



## SCIENTIFIC FINAL REPORT

### Two- and three-year projects and postdoctoral projects

Registration number, Östersjöstiftelsen: Dnr 28/17

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Project title: *Transnationalism and belonging in the Baltic Sea region among descendants to Polish migrants in Sweden.*

#### 1. The three most important results of the project with conclusions

The overarching result is that *descendants of migrants occupy a special position in the social structure, which generates special experiences that distinguish them from migrant parents as well as from generational peers with native-born parents.* The 31 adult descendants of migrants that were in-depth interviewed in the project grew up in Sweden with one or two Polish parents, all but six in Stockholm. They described feeling different from their own parents – based not only on upbringing in different times, but *also* different national contexts and cultures. Having been raised by parents born in another nation, who had undergone a migration process, also made them feel different in relation to peers with majority parents. Various aspects of this overarching result were mirrored in the further results, the three most important ones addressed below:

*A. The interviewees had a special whiteness position in Sweden.* All but two of the descendants, who had fathers born outside of Europe, expressed how they most often passed unnoticed in relation to the norms of whiteness. They narrated passing as white – and thereby also as Swedish. Their narrations thus illuminated aspects required for passing the norms of Swedish whiteness and moreover made visible the racialisation of Swedishness as white. They illuminated what I have termed the norms of *materialised Swedish whiteness*; norms that require a body with certain physical characteristics to be interpreted as white in Sweden – such as light skin colour as well as other blond phenotypes. They also elucidated a seldomly discussed level of Swedish whiteness norms, which I have labelled the norms of *performative Swedish whiteness*. These are norms that require performative abilities, such as the capability to speak Swedish as a native and to enact dominant Swedish norms by dressing, moving, and behaving in particular ways. Being able to pass the norms of performative Swedish whiteness distinguished these descendants from their migrant parents, who came of age in Poland, did not speak Swedish as natives and often stood out in Sweden due to their ways of dressing and behaving.

Passing all levels of Swedish whiteness generated privilege, but also had undesired effects, as being ascribed the same experience and knowledge as their majority peers – experience and knowledge they did not always have. It meant that they had to handle expectations of sameness and fitting into dominant norms of Swedishness, while the everyday experiences and the multifaceted subject positions they had acquired as descendants were obscured. Their own experiences of difference in relation to majority peers went unacknowledged and feelings of alienation and being incomplete were fostered.

*B. The interviewees created place, translocal ties and belonging in ways that distinguished them from their migrant parents as well as from generational peers with native-born parents.* Stockholm proved to be constructed as the main adult place of belonging and a



homeland among the majority who grew up in this location. They did hence not express first-hand belonging to Sweden as a nation. Constructing Stockholm as the main place of belonging can be understood due to their parents being one-time migrants, which turned the descendants gaze towards Sweden, and due to being descendants who did not have many relations in, and experiences of, sites in Sweden outside their place of growth. But it can also be understood in relation to whiteness norms. Stockholm offered the descendants neighbourhoods with mixed racial and ethnic compositions, where whiteness norms were less at play and where they were among others feeling different in relation to the white majority. The attachment to Stockholm was also strengthened by complex relationships with their parent's native country Poland. Poland was foremost narrated as a childhood location, while in adulthood the relationship to Poland was ambivalent and coloured by conflicting emotions; due to, diminishing social relations in Poland, differences in mindsets and feelings of estrangement owing to the current political situation (PiS).

C. The descendant's Polish parent were marked by traumas related to World War II and/or the communist period in Poland. *Being raised by parents who, due to the scars of trauma, were suspicious, thrifty, tenacious, industrious and, not least, overanxious did shape the descendants.* Many descendants had developed a sense of responsibility, a special type of anxiety and an awareness that personal life took place within a far vaster political context, which without any warning and with disastrous consequences might impact on their personal domain – just as World War II and the communist takeover in Poland impacted the lives of their parents. This affected how the descendants lived their lives and many invested in education to safeguard their positions in Swedish society. Due to this anxiety and awareness they had also developed tactile antennas by which they detected insidious changes towards ethno-nationalism in the political discourse. They also anticipated the effects of these changes: intensified everyday exclusionary processes that could threaten their whiteness position. This could hence change the rules of the game in much the same way as the historical traumas already experienced by the older generations of their families.

*An overall conclusion* to be drawn from these clusters of results is the importance of separating descendants of migrants from the category of migrant as well as from peers with a majority background – not only analytically but also in everyday practice – in order to provide equal conditions and opportunities and avoid misrecognition.

## **2. The project's contribution to the international research frontline**

### *A. It contributes to critical race- and whiteness studies:*

- by focusing on the under researched category of descendants passing as white.
- by exploring less explored negative experiences of passing as white and thereby problematising the category white.
- by nuancing the concept of whiteness by proposing the terms 'materialised whiteness' and 'performative whiteness' (see above), thereby demonstrating that the norms of Swedish whiteness are not only about looks but also about performances.
- by showing that Swedish whiteness norms are very narrow and exclusive, and furthermore are becoming even narrower in the wake of ethno-nationalism.

### *B. It contributes to research on transnationalism/translocalism and place attachment:*

- by illuminating understudied aspects within these research areas, such as
  - place attachment as a process;
  - place attachment as shaped in relation to mobility;
  - place attachment as shaped in relation to multiple locations; and
  - place attachment as shaped in relation to locations on different scales.



- by illuminating ‘translocality from below’/‘grounded translocalism’.
- by locating place attachment in a larger socio-political landscape, thereby indicating the importance of taking into consideration societal structures.
- by showing that mobility does not have to prevent positive place attachment.
- by showing that place attachment is not only shaped by positive place experiences but also by negative and complex place experiences.
- by underlining the significance of considering people’s relationships with different locations to fully understand the creation of place attachment and translocal ties.

*C. It adds to the research field of postmemory:*

- by producing knowledge on several less-explored aspects of postmemory such as:
  - postmemory of transmitted trauma related to World War II and the communist era in Poland, that is, of less extreme abuse and violence than that caused by the Holocaust;
  - postmemory in both second and third generation after the trauma; and
  - postmemory voiced by people who grew up in a country not associated with the trauma.
- by analysing interviews – a rarely used material category within postmemory studies.
- by proposing the concept of ‘transgenerational imprint’ as a label for the formative generational after-effects of trauma.
- by utilising this concept to make visible lived after-effects of trauma.

**3. The project contributes to knowledge of the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe**

- by producing knowledge on a severely understudied group; descendants who grew up in Sweden with parents from Poland.
- by adding to the research field of Nordic whiteness with the results on whiteness above.
- by illuminating how the norms of performative Swedish whiteness places descendants to Polish migrants in a different whiteness position than their migrant parents, thereby nuancing the discussion on both CEE migrants and their offspring as ‘not quite white’.
- by showing how even well-educated offspring to Polish migrants who pass as white (and Swedish) currently experience their whiteness positions in Sweden as threatened due to the spread of ethno-nationalism.
- by showing to what extent and in what forms these descendants construct translocal and emotional bonds with their parents’ native country, Poland.
- by showing how the translocal and emotional bonds to places across the Baltic Sea were shaped by the parents’ mobility pattern and by whiteness norms and in a process spanning multiple locations of different sizes and types.
- by displaying Polish ways of expressing and handling traumas related to World War II and the communist era in Poland.
- by showing that these descendants of Polish trauma survivors expressed and used historical trauma in different ways and for different purposes than their Polish parents.
- by showing how postmemory expressed by the descendants was converted into sensitivity to socio-political change and stood out as something performative and productive, transforming nonspecific anxiety into the fear of a specific object, in this case the rise of specific ethno-nationalist ideologies and parties.
- by suggesting that the special type fear caused by historical political events described in the project also may be widespread among others who experienced the trauma of war and communism in Eastern Europe as well as among other second and third generations after such trauma.

**4. New research questions that the project has led to**



The interview group of this project contained of adult descendants to Polish migrants who arrived in Sweden during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s and who often had received some higher education in Poland. It would be interesting to compare this special group with descendants to the (many) Poles who arrived in Sweden after Poland's entry into the EU in 2004 (and who, according to Statistics Sweden, often work in the construction and cleaning sectors) as well as with adult Polish descendants in other countries.

## 5. Dissemination of the results of the project

### Publications

#### Peer reviewed research articles

Runfors, Ann. 2023. The political as the personal. Postmemory among descendants to Polish migrants in Sweden. *Ethnologia European*, 53(1):1-21. OPEN ACCESS  
<https://doi.org/10.16995/ee.4771>

Runfors, Ann. 2022. Challenging the hierarchies of Swedish whiteness: Negative experiences and undesired effects of passing as white and Swedish. *Kulturella Perspektiv – Svensk etnologisk tidskrift*, 31(2020). OPEN ACCESS.  
<https://publicera.kb.se/kp/article/view/1975>

Runfors, Ann. 2021. Navigating the Radar: Descendants of Polish Migrants and Racialized Social Landscapes in Sweden. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 11(1):65–79. OPEN ACCESS. <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.26>

Runfors, Ann. 2020. Utbildning, målmedvetenhet och vithet. Görande av klass bland kvinnor och män med polska föräldrar. *Kulturella perspektiv*, 2020 (1), s. 69-75. OPEN ACCESS. <https://www.umu.se/globalassets/organisation/fakulteter/humfak/institutionen-for-kultur--och-medievetenskaper/forskning/kp/kp-nr-1-2-2020---for-webben.pdf>

#### Book chapters

Runfors, Ann. 2023 (forthcoming). Place attachment and translocal ties: adult descendants of Polish migrants in Sweden. In: *Migration and Families between East and North of Europe: Translocal Lifelines*. Eds: Laura Assmuth, Marina Hakkarainen, Marit Aure & Pihla Maria Siim. Publisher: Oxfordshire: Routledge.

Runfors, Ann. 2023. Hemmets betydelse för skolambitioner. Utbildning som ideal plikt och trygghet. In: *Det komplexa uppdraget. Kulturanalytiska perspektiv på skola, förskola och fritidshem*. Eds: Zackariasson, Maria, David Gunnarsson & Elisabeth Wollin. Stockholm: Studentlitteratur AB.

Runfors, Ann. 2022. Har den svenska vitheten krympt i den etno-nationalistiska tvätten? In: *Polarisering och samexistens: kulturella förändringar i vår tid*. Eds: Zackariasson, Maria, Öhlander, Magnus & Pripp, Oscar. Tullinge: Boréa Bokförlag. OPEN ACCESS. <http://su.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1676874/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

Runfors, Ann. 2021. En levd social position och en sfär för igenkänning. In: *Frihet! Politik! Systerskap! Vänbok till Beatriz Lindqvist*. Eds: Kim Silow Kallenberg, Jenny Ingridsdotter & David Gunnarsson. Huddinge: Södertörns högskola. OPEN ACCESS. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1588493/FULLTEXT02.pdf>



### **Presentations**

*(OBS: Limited options to present 2020-2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic)*

2019, 21/11: Presentation of the project and some tentative results, *Wanted and unwanted invisibility, Experiences of racialization among descendants of polish migrants in Sweden* at Higher seminar in Ethnology, Södertörn University.

2021, 12/1: Online Panel *Nordic Europe's Eastern Others? CEE/Russian Migration and the Nordic States*, together with Kathy Burrell, Reader in Human Geography, Department of Geography and Planning, University of Liverpool, UK, at the conference *Colonial/Racial Histories, National Narratives and Transnational Migration* held 2021, 11-14/1 online at University of Helsinki.

2021, 12/1: Online presentation of the paper *Descendants of polish migrants negotiating Swedish whiteness, transgenerational traumas and populist right-wing discourse* in the panel *Nordic Europe's Eastern Others? CEE/Russian Migration and the Nordic States*, at the conference *Colonial/Racial Histories, National Narratives and Transnational Migration* held 2021, 11-14/1 online at University of Helsinki.

2022, 9/5: Presentation of the project and its results, *Transnationalism and belonging in the Baltic Sea region among descendants to Polish migrants in Sweden*, at Centre of Baltic and East European Studies, Södertörn University.

2022, 9/6: Presentation of the project and its results, *Transnationalism and belonging in the Baltic Sea region among descendants to Polish migrants in Sweden*, at Department of Historical and Contemporary Studies, Södertörn University.