

CALL FOR PAPERS

for a special issue

Researching migrants as a migrant researcher

Guest editors: Dr. Anna Cieslik and Dr. Magdalena Nowicka

The growing transnational connectivity of educational institutions results in an increase in the number of students and faculty who study and work abroad (King/ Chenicheri 2005, Brown 2009, Fincher/Shaw 2011). As a result, more and more studies are done on migrants and migrant communities by researchers who have migrated themselves. Migrant researchers often have easy access to migrant groups by virtue of speaking the native language and possessing the appropriate cultural competencies. Furthermore, in the age of budget cuts in higher education, financial reasons compel many researchers to do research at least partly in their native country. The implications of doing research “at home” (Gilbert 1994) pose serious methodological challenges that have not been fully addressed in literature. The purpose of this special issue is to give voice to those researchers who work with migrant communities of their national origin, and to open a critical discussion on identity, sameness, and cultural heritage.

A vast literature discusses the issues of researchers who are ‘insiders’ and ‘go native’ (Merton 1972, Ohnuki-Tierney 1984). In this discourse, ‘insider’ researchers share a cultural, linguistic, ethnic, national and religious heritage with their participants. The methodological considerations thus circle around the problem of proximity and distance. In the positivist tradition, a researcher ought to maintain analytic distance from the object of study. On the other hand, the recent feminist scholarship encourages involvement with the subjects and the cultivation of self-reflexivity.

At the same time, the historiography has also pointed out that ethnic and national communities themselves are divided by class, religion, or politics among members of the ‘same’ group (Brubaker 2004). From a methodological perspective, this insight reveals that, despite sharing their heritage with the participants, insider researchers might still experience divides and ‘gates’ during the research process because of their divergent class or generational affiliations (Ganga/Scott 2006).

This special issue evaluates critically what it means to do ‘insider research’ if ethnic and national belonging are multi-layered, culturally constructed concepts. How can we understand ‘cultural proximity’ if culture is to be understood across multiple dimensions? The contributions to this issue will challenge the latent understanding that common origins produce ‘common individuals,’ and will offer new insights on how migrant researchers relate to the migrant group they do (not) belong to. The special issue will add to the growing literature on methodological nationalism in migration studies (Glick Schiller/Levitt 2006). Reflecting on distance between migrant researcher and migrant participant of the same origin, the contributors will shed light on how migratory pathways and conditions at destination alter the understandings of nationality and ethnicity.

We invite contributions that engage with, but are by no means limited to:

- How do the researcher and the participant mutually construct their 'shared heritage' during the research process?
- How can references to 'common culture' and 'shared origin' become a powerful tool in negotiating positions during the research process?
- How can proximity and/or distance in the interview situation be achieved through the similar/divergent migratory experiences and incorporation of the researcher and the participants?
- How can incorporation pathways to a new society, and local specificities, alter national and ethnic identifications, and how is this alteration made visible in an interview situation?
- How can we deconstruct 'shared heritage' in terms of class, opportunity structures and lifestyles vis-à-vis national or ethnic background?
- How are the notions of 'insider' and 'insider research' connected to issues of national bias?

Notes for Prospective Authors:

Interested authors should submit an abstract to the guest editors for consideration. Upon approval of the abstract, the authors will be asked to submit a full article that will undergo peer review. **The expected word length is 7,000 words.** Papers submitted must not have been previously published nor be under consideration for publication elsewhere.

Important Dates:

- The editors request a 250 word abstract by **30 March, 2012**
- You will be notified about the status of your abstract by **April 15, 2012**
- Selected authors will be invited to submit full manuscripts by **September 30, 2012**
- Final manuscripts will be due on **30 November, 2012**

Please email your abstracts to both guest-editors:

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About the guest editors:

Dr. Anna Cieslik has received her PhD in urban geography from Clark University. She is currently a Visiting Research Scholar at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Göttingen, Germany. Her current research focuses on the everyday geographies of ethnic encounters in Astoria, NY.

Dr. Magdalena Nowicka holds a Ph.D. in sociology from the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. Since 2006 she is researcher and lecturer at the Institute of Sociology in Munich. Since 2010 she is Research Fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity. She is working on the transfer intercultural habitus along migrants' social networks spanning Poland and the UK.