families. In the meantime, I was reading travel essays.

I have been reading travel essays for a few years. Travel literature spoke to me, in context of my research, in unexpected ways. The pleasure of reading about places one has never visited is the obvious allure of travel writing. I sit down with a collection of Best American Travel Essays, and I indulge in adventure-by-proxy, enjoying the scenery and the memorable characters without the lost luggage and the threat of dysentery. What repeatedly drew me back to travel writing is the way travel writers build upon the physical journey to raise bigger questions, questions similar to the ones a transnational may pose: what is our place in the world? What is foreign and what is familiar? Can travel, much like transnationalism, become a journey into oneself?

Pico Iyer has been wrestling with these themes in almost all of his writings. Iyer, a prominent travel writer, novelist, essayist, journalist and a commentator on global

culture, has travelled extensively for the better part of his adult life. Born to Indian parents in England, he was educated in England and the States, and has been living in California and (mostly) Japan. His writing is informed as much by his travels as by his life story:

Growing up, I had no relatives on the same continent as myself, and I never learned a word of my mother's tongue or my father's (because, coming from different parts of India, they had no common language save that of British India). To this day, I can't pronounce what is technically my first name, and the name by which I go is an Italian one (though often mistaken for Spanish, Portuguese, female), mostly because my parents, realizing I'd be living among people foreign to Indian polysyllables, named me after a fifteenth-century Italian neo-Platonist whose name was easy to spell and to pronounce. (Iyer, 2000a, p. 23)

He doesn't look "English" even though he was born in England; he looks equally foreign in California and in Japan, the places where he lives. He doesn't speak any of the languages of India, his ancestral home, nor does he have a sort of a "base" there—nor anywhere else: "I have never bought a house of any kind. I have never voted. I have never supported a nation (in the Olympic Games, say) or represented 'my country' in anything" (Iyer, 1993, p. 17). He acknowledges that such life would not have been possible five decades ago. The flexibility in the logistics of his life and in his national identification are a product of globalization. He is a "full-time citizen of nowhere" (Iyer, 2000a, p.277) because his country of birth, residence and work are three different places, well-connected by technology and convenient transportation. The relative ease of



communication and movement has resulted in a changed world and an emergence of what he calls Global Soul.

Iyer is aware that his lifestyle is unusual and perhaps extreme. He argues, however, that Global Soul is not just a matter of frequent travel and face or accent that is hard to place, because “even though those who don’t move around the world find the world moving more and more around them”(Iyer, 2000b). It is rather a new sensibility, a way of being, a positioning of the self in a context of the whole world. I am reminded of an old friend Milo, a Macedonian who recently moved with his family to Central Europe, to the home country of his wife. Both he and his wife own businesses in the United States while living in Europe. They speak to each other in a language that is not a native tongue to either of them. Their son’s mother tongue, English, is not his mother’s (or father’s) tongue. Somehow, their lives do not seem any more or less complicated than anyone else’s, even though they live/work on two continents, and their languages don’t correspond to their national origin. Wherever they go, at least one member of the family is a foreigner. The concept of what is foreign, Iyer argues, has obtained a less obvious form: “Foreignness has gone underground in our times—become invisible, in a sense—and yet it has never lost its age-old terrors, of being left out or left behind” (Iyer, 2004, p. 196). In the global world, foreignness is less self-evident by one’s appearance or accent, and less exotic, while still attracting interest.

Travel writing, for the most part, captures the transition from familiar to foreign, and back to familiar. In the opening line of his essay “Why we travel,” Iyer (2000b) writes: “We travel, initially, to lose ourselves; and we travel, next, to find ourselves.” I experienced a similar arc as a transnational; as a newcomer to the States, I felt disoriented

for a long time, unsure of whether I was ever saying or doing the right thing. I sleepwalked through my days, unable to shake off the sense that I was playing a role in a movie. I believed everyone around me was an actor. Taught British English at school, I was amused by the flood of American English, the language of movies in my previous life. Going to the grocery store was a visual overload—the bright lights, the unfamiliar layout, the thousands of colorful packages that did not evoke any sense of recognition. Andy Warhol had been lost on me, since, until I came to the States, I had not seen a Campbell soup can.

The differences in the appearance of everyday objects are the first and most obvious signs that we are abroad. In *The Art of Travel* (2002), destined to become a classic (judged by its gold-embossed, faux leather covers), Alain De Botton describes the first moments off the plane at Schipol Airport in Amsterdam. What catches his eye is a seemingly ordinary sign directing travelers to the various gates and ground transportation. However, everything about the sign signaled foreignness: the colors, the typeface, some of the letters used, indicated that the writer was in a foreign land: “a plug socket, a bathroom tap, a jam jar or an airport sign may tell us more than its designer intended; it may speak of the nation that made it” (p. 67). Ordinary objects become extraordinary in the eyes of the outsider. I recall crossing on foot The Rainbow Bridge, from the American to the Canadian side of the Niagara Falls. Indeed, at the end of the bridge, I felt as if I were abroad, a feeling not entirely owing to the seriousness of the passport control officers. The landscaping around the Falls, the types of flowers and shrubs planted, the menus displayed outside the restaurants, the double-decker bus, the change machine--- they were all a powerful evidence that I was not in the States any longer.

The effects of the transition from a familiar to a foreign place ripple deep down, for it is not just the body that gets transported:

The travel spins us round in two ways at once: It shows us the sights and values and issues that we might ordinarily ignore; but it also, and more deeply, shows us all the parts of ourselves that may otherwise grow rusty. For in traveling to a truly foreign place, we inevitably travel to moods and states of mind and hidden inward passages that we'd otherwise seldom have cause to visit. (Iyer, 2000b)

Stripped from our usual context, we slip out of our old self, or perhaps deeper into it. In a sense, we are free from our past, or at least, as newcomers, we don't have a past to connect us to the new locale, no reference points. This can be invigorating, or very disconcerting, or both. A Iyer (2004) writes: "It is the foreigner's plight, perhaps, to find himself a detective, as well as an actor, always on the lookout for signs and prompts" (p. 195); an actor, for outsiders often tend to mimic the language and the behavior of the new place; a detective, for they always search for anchors, familiar elements, something to grab on to. After a share of acting and snooping, almost imperceptibly, the strangeness around us fades. The hieroglyphs that puzzled us before crystallize into recognizable shapes. The locals don't look at us funny any longer.

One day during the first months of my life in States, at the opposite end of town from where I lived, I bumped into someone I knew, a friend of a friend from class. I was elated. The only people I had run into before were my classmates, and the only places that I had such spontaneous encounters were my immediate surroundings, like the college campus or the neighborhood around it. Suddenly, I had a claim to a piece of Pittsburgh, and a Pittsburgh face, that was previously not a part of my geography. This seemingly

trivial moment felt like a small victory against the foreignness of the city, and against my foreignness in it.

Once all the strangeness of a place rubs off, the place can eventually become a home. As Iyer explains: “To some extent, home is whatever doesn’t have the glamour and exoticism to one—whatever doesn’t get one’s pulse racing“ (London, n.d.). To a Global Soul, such close familiarity could be ascribed to more than one place. There are two choices one can make, Iyer proposes. The first choice is to not feel fully at home anywhere, because you don’t fully belong anywhere. The second, and more attractive option is, since you don’t fully fit in anywhere, rather than feeling out of place, to feel equally at home everywhere (London, para. 11). It is an elegant solution for a world traveler and a travel writer like Pico Iyer. It may be an answer to a transnational’s perpetual question: Where is my home?

For a Global Soul like Iyer: “home is essentially a set of values you carry around with you and, like a turtle or a snail or whatever, home has to be something that is part of you and can be equally a part of you wherever you are” (London, para. 6). In the closing paragraphs of *The Global Soul*, Iyer describes a dream in which he and a few of his close friends and his girlfriend Hiroko are spending a lazy Sunday afternoon in an old house in England (the country that he considers the least exotic for him, and hence closest to his definition of home). Being in a place that offers the comfort of familiarity and being with the people he loves brings the author a strong sense of what it feels like to be at home, a sense that he finds hard to articulate while awake (Iyer, 2000a, p.298). While it is getting increasingly more possible to claim more than one geographical location as one’s home, or none at all, the close connections with people make one feel grounded. Iyer also argues

that such connections, especially among people from different national or racial backgrounds, are a postmodern response to the traditional divisions: “I seem to see as many couples dissolving nationalities as other kinds of distinctions, and so bringing to light unimaginable new cultures in which the annihilation of traditional identity is turned into something higher” (Iyer, 2000a, p. 292). As someone once told Iyer, such relationships may be the future of humankind, since “It’s not possible to hate your grandson” (Iyer, 2000a, p. 23). Watching my parents interact with Oliver, I wholeheartedly agree.

The changed (and changing) interconnected world has allowed for a greater possibility and acceptance of such hybrid relationships. It has also opened up new creative spaces in which artists can produce works that are a commentary on the contemporary human condition. Such creative pieces are often informed and inspired by the personal background of the artist. These writers’ works build upon classical forms and infuse them with exotic flavors; such amalgamation of the traditional with the foreign inspires Iyer (1997) to name this informal group of artists Tropical Classical. The innovative element in their approach is that:

such writers are not merely bringing two worlds together, as migrant writers have always done; they are trying to put the realities of our multinational present into the established structures of the past; to link the tradition of our textbooks with the changing societies around us. (p.124)

Some of the writers he considers to be Tropical Classical are the poet Derek Walcott, the novelist Michael Ondaatje and the essayist Richard Rodriguez. These writers have chosen not only to make peace with their past and their present, but place them in conversation

with one another. These authors have demonstrated a creative way to deal with the questions of identity/ belonging and foreign/familiar, while rising above the dichotomies. I consider the band Gogol Bordello to be the musical equivalent of Tropical Classical.

Gogol Bordello is a gypsy-punk band that was formed in New York City in 1999. It is a brainchild of Eugene Hutz, a Ukrainian of Gypsy heritage, who left his native Kiev after the Chernobyl disaster. After spending a few years in refugee camps around Europe, he ended up in New York City, where he formed Gogol Bordello. The band is a reflection of the multicultural mentality of the city—the members of the band come from Russia, Ecuador, Israel, Ukraine and the United States. They are the first band to officially use the term gypsy punk to describe their music: punk being already a well-established part of the music cannon (Classical), merged with the ethnic sounds of Eastern Europe (Tropical). While the music influences include other flavors, such as reggae, salsa and ska, the driving force remains to be the Gypsy element: “our anchor dropped somewhere around the Black Sea,” as Hutz explains. (Cooper, n.d.)

Grounding their music approach in punk, the band has made it easier for its audience to accept the foreign/ethnic elements. A similar approach was practiced by Nikolai Gogol, whose name the band adopted. Gogol, known as the father of Russian realism in literature, was born in Ukraine but lived most of his life in St. Petersburg. Hutz finds him inspiring, for “he smuggled Ukrainian culture into European literary consciousness at a time when our language and mythology were forbidden by the Russian Czarist regime.” (Labruce, 2005) Hutz’s war against the homogeneity of Western culture and music by importing foreign sounds is a significant part of his artistic mission: “Gogol’s genius came from his transnational mentality. He wrote in Russian but used

Ukrainian syntax...that's what we want to do with Gogol Bordello—introduce a foreign sound and drop it like a raging, decadent, renaissance bomb”(Labruce, 2005). Like Gogol, who injected unrefined realism in the Russian literary Romanticism, and like the Tropical Classical authors Iyer identifies, Gogol Bordello gives an artistic rendition, as well as an analytical and critical analysis in the moment in history in which they live. As to the “Bordello” part of the band’s name, Hutz has not offered any official explanations. One can stipulate that it is a symbol of the band’s refusal to be faithful to any particular genre, or a particular audience.

Uncle Jerry, my husband’s uncle from Washington, D.C. saw the band a few years ago, bought its CD and played it for us at his house. Spontaneous circle dancing ensued, similar to the traditional wedding dances of Macedonia. It was probably the first time that both the Macedonians and the Americans could relate to the music with equal intensity—and ease—because each of us could identify with some elements of it. Gogol Bordello is easy to love. After all, Eugene Hutz, who has “perhaps the finest mustache this side of the ‘70s,” is often described as “charismatic and unapologetically larger than life,” (Rabinovitch, 2010) qualities that have let him into the world of movies and fashion. He has had roles in *Everything is Illuminated* and *Filth and Wisdom*, and has been a subject of a documentary, *The Pied Piper of Hutzovina*. Hutz is cited as the “key inspiration” for the Fall 2008 Gucci menswear line (Classical). He often wears second-hand clothes that he personalizes with belts and Gypsy jewelry (Tropical).

My initial attraction to the band was the music; it was energetic, it was fun, and the Eastern European flavor of it hit me in a very primal way. Then, I began paying attention to the lyrics, a challenging task, since they are sometimes in Russian (Tropical)

and often peppered with obscenities (Classical—in the punk genre). However, once the listener shifts through the noise and the curses, there emerges a wonderful depiction of the New York City immigrant scene and a vision for an equivalent of Iyer’s Global Soul. Much like Iyer sees himself as a part of an “intercontinental tribe of wanderers,” (Iyer, 1993, p.13) Hutz, in a far more flamboyant manner, proclaims in the song of the same title: “I am a wonderlust king!” (Gogol Bordello, 2007, track 2). Hutz sees travel as a right of passage, an education; unlike the “scarecrows in hometown” who, “from screen to screen they’re travelling,” he needs to experience the world directly:

I traveled the world  
Looking for understanding  
Of the times that we live in  
Hunting and gathering first hand information  
Challenging definition of sin.

In the classic tradition of punk music, Gogol Bordello speaks against the injustices of the contemporary migration policy. Their song, “Immigrant Punk,” (Gogol Bordello, 2005, track 4) often considered a foundation of the Gypsy Punk movement, speaks for the many undocumented immigrants in New York City and other places: “Legalize me! Realize me!” Hutz speaks from experience: “I spent seven years without being a citizen of any country. I had to give up my citizenship in the Ukraine in order to get out and I was not accepted as a citizen of the US until 1996. So I know how that feels.” (Cooper, n.d.) The road to a legal status is rarely easy; Hutz ridicules the bureaucracy “was your grandma anti-...they ask in embassy,” (Gogol Bordello, 2007, track 4) and the often questionable treatment of the immigrants:



and after getting checked for fleas  
and barricades of embassies  
I would never never never never  
wanna be young again. (Gogol Bordello, 2005, track 2)

The frustration with the current state of migration, however, is being channeled into a positive, humanistic vision of the way things should be. In several songs, the band sings of a “tribal connection” among people, a brotherhood/sisterhood among equals: “My brothers are protons/my sisters are neurons/ stir it twice, it’s instant family!” (Gogol Bordello, 2007, track 4). The band’s lack of a single geographical center has worked to the musicians’ advantage in crafting music that critiques the current system, while offering a powerful, affirming message about the dignity of the human being. The music becomes a way to freedom, particularly creative freedom: “the forces of the creative mind are unstoppable” (Gogol Bordello, 2005, track 8). The extensive travel (the band tours internationally for the better part of the year; Hutz has been living in Brazil in the past several years) and the various ethnic backgrounds of the band members have allowed for the band to be equally accepted in Istanbul as well as in Helsinki. Perhaps Hutz’s wish, “I want to walk this Earth like it is mine,” as declared in the song “Tribal Connection” (Gogol Bordello, 2007, 8), has been fulfilled.

Writing essays on transnationalism required of me the nimbleness of a traveler. The essays move among events in my life that happened across different times and spaces. Some pieces, like the one on transnational families, are grounded in memory and imagination. Writing them required significant emotional involvement. Others rely more heavily on academic research. All essays integrate the personal and the scholarly, the

emotional and the intellectual. The essays necessitate a reader who has the agility to embrace simultaneously elements from literature, poetry, history, sociology, and other disciplines. Said (1994) sees such flexibility as a way to academic freedom:

our model for academic freedom should therefore be the migrant or the traveler: for if, in the real world outside the academy, we must needs be ourselves and only ourselves, inside the academy we should be able to discover and travel among other selves, other identities, other varieties of the human adventure. But, most essentially, in the joint discovery of self and Other, it is the role of the academy to transform what might be conflict, or contest, or assertion into reconciliation, mutuality, recognition, and creative interaction. (p.227)

The transnational and the traveler dwell in the tension between the strange and the familiar, the Other and the self. They know, however, not to hold those seemingly opposing notions too precious. What used to be strange can become as familiar as one's childhood bedroom; what we consider the Other can revert into parts of self we never imagined we had. As a transnational, a translator, a member of a transnational family, an international student advisor, a student and a scholar, I strive to bring languages, cultures, disciplines, people and ideas on speaking terms with one another. It is in the midst of that conversation, in that very exchange, that I feel most at home.

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