

Transnationalism, Identity and Material culture in the Finnish-Lithuanian and Greek-Lithuanian Families¹

Akvilė Motuzaitė, University of Turku

Summary

Ethnically mixed marriage can be of different types and in various cultural circumstances. Union between members of different ethnic majorities refers to different partners' nationality and identity. Such family's life combines elements of different cultural swirl and obtains transnational attribution. This condition usually is evoked when one partner moves abroad into the husband/ wife's social circle and more or less different cultural environment.

Family's home carries different cultural meanings and can be seen as a reflection of family identities. A woman usually is the main home creator and developer of its cultural side that involves various artefacts. In the research cases of mixed families the majority of women were Lithuanian living with Finnish and Greek husbands in urban residences of Finland and Greece. The research focused, if and how such families' home environment reflects different partners' ethnic identities and cultural elements referring to it. The combination of different material elements and artefacts signals traces of transnational family's culture.

Research results reveal that some Lithuanian women find it important to display objects and artefacts referring to their ethnic identity and culture. These items do not necessarily indicate mere different nationality but demonstrate cultural elements that make a link to Lithuania – its culture and native social circle: family and friends. The artefacts mentioned by women and noticed at homes can be preliminary grouped according to their function as follows: aesthetic (e.g. art pieces like reproductions of M. K. Čiurlionis paintings), symbolic (e.g. a flag of Lithuania), representative (e.g. photo-albums about Lithuania, different Lithuanian food products for treating), sentimental (e.g. Lithuanian native family belongings, photos), educational (e.g. Lithuanian books for children). Such and similar cultural elements strengthen aspect of transnationalism in the mixed family's home environment and life.

Introduction

When visiting Lithuanian friends living abroad, I could notice some items or artefacts referring to their home country. This was a sign that the present home abroad transmitted ties with Lithuania and those people expressed a fraction of their cultural identifications. Such elements could be found in single people's rooms or at the Lithuanian families. Later I wondered, what about the room spaces of mixed couples or families? Do they keep them ethnically "neutral", or are there any material reflections of spouses' different cultural identifications?

Generally, home environment carries different cultural meanings and can be seen as a reflection of family members' identities. It can refer to social status, economical potentials, individual taste, and perceptions of aesthetics, fashion trends, and personal inclinations. Both partners can participate in creating the home environment, or some seek for professional solutions. It can be affected by global market, local or international industries, and popular designs, which standardize spaces in certain ways. The aesthetic uniqueness often is reached by selecting and fitting particular elements. A woman often plays an important role in adding

¹ The paper is based on the research material and study for a doctoral thesis.

and developing this material home side that involves various artefacts – these are usually bigger or smaller decorative or practical objects. This female “touch” can be more variant, when she is “different” from her present social circle and have other cultural backgrounds than of majority.

Research Context

According to the data of the Lithuanian Statistics Department, mixed marriages between Lithuanians and other nationals comprised about 15 percent of the total number of all marriages registered in Lithuania in the year 2014. (See Lietuvos statistikos departamentas: *Susituokusieji*.) Similar or a bit smaller number of such wedded couples has been registered since the year 2000. In the majority of the cases, the Lithuanian women chose a foreign partner. Still, it must be noted that the official data gives just a partial picture of the social movements. As it has been mentioned somewhere else (see Motuzaitė 2011: 38), since the year 2003 Lithuanian statistics is based just on the partners’ nationality indicated by a passport and it does not reflect their ethnic identity, which may vary from the citizenship (e.g. members of different ethnic minorities). Also, some Lithuanians may not have declared their marriage and place of residence abroad to the Lithuanian institutions. Thus, the statistics reflect reality only partially. Still, these social changes are obvious and very relevant from the ethnocultural point of view because they do affect the sending and host societies in various aspects.

Lithuanian “love emigrants” (as it has been named by the mass media) are spread unevenly all over the world. This research was limited by focusing on two European countries: Finland and Greece. They are not the countries with the biggest number of mixed marriages involving Lithuanians. Since the year 2000 Lithuanian register reports an average of 11 marriages annually to Finnish citizens and about 20 marriages annually to Greeks. The majority of these marriages involve Lithuanian women married to Finnish or Greek men. Just a few Lithuanian men have Finnish or Greek wives from the perspective of the last 15 years. This social tendency determines gender aspect of the research.

The quantitative factor is only one of the reasons to make gender based distinction when choosing research participants. Another factor is the presumably different women’s and men’s roles having distinctive cultural weight within the family. The fact that the female partner is a foreigner creates a context for intercultural and transnational processes. A woman as an immigrant has to go through various cultural processes of adaptation, acculturation, and integration within the new social environment. J. Itzigsohn and others have pointed that gender matters in the analysis of immigrant incorporation. The experiences of immigrant men and women share a lot in common as they confront similar challenges, but are also affected differently by the most relevant factors in the process of incorporation and transnational participation. (Itzigsohn et al. 2005: 895)

Although there are no many Lithuanians residing in the chosen countries, Finland and Greece are interesting as two opposite poles of Europe with distinct socio-cultural life and traditions. Research participants were met mainly in three cities – Turku and Helsinki in Finland and Athens in Greece. All the material has been collected from Lithuanian women, who can be

described as city dwellers. Most of them have lived also in urban areas of Lithuania before moving abroad, so their cultural environment had urban characteristics as well.

Transnationalism

Material home environment gains specific cultural weight in the context of transnationalism. Mixed family's transnational potential is a factor that can be beneficial for various cultural expressions in the living space. Since the majority of mixed families reside in urban areas, they directly influence urban culture in different levels. Transnational home spaces created can be seen as one of the cultural outcomes within urban cultural swirl. Correlation between families and urban cultures has been emphasized by the anthropologist Anna Marie Wattie, who notes that urban families are as both culture resources and complex mirrors of modern life. (Wattie 2006: 6-7)

Transnationalism as a segment of the cultural flow is exceedingly relevant in the modern times. Physical migration internationally can strongly expand such experiences. Despite the diversity and possible multiplicity of the cultural channels or resources, transnationalism is embraced differently depending on the individual cultural world that is also unique and complex. Many people are affected by the transnational cultural flow from various channels and in different levels. The individual experiences come out because of people's unique cultural worlds influenced by different resources of transnationalism. New diversiform cultural products can be based on these experiences, especially when the transnational effect is intense.

Transnational acts can be developed and externalized in different forms, depending on individual experiences, sociocultural status, and other circumstances. As Vertovec has pointed, transnationalism may be "broad" or "narrow" and may vary over time, depending on the intensity of exchanges and communication (Vertovec 2001: 576). José Itzigsohn and Silvia Giorguli-Saucedo identified three explanations for transnational participation, which refers to physical migration and immigrants: (1) the "linear transnationalism" argues that transnational practices are the result of the ties that link immigrants to their families and places of origin. Immigrants send remittances, travel home, and build ethnic institutions within the host countries in order to maintain their social relations with and their involvement in their place of origin; (2) the "resource-dependent transnationalism" affirms that immigrants try to reconstitute their linkages to the country of origin, but they cannot do that immediately upon migrating because the lack of resources; and (3) the "reactive transnationalism" views transnational practices as a reaction to a negative experience of incorporation (Itzigsohn et al. 2005: 899). In different migrants' cases, transnationalism takes different forms in various levels and intensity. Even in the similar social context it may be developed very intensively and using various channels or it can be reduced to the minimum. This is a permanent process. Its development can be changing and modified depending on subjective or objective circumstances. As Itzigsohn with Giorguli-Saucedo has pointed, incorporation and transnationalism are concurrent processes (Itzigsohn et al. 2005: 900).

Cultural reproduction obtaining elements of transnationalism can appear to a smaller or bigger extent in everyday life and family life. It can be reflected in the material environment of the home, everyday rituals, leisure habits, and family or public festivals. People's individual

choices are often directly or indirectly influenced by the transnational channels and gradually become a part of their environment and culture. It results forming and appearance of various cultural elements with characteristics of syncretism and creolization. These processes are relevant to bigger or lesser degree in different groups of society, depending on individual choices, values, and influences of cultural flows. Transnationalism has stronger influence within more heterogeneous societies, especially in the urban or metropolitan environment. Dense and multiple cultural fluxes shape people's cultural worlds and identities. Another condition for more intensive transnational processes is heterogeneous, or mixed families. Smooth family life requires certain cultural organization. In the case of intermarriage, different partners' ethnic identities with specific cultural backgrounds prompt a formation of certain cultural strategies. Different strategies would be shaped by the cultural family life within the transnational context.

Transnationalism and Mixed Marriage

Certain circumstances may be as an impetus for transnational experiences, i.e. individual migration and mixed marriage. In the case of mixed marriage, transnational aspect gets different forms and intensity because mixed marriage can be of different types and in various sociocultural circumstances. The distinction between ethnic identity and nationality (or citizenship) becomes relevant in the mixed family's context when the transnational aspect is under focus. These factors determine heterogeneous marriage in a simplified view as follows: it may be partners' different ethnic identity but citizenship shared; may be different partners' ethnicity and citizenship, or just the citizenship could be the "distinguishing" factor in some cases. Also, there are individuals with double citizenship or even mixed ethnic self-attribution. The indication of these few identity elements does not deny complexity and multiplicity of individual and shared identities. This primitive distinction helps to consider, in which context of mixed marriage transnational aspect may gain more relevance. The very term "transnationalism" suggests that the cultural ties crossing national borders are under main focus. Thus, the mixed marriages involving partners with different ethnic and national identities have greater transnational potentials.

Mixed family's life combines elements of diverse cultural background and obtains transnational aspect in various levels and different intensity. This condition usually is developed and intensified when one partner moves abroad and settles within the husband/wife's social circle surrounded with more or less different cultural environment. In other words, cases of marriage migration get under focus when at least one of the partners has to move to another country (see Bailey and Boyle 2004: 237). This factor of migration brings a person into similar circumstances like the migrants who are not married to locals. Sometimes the foreign partner may have lived in the partner's country before their acquaintance and marriage. In this case, the person has already gone through acculturation and adaptation processes. Even so, marriage and marital life generate some new socialization forms that must be adopted by the foreigner for smoother integration into the particular social circle. Emigration and mixed marriage bring the individual into multiple social environments: he/she has to build ties within the building his/her social circle and to recreate connections with the sending society. In some cases, the connections are being kept also with other places at the

same time, e.g. when both partners are originated from different countries and the place of residence is foreign for both of them or when their family members are spread in different countries.

As mentioned, the migration factor prompts changes of the previous social ties and building of new ones in the host society which mutate as well. This is a constant process but there are periods when it may become more intensive: the first years after resettlement and later after liminal societal changes like marriage, newborn arrival, baptizing, etc. According to P. Levitt and B. N. Jaworsky, migration has never been a one-way process of assimilation into a melting pot or a multicultural salad bowl but one in which migrants, to varying degrees, are simultaneously embedded in the multiple sites and layers of the transnational social fields in which they live. Patterns of assimilation, acculturation, and integration vary depending on the country and context of departure, immigrant characteristics, immigrant enclave capacities, and the political, social, and economic context of the sending and host communities (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007: 130). As the authors summarized, more recent scholarship understands transnational migration as taking place within fluid social spaces that are constantly reworked through migrants' simultaneous embeddedness in more than one society. These arenas are multi-layered and multi-sited, including not just the sending and the receiving countries but other sites around the world that connect migrants to their compatriots and coreligionists. Both migrants and nonmigrants occupy them because the flow of people, money, and "social remittances" (ideas, norms, practices, and identities) within these spaces is so dense, thick, and widespread that nonmigrants' lives are also being transformed even though they do not move (Ibid.: 131-132). In the case of marriage migration, the foreign partner goes through all these processes of various degrees and may be even in stronger cultural implications. Marital ties with a member of other society bring the woman into the depth of the other social circle and condition a need to build a certain relationship within it. Simultaneously, connections with the family and friends left in other country or countries are being reshaped constantly. As it is stated in the Background Paper of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), being connected to several places at once – or "being neither here nor there" – has long been a defining feature of the experience of being a migrant. Leading transnational, multi-sited lives means that exchanges and interactions across borders are a regular and sustained part of migrants' realities and activities. Every migrant can be an agent as well as a subject of transnationalism, engaging in transnational activities and practices to a greater or lesser degree. This does not mean that all aspects of an individual migrant's life are of a transnational character (IOM 2010: 1-2).

Transnational migrant's life includes elements of cultural adaptation, acculturation, integration, identity negotiation and cultural reproduction. It stimulates constant revision of cultural values and strategies in different social contexts. Foreign partner within mixed marriage is coming into more or less different cultural environment which can make weaker or stronger pressure for incorporation and adaptation. Even without stronger external influence, deeper socialization cannot happen without sufficient acculturation. At the same time, self-identification is challenged and the personal cultural world is going through various transformations. According to Steven Vertovec, transnationalism and identity are concepts that inherently call for juxtaposition. This is so because, on the one hand, many peoples' transnational networks are grounded upon the perception that they share some form of

common identity often based upon the place of origin and the cultural and linguistic traits associated with it. On the other hand, among certain sets of contemporary migrants, the identities of specific individuals and groups of people are negotiated within social worlds that span more than one place (Vertovec 2001: 573).

Cultural provocation of divergent elements and gradual integration in the foreign environment stimulates a need for identity reconstruction. This identity consolidation is important for an individual in order to find cultural balance and position within the new environment and society. Identities are unique and complex, obtaining also elements of shared identities and various common identity points of contact with different individuals or groups of persons. Thus, a migrant searches for ways to strengthen important self-identification elements in the given context or situation, and transnational channels are the main tools for the identity construction. Such identity reformation may be periodically slower or faster but it is a permanent process leading towards greater cultural integration in the social place of resettlement. Every migrant may find different cultural aspects important for the strengthening of self-identification: some elements may be shared by groups of migrants, others may be unique. Finally, migrant creates an individual combination of shared and unique elements that are considered important for the identity reconstruction and maintenance. In this way, certain cultural strategies are being shaped defining the chosen ways. These processes are directly relevant in the cases of marriage migration. Inter-marriage conditions an immediate contact with the partner's social world in the smallest cultural unit of home and family up to the closer social environment and wider society.

Methodology

The main ethnographic material was collected using the semi-structural interview method in the period of the years 2009-2011. Seven women agreed to give an interview in depth in Finland and eighteen – in Greece. Such numerical difference occurred because of different periods of research in these two countries. When I came to Greece to collect the material, my personal life developed in the way that I also was recently married to a Greek man. In that period we decided to move from England to Athens and reside there for a while. So, I had a chance to meet more potential interviewees and make research arrangements with them. In order to balance the sources quantitatively, questionnaire method was applied electronically just in Finland. Two women and one man married to Finnish partners responded. The mixed marriage was the first marriage for the most of the informants. Few women were still preparing for their wedding in Greece, but they knew most of the details and could comment on their decisions or dilemmas. The collected material was studied following principles of qualitative analysis.

As it became clear, my position as a researcher was shifting during the period of doing ethnography. I began to study this topic as a complete outsider but gradually I became in a similar position as my informants were in. This situation helped me to find key questions and problematics of the subject. Besides, I could gain more trust from the informants since I was becoming "one of them". It could seem to someone that the research was losing validity because I could not "get out" from the field into my initial position of outsider. Here, I would refer to M. Peirano, who reviewed the development of anthropology as a science and its

returning “home”. According to her, there are many meanings to the expression “anthropology at home,” the most obvious of which refers to the kind of inquiry developed in the study of one’s own society, where “others” are both ourselves and those relatively different from us, whom we see as part of the same collectivity (Peirano 1998: 105-114). Thus, my role became dual: I was entering into the Lithuanian community of Athens and enquiring women as an outsider, but slowly I became one of them. Later, after I made my ethnography, I was glad to remain there merely as an individual in a similar social context.

Material Culture of Home Environment

Material environment is a form of cultural expression and identification. The home environment is a kind of reflection of family members’ culture and identities – its values, interests, aesthetic perception and some behavioural patterns. As Antanas Daniliauskas has pointed, the interior of dwelling rooms involves phenomena of material and spiritual culture (Daniliauskas 1970: 61). It also depends on different contexts like economic, social status, cultural belonging and self-attachment, occupational and individual inclinations. The home environment is influenced by the global and local industries, market, fashion tendencies, economic potential and individual competencies and taste. It is shaped by complex aspects and nuances. Modern interiors often are formed using commodities offered by various smaller or bigger industries. International industries and global market influence people’s home environment in wide areas of the world. For instance, Swedish “IKEA” stores are spread internationally and one can find the same items in different homes all over the world. This aspect partly can be applied for the home decoration as well because these “all for home” industries offer practically “ready to move in” room furnishing and decorations. Still, smaller decoration items as well as other movable house interior elements often have different origins and are picked according to the house dweller’s intentions. In this way, the home interior can be often characterized as hybrid and combining transnational elements. Although the authenticity can be hardly sought in the modern material goods despite their origin, the choices made by their owners are worth attention. The material home environment and its elements may give certain reference to people’s cultural inclination and identification. As D. Miller has noted, “once consumer goods are thought of as a symbolic system then this opens up the possibility for in some ways “reading” society itself through the pattern found among goods” (Miller 2006: 346).

Especially it is interesting to notice the interior items purely for decoration or consumables. These elements give a certain message on the mixed family members’ identity and cultures. The focus on the material home environment can reveal if the items exhibit transnational side of the family’s cultural life, the foreign woman’s cultural inclinations, and identifications. As it was said somewhere, innovation is much less dependent on the creative individual than on the interaction within the social milieu. Such milieux appear to function best when they incorporate heterogeneous actors, e.g. mixed family members, and are not closed systems but exposed to serendipitous encounters and exchanges with others actors and milieu, like local social circle and native family in the country of origin. Thus, the miscellaneous social

connections in transnational level and mixed family members' cultural complexity can be reflected in the material environment of different forms.

I. Akstinavičiūtė and D. Petraitytė made a research on what material items and symbols would be considered as an expression of the Lithuanian identity and would be “used” by Lithuanians as identity consolidating. They focused on the Lithuanians' homes in their native country. According to the researchers, the symbols in sight evoke certain senses that bring memories and experiences that act as identity constructing elements. Generally, Lithuanians pointed mostly to the amber ware, linen tablecloths, books about Lithuanian history and ceramic artefacts (69.1%, 60.7%, 60.1% and 57.8% accordingly), which are exposed in their homes. The most unpopular identity symbols mentioned by the respondents were town blazons, wooden spinning wheels and Lithuanian blazon (10.6%, 17.8%, and 19.4% accordingly). The conclusion is that the Lithuanian identity is constructed on the ethno-cultural basis (see Akstinavičiūtė and Petraitytė 2007: 27-28).

The context of emigration and mixed marriage, however, may impart different meanings and material expressions. Research results reveal that some Lithuanian women do not find it important to include any objects in their home abroad, which would exhibit a link to their homeland particularly. As one interviewee pointed, she did not like to demonstrate her [identity]. “I know who I am and I shall never change even if I would wish to. I am from there (Lithuania) and I am such a person” (Interview No. 3.GR-LT). Ethnically different partners' identities are not exposed obviously and it is latent referring to the material home environment. It can be seen as certain cultural strategy – not to emphasize one's identity and keep it implicit in the foreign environment. Still, it may be expressed in other occasions or particular circumstances and can have different forms. Another woman formulated this way: “when I am in Lithuania – I want to be a Lithuanian, but when I am in Greece – I want to be a Greek. I never try to stand out. [...] I always try to conform to the environment” (Interview No 7. GR-LT). Such perspective is a strategic choice to conceal one's identity or re-construct it depending on circumstances. The individual may hide some part of her culture in some cases and reveal it in certain situations. The same woman remembered how emotionally she was explaining the history of Lithuania when some Greek man denominated it a part of Russia. The transnational cultural aspect may have diverse or fluid modes, which are also contextual and situational. However, it is driven by the cultural strategies applied individually in the particular sociocultural context.

Still, the majority of the Lithuanian women find it important to have material objects at home, which would refer to their ethnicity and culture. These items and artefacts have different meanings: some primarily signify national attribution and other are important as cultural elements that make more direct or symbolic link to Lithuania, its culture and native social circle: family and friends. The artefacts mentioned by women and noticed at homes can be preliminary grouped according to their function and meaning as follows:

- aesthetic or artistic (e.g. art pieces like reproductions of M. K. Čiurlionis paintings, Lithuanian graphics works, Lithuanian literature, wooden statuettes, ceramic souvenirs),
- symbolic (e.g. a flag of Lithuania, amber pieces, girl's figure dressed in national costume),

- representative (e.g. photo-albums, a DVD film about Lithuania, different Lithuanian products for treating),
- sentimental (e.g. native Lithuanian family belongings, gifts, family photos, photo-pictures of native places),
- educational (e.g. Lithuanian books, toys for children, dictionaries).

Such and similar cultural elements strengthen the aspect of transnationalism in the mixed family's home environment and life. They function as cultural messengers between "there" and "here" connecting different socio-cultural worlds. The objects also strengthen awareness of the local social circle and mixed family's children about the transnational cultural flows connecting the place of residence and Lithuania.

Individual taste and values are important factors in choosing material items for the home. Few interviewees emphasized that they did not wish to exhibit direct symbols like national flags at home abroad. Still, there was an inner need to have something that was important and dear when lived in Lithuania. As one interviewee mentioned, "I have some art works from Lithuania at home because I like them, not because they are "super" Lithuanian. But, the fact that they are from Lithuania gives a sense of pleasure..." (Interview No. 3. FIN-LT). The factor of aesthetics was very important to some women – they wanted to match up the Lithuanian items to their total home style and design. They would match up artworks of Lithuanian artists or linen curtains from Lithuania primarily because of the look, not because of origin. Some artefacts would not be exhibited because they would not be fitting as the room décor. Still, the correlation with the "native" or "own culture" is important although ulterior factor. Another interviewee was feeling happy to keep in the room some Lithuanian ceramic souvenirs – bells, a candle holder, horn. She hung up a photo-picture of a church from her native town as well. These items decorate the space and give a pleasant feeling of connection with the native cultural world. Another woman also brought some items to Finland basically because of their aesthetic look. Still, she said that it was important for her to have something to show for others about Lithuania in case "the situation had emerged". She demonstrated photo-albums about Lithuania or a DVD film when someone showed interest.

Thus, being sensitive to "the situation", when women could present Lithuania in some way or share information about it, was important to several informants. They were using generally discreet tactics for communicating themes of "own" country and culture. It was important for them to feel that someone was interested in Lithuania and it was the "right moment" to talk more or demonstrate some material about it. Women avoided being seen as an upstart and preferred to conceal self-identification otherwise. Some informants similarly acted referring the material objects in the home environment. They kept, for instance, small Lithuanian flags exhibited or invisible or some Lithuanian pictures because the items were received as presents; but they did not seek and buy anything intentionally in order to decorate home with objects referring to their origin particularly.

Many informants mentioned that they liked to bring Lithuanian spirits, sweets or other products like bread and cheese and offer them to their husband's families and friends in Finland or Greece. As one interviewee said, "I bring some chocolate and spirits even to my husband's aunts so they would know and would not forget [that I am Lithuanian]. Later they would share and offer them to their friends and guests presenting them as a precious

Lithuanian gift” (Interview No. 6. GR-LT). Such sharing of Lithuanian treats is like demonstrating something of “one’s own”, something different from the local things. It is a form of identity expression. This presentation brings the feeling of pride since it is usually appreciated by others; or it can be disappointing, bringing a sense of refusal and incomprehension if the treats are considered bizarre or with too strange flavour.

The consumable products like food and drinks are quite an important element of cultural sharing and representation in many informants’ cases. An individual sometimes can have double-acting role about it: to represent the native country abroad, and the country of residence, when visiting Lithuania. There is an interesting cross-border movement of such products when the women travel from Lithuania to their country of residence and back to the native family. Coming back to Finland or Greece often is associated with bringing favourite Lithuanian products to one’s home abroad, wider family and friends. It can be selections of fine chocolate, other sweets like *šakotis* (a traditional spit cake), also black bread, cheese, various herbal tea, beer or stronger alcohol. When the same women travel to Lithuania, often they are expected to bring something “Finnish” or “Greek”: sweets, drinks, olive oil, spices, some “traditional” products, etc. Women enjoy having their favourite Lithuanian products at least for a while in their homes abroad, as well as they enjoy tasting and sharing something from their foreign everyday food when visiting Lithuania. Similar cultural sharing can be traced in the cases such as when a Lithuanian mother offers imported black bread (which cannot be found baked locally) for the guests at her son’s birthday party in Athens or other occasions. Lithuanian women friends residing in the same area sometimes also share the ‘own’ food or products or Lithuanian items as gifts among themselves, especially for the ones who had a long time to visit the native country. Such sharing of objects from the country of origin consolidates identity and relationships between the co-nationals.

The relation with material elements may change in time. According to one interviewee, she was bringing different Lithuanian items – like ceramic jugs, amber tree, photo-albums – mostly during the first years of residing abroad because of nostalgia for the native home and family. Later it became a habit without stronger emotions since she got adapted to the foreign environment (see Interview No. 18. GR-LT). As the woman gets integrated and acculturated in the local society, she may feel acquainted and accepted by others with the cultural world she has brought. Then the need of self-representation in the material or any other form may weaken. On the other hand, the meanings attached to the material items may get stronger and modify after longer periods of residing abroad. As one interviewee pointed, “when you stay abroad longer – Lithuania seems more exotic to you. When it seems more exotic – the wish to have some kind of piece of it gets stronger: it may be a bit of amber or anything else. It is beautiful to me. It is not so significant in the first years, but it gets a sense later on. [...] It must be connected to the family and Lithuania, e.g. my personal belongings or a mother’s photograph” (Interview No. 10. GR-LT). The longer periods of being away from native family and country may bring sentiments and memories about the times passed. Then the material objects function not as representatives so much but as carriers of remembrances and ties to the past.

Some objects like national flag can serve as an expression of acceptance and favour on particular nations. It can be used by the women’s native family left in Lithuania also. Natives are affected by the fact that a member is married to a foreigner and lives abroad. Such

circumstance may have a symbolic expression at the Lithuanian home. One interviewee revealed that her mother hanged a Greek flag at home because she supported her daughter's marriage to a Greek man (see Interview No. 2. GR-LT). Still, a national flag can be an important symbol in the mixed family's home or different flags can be combined. Few informants wrote that they still had a Lithuanian flag abroad. Other woman mentioned that her son's room is decorated with Greek and Lithuanian flags in Athens (see Interview No. 6. GR-LT). It was important for her to combine both flags, which would signify boy's Greek and Lithuanian identifications. She wanted to pass this message to her son, her family and anyone who would visit their home.

Lithuanian objects in the home environment abroad or Lithuanian treats for foreign guests is a mode of reconstructing and supporting one's identity. Referring to the homeland, native family, and friends, the items create a sense of belonging there, as well as here, in the new social circle. They work as fluid ties to the previous cultural world and, at the same time, become a part of the mixed family's present culture. This is a certain way to feel connected with the "native culture" before moving abroad and to pass this message to the new family, its social circle and the children. All the material elements considered Lithuanian in the foreign environment work as small transmitters of cultural messages between the native family, home, country and present foreign place of residence. It can be seen as a form of a transnational cultural channel having a material expression which brings together and integrates different elements into one space. At the same time, they are transmitters of meanings and ties between different spaces and people "there" and "here". For instance, an informant kept at present home a photograph of her whole Lithuanian family – what she would not do while living in Lithuania before, according to her. It made her feel closer to her natives, who are dear to her and she was missing them. Similar meanings were attached to the family and friend's postcards and small gifts (like a vase decorated with amber from Lithuania or pebbles with the Baltic signs), which were exhibited on shelves (see Interview No. 12. GR-LT and Interview No 13. GR-LT). The native family can play also an active role in the identity consolidation which influences the member residing abroad. The types of gifts they choose or make – with national symbols or ethnic elements – may be invoked by the circumstance of emigration. In that context, the cultural messages attached to the objects can be an intentional pull into a certain direction of individual cultural development.

The cultural development of the children from mixed families directly and implicitly depends on the cultural resources that are being used by parents as well as other mixed family's members. At the same time, it is affected by the family's cultural life and environment. Every family member can make different influences of various degrees and types over the growth. Strong mother's communication of her "other" identity and cultural input can more or less balance the cultural environment of the majority. According to R. Grassby, material life is partly shaped by cultural imperatives. Social reality has to be structured to be perceived and understood. Whether it communicates through words or visual representation, the cultural system relies on metaphor and symbolism (Grassby 2005: 591). These metaphor and symbolism carried by the material objects are the critical functions, next to the other functions of practicality, aestheticism and educative role. Referring to ethnologist V. Savoniakaitė, ethnic symbolism has features of ethnic and national identification and solidarity. People

reveal relations to subjects and phenomena with the help of symbols; symbols express ideals and beliefs of the society or social group; traditions emerge as symbols of culture. People's creation and nurturance of cultural symbols are concurrent with a wish to maintain the ethnic, cultural and national identity (Savoniakaitė 2002: 39, 41).

Other scholars as well pointed the significant foreign women's input in heterogenizing material home environment culturally in the context of mixed families (see Leinonen 2004: 40; Tuomi-Nikula 1988: 12-13, 18). This material form of cultural self-identification and expression is one of many possible strategies in emigration. The factor of mixed marriage can work as a stimulator or an incentive for searching acceptable cultural forms and ways of their application. As Tuomi-Nikula pointed, "in an alien cultural environment the immigrant needs *identity channels* for maintaining his own cultural awareness. [...] In the absence of any identity channels he may face an *identity threshold*" (Tuomi-Nikula 1988: 8). To rephrase Georges' words, there are many ways of being Lithuanian. Some individuals do so in similar ways and some – in different ways, but all do so in a variety of ways, both at a given point in time and at different times (Georges 1984: 218).

Conclusions

Individuals are surrounded by a more or less intensive urban cultural swirl, which is complex, carrying various meanings and messages through different channels and in multiple directions. Its streams may flow at the local level, nationally, transnationally and globally, and it is directed by different factors and stimulators. These factors include many aspects – the individual and shared identities, local cultural traits and national politics, up to the international socioeconomic and political turns.

Material home elements carrying ethnic, national, symbolic, sentimental, educational or aesthetic meanings can be one of many different tools for construction and negotiation of the identity by women in the mixed marriage. It may be used intensively or passively or it can be unexploited in the family's space. Lithuanian items at home abroad create a small cultural "oasis", which affects family members and their social circle to various degrees. The symbolic or sentimental objects at home bring a feeling of being connected to the Lithuanian family, the place of origin and the social circle there. It is a symbolic tie between "here" and "there". Sharing Lithuanian souvenirs and treats is a kind of manifestation of one's identity. It helps to connect with the "other" social circle and be accepted while declaring the cultural "otherness". This is a form of cultural transnationalism.

Different individuals choose particular forms of the material culture referring to their socio-cultural ties and identity. It may depend on the access to the sources (e.g. the frequency of traveling to Lithuania or contacting the natives), individual perceptions, priorities, values, interests, and abilities. The individual choice whether to use some forms of material expression or not can be seen as a certain cultural strategy. The matter of strategic choice is essential here because it drives the mixed family's cultural life in particular directions affecting its members and social circle to a certain degree. The foreign woman is the main family actor who has the best access to the transnational channels correlating elements of her native cultural background and identity to the foreign socio-cultural situation. She can manage these sources of cultural flow quantitatively and qualitatively, select them for different usage

or ignore them. She can also pick up, to whom the material would be concentrated and applied for. For instance, raising children and the formation of their cultural world greatly depends on their mother's cultural input and the type she would use. Applying transnational elements makes an impact on children's cultures and identities.

Primary Sources

Interviews

Lithuanian women in FIN-LT marriage:

Interview No. 1-7.

Lithuanian women in GR-LT marriage:

Interview No. 1-18.

References:

- Akstinavičiūtė, I. and Petraitytė, D. (2007). Lietuvių tautinės tapatybės simbolinių komponentų konfigūracijos. *Filosofija. Sociologija*, 18(2), pp.14-31.
- Bailey, A. and Boyle, P. (2004). Untying and Retying Family Migration in the New Europe. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30(2), pp. 229-241.
- Daniliauskas, A. (1970). *Šiaurės Rytų Lietuvos pramonės darbininkų materialinė kultūra*. Vilnius: Mintis.
- Georges, R. A. (1984). The Many Ways of Being Greek. *Journal of Folklore Research*, 21(2/3), pp. 211-219.
- Grassby, R. (2005). Material Culture and Cultural History. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 35(4), pp. 591-603.
- IOM International Organization for Migration. (2010). *Migration and Transnationalism: Opportunities and Challenges*, International Dialogue on Migration: Intersessional Workshop, 9-10 March 2010, [pdf] Background Paper. [online] Available at: http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/microsites/IDM/workshops/migration_and_transnationalism_030910/background_paper_en.pdf [Accessed 20 December 2013]
- Itzigsohn, J. and Giorguli-Saucedo, S. (2005). Incorporation, Transnationalism, and Gender: Immigrant Incorporation and Transnational Participation as Gendered Processes. *International Migration Review*, 39(4), pp. 895-920.
- Leinonen, J. (2004). Suomalaisten siirtolaisnaisten avioliitot Pohjois-Amerikassa toisen maailmansodan jälkeen. In: E. Heikkilä et al., ed., *Monikulttuuriset avioliitot sillanrakentajina*, pp. 35-45. Web Reports No. 2. [pdf] Siirtolaisuusinstituutti. [online] Available at: <http://www.migrationinstitute.fi/pdf/webreports2.pdf> [Accessed 10 February 2013]
- Levitt, P. and Jaworsky, B. N. (2007). Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends. *Annual Review of Sociology*, (33), pp. 129-156.

- Lietuvos statistikos departamentas. *Susituokusieji*. [online] Available at: <http://osp.stat.gov.lt/analysis-portlet/print-servlet> [Accessed 02 October 2015]
- Miller, D. (2006). Consumption. In: Ch. Tilley, et al., ed., *Handbook of Material Culture*, Sage Publication Ltd., pp. 341-354.
- Motuzaitė, A. (2011). Mišrių porų vestuvės Lietuvoje kaip tautinio tapatumo išraiška XXI a. pr. *Liaudies kultūra*, 2(137), pp. 37-50.
- Peirano, M. G. S. (1998). When Anthropology is at Home: The Different Contexts of a Single Discipline. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, (27), pp. 105-128.
- Savoniakaitė, V. (2002). Lietuviybės simbolių perteikimai. *Lituanistica*, 2(50), pp. 39-48.
- Tuomi-Nikula, O. (1988). Acculturation in the Ethnic Mixed Marriage. *Ethnologia Fennica*, (16), pp. 5-26.
- Vertovec, S. (1999). *Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism*. [pdf] [online] Available at: <http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working%20papers/conceiving.PDF> [Accessed 01 May 2013].
- Vertovec, S. (2001). Transnationalism and Identity. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 27(4), pp. 573-582.
- Wattie, A. M. (2006). *Urban Family and Culture Resources Management*. [pdf][online] Available at: http://urp.fib.ugm.ac.id/images/download/urban_paper_anna_wattie.pdf [Accessed 27 February 2015].

Biographical note

Akvilė Motuzaitė is doing her PhD in European Ethnology at the University of Turku in Finland. Her field of interests is ethnicity, identity, mixed marriages and migration.

Email: akvilem21@hotmail.com