8 Beyond authoritarianism

Migration, uncertainty and a sense of belonging among public intellectuals

Christian Franklin Svensson

Introduction

Scholars, writers and artists hosted in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden deal with uncertainty in a number of ways when living in exile from the regimes in their home countries. Globally, authoritarian governments are now in the majority, encompassing 92 countries and 54% of all human beings.¹ However, as social movements and civil society activity throughout the world have shown, human mobility and demands for liberation seem also to be increasing, because citizens such as these interlocutors do not identify with repressive values.

Analyses of social arenas can potentially provide learning from new trends to gain an insight into what may happen in the future beyond current social structures and set boundaries.² I wish to attempt to understand these individuals, who from their exiled position strive to create belonging while struggling for human rights. A prudent question to ask when encountering social challenge is: *how do people deal with uncertainty?*³ I interpret this as an exploration of the interlocutors' navigations, imaginings and values in a perspective where the past, present and future are connected to create a sense of belonging, and in this case, preferably also societal change.

The interlocutors voice concern over lack of freedom of expression, while enjoying comparative security in their host countries. In this position of delegitimizing and acknowledging the fallibility of authority, topics of resistance and integrity are prevalent. When hegemony and injustice are challenged to create alternative cultural narratives and identities, at some point individuals may cross a line, from where it is not easy to return, as we see among interlocutors who have faced the consequence and fled their countries. On the other hand, they are attempting to co-create the world they want to live in, which prompts reflections on migration and community. "Another world is possible" is the attitude, where cultural resourcefulness is a celebration of imaginings of change.

A shared feature is an imagination of the world as dynamic and multicultural as opposed to the values of the regimes in their home-states, and they navigate within these pluralist spaces of identifications beyond finite social categorizations. When these interlocutors encounter new cultural and

professional arenas, they identify with being at one and the same time *the stranger* and global residents. In addition, continually delegitimizing the home-state regimes in itself presents a significant sense of identity. They hold these complex transnational positions as a cultural necessity and as a reaction to authoritarianism.⁴

This chapter will begin by contextualizing the interlocutors' position and that of the regimes in their home countries. I then reflect on the methodical design of fieldwork. The next sections deal with challenges when encountering new cultural spheres in the host country, which provides not only physical security, but also uncertainty and lack of a sense of belonging when they are not fully accepted for a variety of reasons. They compensate for this by identifying with a sense of a global community comprising like-minded individuals as a need for meaningful inclusion. Finally, the interlocutors are framed as actors capable of delegitimizing the homogenous and hierarchical values of the regimes. The physical departure from their home countries transforms them from being private actors to political ones: ideally, if they publically withdraw their support, the regimes will cease to govern, because they will no longer represent legitimate power.

Because of their circumstances of being threatened by "disappearance", execution, torture and "political re-education", all the interlocutors' names are pseudonyms, and context-specific mention of their country of origin and each host institution has been removed.

Context – the interlocutors and authoritarianism

The interlocutors are hosted in the Nordic countries of Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark, and they are all affiliated with the facilitating organizations of Scholars at Risk (SAR), Scholar Rescue Fund (SRF) and the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN). Professionally, they are scholars, artists, writers and journalists, but often they occupy two or more categories at the same time: "I am a doctor [PhD], but I write a lot for independent media and free NGOs", says Lub from a country in the Middle East. The issue of categorization relates to concerns about how to view displacement and related concepts such as *migration*, *refugee* and *exile*, which risk labelling actors in terms of absolute roles, thereby imposing certain expectations on them,⁵ for instance victim/hero qualities. Specifically, the interlocutors wish to be seen neither as unwilling heroes nor as forced migrants, but rather as free agents, as Kim, a journalist from an East Asian country, explicates: "I do this work because I need to – for the people and for my family at home." She adds pragmatically, "also because this is all I know what to do."

Even though the interlocutors express great affection for their home countries, and a strong desire to return, when or if the authoritarian powers disappear, their identities are largely constituted by navigating beyond nation-state borders – those of both the host country and the home country. A few of the interlocutors have received permanent residency in one of the Nordic countries, but most live in precarity, not knowing where to go after their stay with

the host institution. For Aaron, an associate professor, his needs are simple; he says that “the truth is that the main need is to get a job. A job that will help me reconnect with my family and life”.

They have an awareness of insecurity as a basic feature, because they are unable to return unless the political climate changes or if they retract their critique. The latter is not an option, as most likely it is equivalent to lifelong persecution of themselves, friends and family, in addition to deprivation of a working life within their respective professional field. Several also express that they experience frustration when they think of those who have stayed in their home countries, either because they subscribe to the regimes’ values, or simply because they have no possibility of leaving.

Uncertainty forms an integral part of their social arenas,⁶ which is a central theme when analysing authoritarianism and its discontents.⁷ Uncertainty entails plural connotations of ambivalence, unrest, indecision and confusion as a human condition.⁸ As a way of managing this, the interlocutors express a diversity of identifications⁹ entailing fluid strategies for social self-realization and societal emancipation. Their activities are constantly changing and being challenged, which allows them to navigate in flux rather than being directed by solidified notions of social arenas.

It will be redundant here to attempt to typologize each of the regimes, but some recurring characters are nevertheless identifiable. In each country, a single leader or a small group wield power with poorly defined boundaries,¹⁰ but with some predominant traits: limited political pluralism, repression of opponents and informal executive power.¹¹ The regimes listen only to elements compatible with their own objectives,¹² which enables the governments to thrive in a nativist call for nation-state homogenization¹³ to legitimize power concentration. These traits have the direct consequence of non-acceptance of the interlocutors’ so-called “dissident” views with the potential subsequent decline of egalitarianism and human rights.¹⁴

Methodical reflections

A sense of belonging, community and commitment is the starting point for the interlocutors’ conceptions of their current situation,¹⁵ and the methodical focus is on their everyday experiences and structural challenges to attempt to gain an insight into what lies behind their navigations and identifications, and how these are expressed.¹⁶

The Nordics are culturally slightly different one from another, and the fieldwork has focused on social arenas rather than geographical locations as a multi-sited empirical field.¹⁷ As a field that consists of shared social struggles,¹⁸ the interlocutors are linked by their professional relations and a cultural like-mindedness. Typically, they know each other from global networks, their home country or the host country, which methodically has facilitated connection to additional informants in a snowball effect.¹⁹

A combination of methodical approaches has, I believe, contributed to insights into perceptions of everyday practices, imaginings and social conditions.

Twenty-five interlocutors were formally interviewed in addition to 10 coordinators affiliated with host institutions, the public sector, ICORN and SAR. Participatory observation and informal conversation provided insights into cultural views and social organization.²⁰ I took part in numerous professional, cultural and social events as a prerequisite for interpreting the interlocutors' practices and identifications. Additionally, textual analysis and policy studies of media and governmental publications were conducted.

When doing fieldwork among one's own cultures, it will always remain a matter of doubt whether social norms and codes can ever be comprehended by the researcher, let alone the reader.²¹ In one sense, I have done fieldwork in my own familiar settings, as I am myself both from the Nordics and a scholar. On the other hand, I am not personally being persecuted by a regime. Moreover, fieldwork has been replete with novel sounds, working methods and language, and I have often been oblivious to cultural expressions of artists, writers and scholars from fields other than my own. This position of being "the other"²² has then not merely been a geographical issue; rather, it has bestowed a fundamental awareness of non-knowledge of the social spaces being studied.

Uncertainty when being hosted – "flexibility and a recognition of challenges is crucial"

In their respective host country, the interlocutors have the opportunity to assert themselves beyond the confines of the regimes' politics; but for many, a sense of being different is prevalent as they experience non-inclusion in different forms.

They are much concerned with the nature of arrival and residence, which often presents a difficult and dilemma-filled topic. Several feel lonely and miss having relatives and close friends in their everyday lives. This correspondingly touches on their attitudes as to what one, as an invitee, ought to contribute with, which sometimes stands in stark contrast to the level of activity on which they are invited to participate. Furthermore, creating professional networks can be difficult and resource-consuming, which discourages some from seeking new contacts.

They are at times considered unwanted migrants despite having been invited to the host country. Murat speaks of a related situation: together with his programme coordinator from the university, he went to an office in the local municipality shortly after having just arrived in the country. While waiting on a bench, a heavily-built man approaches them and begins ranting his racist views. After the initial shock, his coordinator level-headedly tells the stranger of Murat's reason for being in the country. Murat reflects on the situation in his own words:

Suddenly this guy pops up, and afterwards she [the coordinator] comes over and apologizes to me. I said 'don't worry, it's fine'. She then told him that I am a professor who has come here to do research. And then he is suddenly extremely apologetic. His reaction is really interesting because you see the class aspect.

While Murat is telling his story, he recollects with surprise his own detachment during the situation, but is perplexed by the apparent social legitimacy of the man's actions, not least because it takes place in a public setting. When recounting his experience, however, he is especially upset that in the end he is treated differently and better than other perceived immigrants, just because he is a scholar employed at the university.

An issue of non-inclusion is also present for Kasimir, a visual artist. Despite having lived in the host country with his wife and children for several years, he is exasperated when he reflects on the missing sense of community and ethical responsibility in the country: "It's an injustice to all. You might think or mean that we come from another country, and that you don't have these [authoritarian] issues, but you may have it yourself one day."

Aaron similarly reflects on distrust, both at his host university and outside, and that it is difficult to change people's perceptions. When I ask him about what can be done to make his life easier, he mentions as a strategy that in some instances it is better not to mention an affiliation with the facilitating organization, which in his case is Scholars at Risk. His experience is that this association can generate prejudice along the lines of not deserving to be an academic peer because of a perceived lack of professional abilities:

Well, I am very thankful to them [the host institution] for their support. It's great. But I have been thinking about being a supposed scholar at risk. The viewpoint of some is that you are not qualified enough to be in this position, which of course is completely false; of course. Because of this particular programme, there is this kind of thinking and misconception among employees.

Social imagining and mobilization can lead to a better life, but the danger is ever-present of turning desirable ideal into tragic reality. Aaron's experiences represent a theme among scholars relating to lack of a sense of belonging, even though they have the same academic titles as their local counterparts; some scholars even hold degrees from the global top-10 ranked institutions.

Social identifications mirror individual and collective dimensions of everyday practice among the interlocutors. "Identity is understood as a stronghold of security, even though the search for identity is often marked by insecurity and uncertainty",²³ and their identities are unfortunately often expressed as a sense of difference, uncertainty and a lack of opportunity to participate in social, professional and cultural activities.

In this perspective, the interlocutors are *a stranger* in host countries. Drawing on Simmel,²⁴ Bauman²⁵ views the stranger as someone who is bodily present but mentally remote in the eyes of the cultural majority. The stranger is endured insofar as there is sufficient social distance. When this is not the case, however, then there is a constant and real possibility of "othering"²⁶ and rejection. On an optimistic note, this suggests the possibility for the stranger to become emotionally detached, and to view the majority culture from afar, but uncertainty and distrust will nevertheless ensue, because the stranger will

then be regarded with scepticism as someone who by choice is either an insider or an outsider. Furthermore, many interlocutors feel that they are not contributing to society satisfactorily because they are not included in the local community. Özdemir, Mutluer and Özyurek²⁷ identify similar findings, which they frame as states of exposure to a form of condescending humanitarianism, where individuals are not a part of everyday scholarly and collegial work.

All interlocutors, whether scholars, artists or writers, are assigned to a contact person, who is supposed to take heed of their well-being and to facilitate inclusive networks. A specific effort includes mentoring programmes with peers at the host institutions from the intent that it will proliferate connections with professional arenas and the labour market. Frequently, however, it seems that coordinators and mentors do not understand what their work should consist of, and therefore do not comprehend what type of knowledge and advancement is needed. Jay – a visual artist and an intermediary for other artists – mentions this problem related to a former colleague:

This particular guest felt mismatched. It's a very critical and important aspect of artist protection. A lot of cities, you know, God bless them, are interested in being part of programmes where they can assist artists, writers, journalists at risk and all of that. But at the end of the day, some end up doing a hatchet job, because they don't understand the artist; like when any random city is picked to host them.

Jay feels that there must be a greater focus on interlocutors' individual needs, and it is important to help interlocutors coordinate activities because it can be difficult to keep track of opportunities and relevant networks in new social settings. If this does not happen, their professional development is significantly hindered, she elaborates:

When it comes to the people that deal directly with the artists, they should be well-versed in understanding their issues and be sensitive to their needs, and so on. I think it's more the middle level than the managers; they are more important than the people at the top. I used to attend a lot of board meetings, and I really mixed and talked with coordinators in different cities, and I did see a bit of disconnection in some cases. There was particularly one, who felt she was completely mismatched in the city, because they couldn't cater to the kind of art that she performs.

Kasimir likewise reflects on the need for continuous training, supplied both from the host institution and from the public sector in each country:

There is a need to educate all stakeholders involved in the free cities [ICORN]; also the people in the migration office and other state institutions. Some applaud freedom of expression and speech, and they will do everything to help, but other cities don't know enough about it. They

don't care enough to want to help. So maybe we should find a way to bring everybody's knowledge base to the same level, so that we can all understand that this is about injustice done to an actual person from an actual country.

As inclusion and collaboration are difficult for some host institutions to manage, the facilitating organizations like SAR and ICORN play an important role in preventing uncertainty, says Kasimir. It is crucial that coherent projects are generated, he adds. They can make use of their vast global network and expertise to allocate resources and address potentials locally, "because a recognition of challenges and flexibility is crucial to the programme", Jika, a journalist, reflects. She feels that for initiatives like the ICORN programme to succeed, it is necessary for them to facilitate adequate social mobilization: "These activities can be fashioned in a synergy between the desires of myself and the host community. The alternative is intense feelings of uncertainty." Considering that she and her colleagues are invited to the host country because of being personally threatened – and to a lesser degree because of their professional skills – Jika is astonished that there is not more emphasis on support and training to help succeed in future endeavours, whether in the host country or globally.

Uncertain futures – "you get a recommendation, but it's not enough"

All the interlocutors express pronounced pleasure in their work, and also a desire to progress in their respective field. For most of them, sufficient financial resources are available to participate in conferences, exhibitions, workshops and similar events. In these settings, they exchange experience and gain new knowledge from peers across the world, and attending is perceived as a necessity, closely linked to a professional future and community. The desire for relevant employment, and frequently a permanent position, presents a drive to participate in activities and social contexts, but in order to carry out their work properly, most of the interlocutors are challenged by not attaining enough future-oriented professional skills.

The interlocutors' social imagination is an expression of how they view themselves and their future in relation to others in social arenas, and to what extent their needs are fulfilled.²⁸ Emmary expresses that she finds herself in a constant state of uncertainty because she is not able to get an appointment, either with an international organization or with her current host university. On one of the occasions when I spoke with her, she was particularly pessimistic about the future, expressing with some exasperation that now she is just waiting to see if her colleagues can do anything for her:

After a maximum of two years, you will be under stress again. I don't know where to go, especially if I cannot return to [home country]. And this is the big problem, really, that is facing all the scholars. As a scientist, I have done a lot of things during my trips around the world. Like at the

University of Oxford where I also met people who deal with the same problems. So where should we go? You get a recommendation, but it's not enough.

Emmary appreciates the title of associate professor, and she feels that SAR have supported her considerably, but she is in her second yearly extension with no assurance of anything permanent.

Some countries' policy of only hosting for a limited space of time is tricky because, like Emmary, the interlocutors have no idea of their future circumstances beyond their present institutions of affiliation. Other findings emphasise this uncertain future as a recurring topic in similar programmes: "(...) there are uncertainties around the sustainability of such temporary arrangements for the future of the artists' work and life conditions".²⁹ Because of this stressful factor, Emmary says that she is not able to concentrate on doing her work properly, which creates a "catch-22 situation" that further puts her future career at risk.

Aaron, who is employed at another university, shares Emmary's bleak view of his prospects:

In reality, I need more time to get papers published and to achieve more academic landmarks. That would lead to the improvement of my CV in order to get a job. So I would suggest that we think of policies and strategies to handle these kinds of challenges that will lead to people feeling really secure.

Related challenges are found among "non-Western" research assistants based in the "global North", as they are almost entirely dependent on a significant international publication list, which can be strenuous work to achieve without formal training and peer guidance.³⁰

Apart from the obvious hazards in the future of returning to the home country or having to apply for asylum within the regular state refugee systems, a profound uncertainty is at play, namely the consequence of down-playing, deleting and self-censoring one's work, as Jay reflects:

After one or two years a lot of the artists involved find themselves almost pushed to a point of self-censorship, because they know that: I have this temporary platform now, from where I can create awareness, but I am only guaranteed shelter for a limited time and then my situation worsens'. I find that many artists shrink during that period, because they don't want to draw attention to themselves, fearing that if they do, it will mean nothing at all anyway. They also become afraid that they can never go home.

For Jay, this is one of the worst reactions among his peers, because it is equal to quenching "the free spirit", which means that the regimes have won with no opportunity to change the future, so she feels.

A consequence of uncertainty about the future can be suffering on a number of levels.³¹ Referring to Braidotti's becoming nomadic,³² Vatansever³³ discusses social uncertainty in relation to reactions to precarity and non-belonging. If the interlocutors' identifications are linked to uncertainty in the host country and institution, and if they do not imagine their future as being a part of these, then they will instead consolidate a feeling of nomadism and a sense of belonging among global communities.

Belonging with a global community – "I immerse myself in the culture"

The interlocutors' views of grand themes such as ethnicity, politics and gender are pointedly opposed to the regimes, which, in turn, plays a role in their navigation as it associates them with a sense of global belonging instead. They exist in a significant state of uncertainty, both because the possibilities of remaining in the host country are extremely limited if permanent residency is not granted, and because returning home will entail severe retribution and intensified curbs on freedom of expression. They wish to work and contribute to society locally, but when unable to find a job within their field, they are forced to move around globally depending on where opportunities occur, being trapped in an indeterminate state of nomadic struggle for survival.

This sense of community, combined with a higher *raison d'être* and a self-image of autonomy, constructs imaginings of professional and social arenas, as Jay puts it:

Now, as always, I enjoy the company of other artists and writers. I know that they play a big role in my development. When I lived in [home country], you know, I met with artists, people in theatre, people in film and photography. I immerse myself in the culture and the knowledge. That's something I crave still. It's not something I have been able to replicate since I moved to Europe. So yes, I do feel that community.

When speaking with Jay at a contemporary art fair, Aaron joins the conversation and continues this train of thought:

I have this happiness when I feel that I belong to a larger community. It will give you the trust and respect you deserve as a person, mentally and professionally. As I said, I have made good friends with many colleagues around the world, and with students as well.

The interlocutors have their fair share of challenges, but due to both their skills and opinions, they experience a level of social security in the wider global community, not least when or if they are invited to a country to be able to continue their work. This sense of community is determined by their current needs and desires, and created from collective values and attitudes.³⁴

To gain a picture of the mechanisms of their belonging, not only *choice*, but also *chance* must be taken into account, as Kasimir reflects:

There is a whole group of global people like us. And of course there are a lot who don't share the same situation. We are writers and artists. We are fortunate, because we do not have nothing, so you are in a special situation, because you have all these capitals that are different.

Continuous socio-geographical mobility plays a substantial role for Kasimir alongside a well-developed sense of social indignation. As his present international success shows, his views and navigations are shaped from transcultural identifications, as someone who is willing to move around globally depending on where openings occur. He is quite aware of being connected to a larger network, and of the value of being able to make use of global opportunities, which presents him and colleagues with the potential privileged position of being part of a transnational elite.

A community is, of course, an essentialist and ideal-type construction, but whether one regards these global communities as imagined or not,³⁵ the fact that they offer the interlocutors the opportunity to orientate themselves elsewhere than locally should not be underestimated. As autonomous actors,³⁶ they are influenced by a sense of community with like-minded individuals, and therefore not delimited by the regimes in their home countries.

Apart from an awareness of the potential of their professional skills, their identifications are largely based on an appreciation of difference from the regimes. Factors such as ethnicity, nationality and language then become less prevalent for them when associating beyond a nation-state³⁷ – both in their host and home country – and as such they are in constant flux. Their navigation and sense of global belonging is fashioned from a response to a contemporary, uncertain world of continual migrant movement³⁸ whilst being a part of something other than nation-state hierarchies in a “(...) continual questioning from below of any attempt to establish order from above”.³⁹

Though they seem doomed to become part of the global migration stream in predominantly precarious settings,⁴⁰ these particular global nomads may nevertheless be able to achieve social becoming, constructed from their cultural integrity and professional and intellectual opportunities to escape and potentially delegitimize the regimes.

Delegitimizing authoritarianism – between uncertainty and a sense of belonging

The emergence of authoritarianism can be construed as a failure of social, political and economic events.⁴¹ The United Nations addresses this predicament related to civil and political rights:

Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers; either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of choice.⁴²

Based on experiences in their home countries, the interlocutors are well aware of unjust and oppressive mechanisms, and the need for a decent future for “the people”, as Edward expresses it. Their alienation from the regimes is generated from a longing for social interaction and civil dialogue. When discussing these topics during a focus group conversation, Edward expounds on a related dialectic relation:

The people are what make a nation. Whether a government is despised or trusted, there can never be legitimate governance if there is no social intelligence among the citizens. It goes both ways: a good government needs the voice of the people, and the people must feel represented by any government. To make my country free again, this is one of the things I am fighting for.

Edward distrusts hierarchical governance in any form, he affirms. Though he lives in a state of uncertainty, where authorities can be trusted only so far,⁴³ from his conviction that non-hierarchical societal bonds are based on mutual agreement, he may succeed in delegitimizing the regime in his home country to enable more egalitarian social arenas.

Without such imagination, it would not be possible to perceive the necessity for change.⁴⁴ Mary Douglas⁴⁵ refers to Bourdieu’s concept of *illusio* as a belief that social struggles are worth fighting. Imagination, then, can form the foundations for both personal and societal change and resilience.⁴⁶ Among the interlocutors, the illusion is that security and liberation can be achieved, and that an initial step in this process is to delegitimize the social order of the regimes.

What is feasible is closely linked to such imaginings, but because emancipatory alternatives most likely do not occur by themselves,⁴⁷ social change also depends on conscious strategies. Processes of change and social emancipation are complex, but the potential for delegitimizing authoritarianism is inexhaustible.⁴⁸ The interlocutors engage the media, fellow citizens and stakeholders by using a variegated repertoire of methods ranging from satire, theatre, and civil disobedience to public speaking and academic writing. In other words, they are “working microscopically, cooperatively, complicitly, and massively at political change from below”.⁴⁹ A delegitimization of the regimes is then exercised by disrupting normative practices and discourses in order to produce new cultural values, from a firm belief that it is possible to build a society worth living in.

When authoritarian configurations of power are revealed, their socially alienated ways of organizing life are delegitimized by appearing foolish and irrelevant, as Graeber⁵⁰ argues. This is the result of deliberate agency and rigid efforts from a position which he believes we can and should uphold to reinforce ambitious and dynamic co-existence based on principles of self-organization and mutual aid. He states two assumptions: that another world is possible where forms of dominance such as racism, religion, sexism and ethno-nationalism do not exist, and that most people would then be better

off. The second assumption is that it is a part of human ethical behaviour to endure struggles to oppose authoritarian systems. Nikolas Rose⁵¹ similarly identifies such delegitimizing responsiveness as an elementary standard and condition of human interaction, which accentuates the interlocutors' desire for a future defined by human values, so as not to reproduce illegitimate power structures that are not representative of the people.

Through their endeavours, they struggle to form the basis for an existence where the aim is not to take power, but to create pluralist and heterogeneous communities – at first hand in their home countries, which is the view of Syed, an author from the western Maghreb:

For me it is not important who is in government. I don't want to be part of direct rule. It's only important for me that all people, regardless of political views and ethnicity, can be a part of their own country. This is why I keep on writing and expressing my opinions. If the government in my country will not change, they will become more and more non-valid in the eyes of my fellow citizens, and also the international community, I think.

For Syed and the other intellectuals, their imaginings are rooted in a deep-seated social awareness, which prompts them to respond rather than merely being victims of social patterns.⁵²

Taylor⁵³ sees such responses as expression of autonomy, and as a proposition for freedom not only for the individual, but also for society as a whole. Ideally – from the interlocutors' point of view – in this state of interregnum, though new structures have not yet fully emerged, the regimes are losing their legitimacy, and the authoritarian structures, which once represented social and organizational dogma in the home countries, now seem inappropriate and antediluvian.

Conclusion

We cannot predict what the future has in store for the interlocutors – the public intellectuals – but we can gain some insight into their imaginings, activity and identifications. As Erik Olin Wright⁵⁴ reminds us, it may be difficult to imagine future scenarios, but what one can do is to attempt to diagnose harmful social mechanisms in order to neutralize them as much as possible. Ethnographic fieldwork by means of interviews and observation combined with document analysis has revealed a number of themes related to a complex sense of belonging.

Social identifications are not definitive, but subjected to fluid imaginings, opinions and ideologies,⁵⁵ and there is rarely a sharp distinction between categorizations. The interlocutors' activity and resilience are shaped by diversity, and their sense of belonging is based on flexibility from an approach that one is able to subscribe to a variety of values simultaneously. The past, the present and the future are interconnected dimensions that provide a background for them to navigate in social arenas based on their own desires and abilities.

Navigating in a global arena entails their privileged panorama of having been invited to a host country, and being a part of a community with like-minded individuals in both formal and informal relationships. However, there is a danger of idealizing their opportunities, because they may be hampered by rootless points of identification without even being able to return to their home countries, on account of the persecution they will encounter. Nevertheless, returning home can be a necessary and only – if somewhat unwelcome – option if permanent residency in the host country cannot be granted, or if there is no possibility for employment locally or on a global scale.

Experience of loss of professional networks, the labour market and family and friends in both the country of origin and the host country are prevalent. On an individual, social and professional level, they are dependent on support and meticulous attainment of career-oriented qualifications. In this respect, according to the interlocutors, attending events such as conferences and exhibitions is essential, and among the facilitating organizations and the host institutions, more emphasis should be placed on collaborating with each other and with the interlocutors.

A foundational mechanism for social change to take place from an awareness of oppressive conditions forms the circumstances for imaginings to transform into action. In this perspective, social change is the result of human experience and desire, for which the interlocutors are willing to risk their existence and careers in their home countries. Ideally, they are able to take advantage of their diversity of identifications and experience to develop cultural agency and social resilience. They seem to be able to navigate in these states of uncertainty, not least because of imaginings of belonging among a global community, which aligns them with a larger, constantly fluctuating world, beyond both the localism of their host countries and the authoritarian regimes in their home countries. From such an anticipative understanding, these intellectuals' navigations and activities may prove to create egalitarian conditions and novel social structures beyond the nation-state.

Notes

- 1 Lührmann et al., 2020.
- 2 Hannerz, 2016.
- 3 Douglas, 1987.
- 4 Eriksen, 2016; Benhabib, 2018; Özdemir, Mutluer, and Özyürek, 2019; Seton-Watson, 2019.
- 5 Vatansever, 2020.
- 6 Bauman, 1990; Jacobsen, 2013.
- 7 Giddens and Pierson, 1998.
- 8 Cooper and Pratten, 2014.
- 9 Turner, 1974; Bauman, 1990; Kierans and Bell, 2017; Svensson, 2020.
- 10 Lührmann et al., 2020.
- 11 Linz, 2000.
- 12 Geddes, Wright, and Frantz, 2018, 137–140; Whyatt and Reitov, 2019.
- 13 Schmitt, 1988; Bauman, 1990.

- 14 Gramsci, 1999.
- 15 Jackson, 1996.
- 16 Hastrup, 2018.
- 17 Marcus, 2011.
- 18 Bourdieu, 2016.
- 19 Svensson, 2017.
- 20 Hastrup, 2018.
- 21 Hannerz, 2016.
- 22 Comaroff and Comaroff, 2019.
- 23 Droogers, 2010, 148.
- 24 Simmel, 1971.
- 25 Bauman, 1990.
- 26 Kmak, 2018.
- 27 Özdemir et al., 2019.
- 28 Taylor, 2003.
- 29 Whyatt, 2018, 218.
- 30 Carney, 2017; Friedlander, 2019; Sukarieh and Tannock, 2019.
- 31 Bauman, 1990; Svensson, 2020.
- 32 Braidotti, 2011.
- 33 Vatansever, 2020.
- 34 Taylor, 1989; Mulhall and Swift, 1996; Svensson and Nielsen, 2020.
- 35 Anderson, 2006.
- 36 Durkheim, 1893.
- 37 Shafer, 1972; Rösch, 2014; Hansen, 2016.
- 38 Nail, 2015.
- 39 Critchley, 2008, 88.
- 40 Vatansever, 2020.
- 41 Arendt, 2004; Sen, 2007.
- 42 United Nations, 1976.
- 43 Giddens and Pierson, 1998.
- 44 Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020.
- 45 Douglas, 2001.
- 46 Svensson and Nielsen, 2020.
- 47 Wright, 2016.
- 48 Fassin, 2017; Sousa Santos, 2017; Cooper-Cunningham, 2019.
- 49 Scott, 2012, 16.
- 50 Graeber, 2020.
- 51 Rose, 2000.
- 52 Jenkins, 2014.
- 53 Taylor, 1989.
- 54 Wright, 2016.
- 55 Jenkins, 2014; Eriksen, 2016.

Bibliography

- Anderson, Benedict. 2006. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso Books.
- Arendt, Hannah. 2004. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. 1990. "Modernity and Ambivalence." *Theory, Culture & Society* 7: 143–169.

- Benhabib, Seyla. 2018. *Exile, Statelessness, and Migration: Playing Chess with History from Hannah Arendt to Isaiah Berlin*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2016. *La Distinction: Critique Sociale du Jugement*. Paris: Minuit.
- Braidotti, Rosi. 2011. *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Carney, Stephen. 2017. "Geographies of Knowledge in Comparative Education or, How to Silence that Which Disturbs!" *I Problemi della Pedagogia* 63, no. 1: 171–189.
- Comaroff, Jean, and John Comaroff. 2019. *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*. London: Routledge.
- Cooper, Elizabeth, and David Pratten. 2014. *Ethnographies of Uncertainty from Africa*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cooper-Cunningham, Dean. 2019. "Drawing Fear of Difference: Race, Gender, and National Identity in Ms. Marvel Comics." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 48, no. 2: 165–197. doi:10.1177/0305829819889133.
- Critchley, Simon. 2008. *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*. London: Verso.
- Douglas, Mary. 1987. *How Institutions Think*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Douglas, Mary. 2001. "Dealing with Uncertainty." *Ethical Perspectives* 8, no. 3: 145–155. doi:10.2143/EP.8.3.583185.
- Droogers, André. 2010. "Religion, Identity and Security among Pomeranian Lutheran Migrants in Espírito Santo, Brazil (1880–2005)." In *A World of Insecurity: Anthropological Perspectives on Human Security*, edited by Thomas H. Eriksen, Ellen Bal, and Oscar Salemink, 148–181. London: Pluto Press.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1893. *The Division of Labour in Society*. New York: The Free Press.
- Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. 2016. "Introduction: The Art of Belonging in an Overheated World." In *Identity Destabilised*, edited by Thomas H. Eriksen, and Elisabeth Schober, 1–19. London: Pluto.
- Fassin, Didier. 2017. "The Endurance of Critique." *Anthropological Theory* 17, no. 1: 4–29.
- Friedlander, Judith. 2019. *A Light in Dark Times. The New School for Social Research and Its University in Exile*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Geddes, Barbara, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz. 2018. *How Dictatorships Work*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Giddens, Anthony, and Christopher Pierson. 1998. *Conversations with Anthony Giddens: Making Sense of Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Graeber, David. 2020. "Policy for the Future of Work." In *Work in the Future*, edited by Robert Skidelsky, and Nan Craig, 157–173. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Gramsci, Antonio. 1999. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quentin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. London: Electric Book Company.
- Hannerz, Ulf. 2016. *Writing Future Worlds: An Anthropologist Explores Global Scenarios*. Cham: Springer.
- Hansen, Lene. 2016. "Discourse Analysis, Post-Structuralism, and Foreign Policy." In *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, edited by Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield, and Tim Dunne, 95–110. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hastrup, Kirsten. 2018. "Collaborative Moments: Expanding the Anthropological Field through Cross-Disciplinary Practice." *Ethnos. Journal of Anthropology* 83, no. 2: 316–334.
- Jackson, Michael. 1996. *Things as They Are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology*. Georgetown: University Press.

- Jacobsen, Michael Hviid. 2013. "From Modern Utopia to Liquid Modern Anti-Utopia?" *Indigo: Humanities Magazine for Young People* 8: 24–49.
- Jenkins, Richard. 2014. *Social Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Kierans, Ciara, and Kirsten Bell. 2017. "Cultivating Ambivalence: Some Methodological Considerations for Anthropology." *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7, no. 2: 23–44.
- Kmak, Magdalena. 2018. "Crimmigration and Othering in the Finnish Law and Practice of Immigration Detention." *No Foundations* 15: 1–22.
- Linz, Juan J. 2000. *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Lührmann, Anna, Seraphine Maerz, Sandra Grahm, Nazifa Alizada, Lisa Gastaldi, Sebastian Hellmeier, Garry Hindle, and Staffan Lindberg. 2020. *Autocratization Surges – Resistance Grows. Democracy Report 2020*. Gothenburg: Varieties of Democracy Institute.
- Marcus, George E. 2011. "Multi-sited Ethnography: Five or Six Things I Know About it Now." In *Multi-Sited Ethnography. Problems and Possibilities in the Translocation of Research Methods*, edited by Simon Coleman, and Pauline von Hellermann, 24–40. London: Routledge.
- Mulhall, Stephen, and Adam Swift. 1996. *Liberals and Communitarians*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Nail, Thomas. 2015. *The Figure of the Migrant*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Özdemir, Seçkin S., Nil Mutluer, and Esra Özyürek. 2019. "Exile and Plurality in Neoliberal Times: Turkey's Academics for Peace." *Public Culture* 31, no. 2: 235–259.
- Rösch, Felix. 2014. *Émigré Scholars and the Genesis of International Relations*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rose, Nikolas. 2000. "Community, Citizenship, and the Third Way." *American Behavioral Scientist* 43, no. 9: 1395–1411.
- Schmitt, Carl. 1988. *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Scott, James C. 2012. *Two Cheers for Anarchism Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Sen, Amartya. 2007. "Global Inequality and Human Security." In *Globalization and Politics in India*, edited by Baldev Raj Nayar, 117–132. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Seton-Watson, Hugh. 2019. *Nations and States: An Enquiry into The Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism*. London: Routledge.
- Shafer, Boyd C. 1972. *Faces of Nationalism: New Realities and Old Myths*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Simmel, Georg. 1971. "The Stranger." In *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*, edited by D. N. Levine, 143–149. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Sousa Santos, Boaventura de. 2017. *A Non-Occidental West?: Learned Ignorance and Ecology of Knowledge. Towards a Just Curriculum Theory*. London: Routledge.
- Sukarieh, Maysoun, and Stuart Tannock. 2019. "Subcontracting Academia: Alienation, Exploitation and Disillusionment in the UK Overseas Syrian Refugee Research Industry." *Antipode* 51, no. 2: 664–686.
- Svensson, Christian Franklin. 2017. "Ethnographic Methodology: Fieldwork Among Vulnerable Informants." *Sage Research Methods*. London: SAGE Publications. doi:10.4135/9781526419637
- Svensson, Christian Franklin. 2020. "The Trickster of Exiled Intellectuals: Arcane Opposition to Injustice." *Anthropological Notebooks. Special issue: Anthropology of protest against the perceived injustice* 26, no. 1: 111–128.

- Svensson, Christian Franklin, and Vibeke Bak Nielsen. 2020. "Community Work as Opposition: Tensions and Potentials in a Formalistic Welfare Context." *Journal of Comparative Social Work. Special issue: Diversity and Tensions* 15, no. 2: 33–55.
- Taylor, Charles. 1989. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Taylor, Charles. 2003. *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Turner, Victor W. 1974. "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology." *Rice University Studies* 60, no. 3: 53–92.
- United Nations. 1976. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. Geneva: United Nations. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>.
- Vatansever, Asli. 2020. *At the Margins of Academia: Exile, Precariousness, and Subjectivity*. Leiden: Brill.
- Wenger-Trayner, Etienne, and Beverly Wenger-Trayner. 2020. *Learning to Make a Difference: Value Creation in Social Learning Spaces*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Whyatt, Sara. 2018. "Promoting the Freedom to Imagine and Create." In *Reshaping Cultural Policies*, edited by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. 208–225. Paris: UNESCO.
- Whyatt, Sara, and Ole Reitov. 2019. *Protecting and Promoting Artistic Freedom*. Hildesheim: UNESCO.
- Wright, Erik Olin. 2016. *Class, Crisis and the State*. London: Verso Books.