

# LIVING WITH CHANGE AMONG A TRANSIENT POPULATION: *Narratives and Practices of Collective Belonging among Swedish Migrants on the Costa del Sol in Spain*<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The article explores how the Swedish migrants narrate and practice collective belonging as strategies to handle life in a region characterised by a transient and circulating population on the Costa del Sol, Spain. It is based on an ethnographic research within the Swedish infrastructure of organizations, institutions, and private enterprises, in addition to interviews with Swedish migrants who are registered residents and live on a permanent basis along the Spanish southern coast. The wider analytical framework consists of theories of diaspora, transnationality and identification. The article shows how the Swedish migrants are engaged in diasporic and transnational practices, and highlights how they value and attribute meanings to such practices. It also illuminates how internal divisions within the Swedish population are shaped through identification in narrations.

## Keywords

Fluid place • narratives • collective belonging • diasporic practices • transnational practices

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## Introduction

Ever since the 1960s and 1970s, there has been a Swedish presence of tourists, second homeowners, as well as seasonal, temporal, and permanent migrants on the Costa del Sol in the south of Spain. Independent of the form of mobility, length of stay and degree of permanence in the area, the Swedish citizens, like many other privileged, voluntary migrant groups from Northern Europe in Spain (O'Reilly 2000, Blaakilde 2007, Kordel 2016), remain closely attached to their country of origin through transnational travel, virtual connections, and social relations.

This marks the Costa del Sol region as a transient and fluid setting as people tend to come and go. Hence, circulation and change along the coast is a part of everyday lives of the Swedish migrants, who live permanently on the coast but are also transnationally connected and equally mobile. Yet, simultaneously, they are in need of creating a sense of belonging and stability as migrants in a new home country. This entails a need to experience lasting social inclusion and connection, in addition to feeling a sense of place and position (cf. Woube 2014:16). In this article, I examine how the Swedish migrants, in their narrations and daily practices, create stability in the social life and experiences of permanence in a region characterised by an unstable and flexible population. I analyse the migrants' ways to create belonging through a focus on identification and differentiation practices in narratives. The narratives convey the experiences of both affiliation and cohesion, along with difference and division among the Swedish population on the Costa del Sol.

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## Diaspora and transnationality in lifestyle migration research

This article aims to problematize narrations and practices of belonging as a means of creating stability and experiences of permanence within a migrant group that is part of a voluntary and privileged form of relocation, which has been labelled *lifestyle migration*. Scholars have shown that the main motive for the relocation in question is a desire to change one's lifestyle and increase one's quality of life, rather than to move solely due to economic motives (Benson & O'Reilly 2009a, 2009b; Benson & Osbaldiston 2014; O'Reilly & Benson 2015). It is a form of migration undertaken primarily by westerners from the industrialized part of the world. Yet, when researching this type of privileged migration, the migration scholars have seldom acknowledged the effect of lifestyle migration in terms of how belonging and cohesion is created among lifestyle migrants (cf. Agnidakis 2013; Benson 2016). Nor has there been any extensive use, by scholars of lifestyle migration, of applying diaspora as a theoretical perspective. Sheila Croucher (2012a, 2012b), who is one exception in having performed research through a diaspora perspective on American citizens living abroad, argues that the association to forced dispersal and trauma has interfered with the applicability of diaspora theory in voluntary migration research. Hence, it has been more common to recognize the privileged lifestyle migration communities as ethnic communities or 'expatriate bubbles', without applying a diaspora lens (see O'Reilly 2000; Fechter 2007; Gustafson 2008; Zaban 2015). Publications applying a transnational

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perspective on lifestyle migration, on the other hand, have underlined and shown how lifestyle migrants are engaged in transnational practices in-between their country of origin and country of residence (O'Reilly 2000; Zaban 2015; Benson 2016). In this article, I combine the theories of diaspora, transnationality and identification in order to examine how the Swedish migrants create belonging after relocation to the Costa del Sol.

## Theories of diaspora, transnationality and identification

In this article, I apply the theories of diaspora and transnationality in a practice-oriented manner. I focus on narrations and manifestations of sharing a common origin and social position as a migrant in a foreign country, and how this stands in relation to the manner in which the migrants cope with a fluid and transient population that change yearly as well as seasonally, and that is characterized by irregularity. The concept of diaspora centres on different types of collective practices that the migrants are engaged in with other Swedes, which is a way to manifest collective belonging. Inspired by a practice-oriented diaspora approach of analysing how daily practices might lead to diasporic formations (Brubaker 2005), I apply Steven Vertovec's and Robin Cohen's (1999: iii-xxviii) definition of diaspora. They give diaspora three meanings, a *social form*, a *type of consciousness* and a *mode of cultural production*. A simplified definition of *social form* is the social relationship of people sharing an ethnic origin, although they are scattered from the country of origin and are linked to a geographical space. A characteristic of diaspora as a social form is the triangular relationship to (1) a country of origin, (2) a country of residence and (3) other migrants of the same origin (Vertovec & Cohen 1999: xvii-xviii). I highlight how a specific social form is produced through the diaspora practices of Swedish migrants. A *type of consciousness* refers to the diasporic awareness of experiencing a migrant position with other migrants, in-between the above-stated reference points (Vertovec & Cohen 1999: xviii-xix). I show how the Swedish migrants express and manifest the consciousness of sharing the experience of post-migration from Sweden to Spain. They create collective belonging through different diasporic practices based on the sharing of conditions with others. Diaspora as a mode of *cultural production* aims to describe the formal and informal cultural expressions and manifestations that take place and are produced in the diasporic setting of Swedes on the Costa del Sol (cf. Vertovec & Cohen 1999: xix-xx). Since the 1960s, these diasporic practices have created and established a long-term collective Swedish presence along the coast (Woube 2014). The character of *longue durée* in the formation of ethnic communities outside a country of origin is also a part of the definition of diasporas (Brubaker 2005:7). Hence, a focus on diasporic practices might give rise to a community of Swedes, distinctive from other groups on location on the Costa del Sol (Woube 2014; Olsson 2017).

In addition to place-bound and collectively based diasporic practices, the Swedish migrants are engaged in transnational practices of exchange and circular mobility in-between the country of origin and the country of residence (Woube 2014). These practices are the central and entwined aspects of diasporic communities, since transnational mobility and communication are vital means for incorporation, involvement in and belonging to the countries of importance to the migrants (Tsagarousianou 2007; Faist 2010).

In order to capture the manifestations and narrations of diasporic and transnational belonging, I focus on individual and collective

expressions of identification. A fundamental aspect of identification is to differentiate oneself in relation to others, and in contrast to them, in social situations (Barth 1969; Hylland Eriksen 1996:52f). I will analyse how the narrations of separation and differentiation are used in order to establish collective belonging, at times, manifested through overlapping expressions. This in turn highlights how identification shapes internal lines of divisions among the Swedish population, who have settled on a permanent basis on the Costa del Sol.

## Method and Data

I base the article on data collected through ethnographical fieldwork in the coastal town of Fuengirola on the Costa del Sol, Spain. The fieldwork was conducted during 5 months in the spring of 2009, with four shorter follow-up visits of 1-2 weeks during the years 2009-2013. I have selected this field due to the fact that the region has been a significant destination for tourism, second home ownership and migration of the Swedish citizens since the 1960s and onwards. The methods *participant experience* and *conversational interviews* were chosen in order to capture the experience of being a migrant from Sweden in the specific setting of the Costa del Sol (cf. Hansen 2003, Kaijser & Öhlander 2011). My methodological objective was to be able to participate, experience and take an active part in the everyday life of Swedish migrants in places where they live their lives, but also to study formally organized activities, for example within the Swedish church choir.

In addition, I conducted 12 *conversational interviews* with Swedish migrants on three to four occasions that were recorded and lasted for one to two hours at a time. The interviewees were seven women and five men in the ages of 21–85 years, who I have given fictive names. I contacted them through a spontaneous approach when I happened to meet them in different locations in Fuengirola, but also through a more organized inquiry directed to personnel working for companies catering the Swedish population. All the interviewees have been permanent and registered residents on the Costa del Sol for many years. Some have lived there for decades. At the time of interviews, the interviewees had no intention of returning to Sweden, but all interviewees depict strong and habitual, often daily, connections to Sweden in a variety of ways. Simultaneously, they are incorporated into the local community in different ways through work, family and in-laws, friends and neighbours; most of them speak Spanish fluently. They migrated as part of a quest for increased quality of life and a different, improved lifestyle but this was articulated in a variety of ways. The interviewees' individual and varied framing of the migration trajectory is in line with the scientific concept of *lifestyle migration*. This indicates heterogeneity and diversity among the migrants, rather than pointing to a rigid and stable mobility movement (Osaldistion 2015). This article shows how individual needs, aspirations and motives of migration stand in relation to the narrations of collective belonging and identification as ways to handle the transient nature of the population in the region.

The interviews centred on personal narratives of the individuals experiencing migration from Sweden to the Costa del Sol. These were life story interviews (Atkinson 1998), but I asked the interviewees to start their life stories from events that had triggered the decision to migrate, and to tell me how they came to migrate. The interview material is called migration stories due to the focus on their decision to migrate and the aftermath of migration. I analyse their stories through a focus on expressions of collective belonging, through positioning and identification from the standpoint of being a migrant

in a foreign country, inspired by Floya Anthias (2002, 2008, 2012). The practice of identification appears in the migration stories through a narration, where the plot is set in different locations. I will show how the interviewees draw attention to locations that are related to the new country, the old country, or their own migrant group. However, the interviewees talk about them and define them as local entities, such as the workplace, the neighbourhood, or social networks in their hometown. Migrant narrations about multiple attachments and affiliations give insight about the complexities in positioning and identification, as these might be based on different and at times opposing contexts, relations and locations (Anthias 2002). I also analyse the migrant experiences in relation to how the migrants understand and make sense of power structures in their everyday life based on gender, nationality, age and social class. The article shows how the identity negotiation forms a part of their strategies as they shape collective belonging, while living in a region characterised by change and a transient population.

## Transient and circular movement

Transient circulation and steady flux of international dwellers characterise the present-day Costa del Sol as a place; it is an obvious practicality of the everyday life to handle, according to the migration stories of the interviewees. The interviewee Lena tells me how she is a part of the circulation and faces individual consequences due to the extensively transient nature of her surroundings. She was born in 1976 and she has lived on the Costa del Sol for eight years with her Spanish partner. She tells me:

This is a temporary stop, where we are right now. For a lot of people, it is probably an easy life, along the Costa del Sol. I don't think it is. Hard work, tough to get work, tough to get a good job, tough to get a good salary and a big investment of time. You work a lot and get little in return. It's also a temporary stop because it's a place where a lot of people pass by in life.

In the quotation, Lena refers to her residency as a temporary stop in the sense that she is uncertain of how long her own permanence in the region will be. She also relates to the transient circulation of people in the area, which makes the temporary stop pertinent in a general collective sense. This hints to a common notion of regarding Costa del Sol as a temporary dwelling among the Swedes residing on the Costa del Sol. Lena depicts how Swedes spend a few years in the coastal region, maybe working or trying to live there permanently, and then deciding to move back to Sweden or to a third country. The Swedish population on the Costa del Sol also changes during the seasons in a year; many spend the winter months in Spain, then change location to spend the summer months in Sweden (Gustafson 2002). For Lena, as a permanent resident, the dwelling of other Swedes appears to be unreliable and in flux.

The account highlights the unequal and very different living conditions within the group of Swedes. Lena says: 'For a lot of people, it is probably an easy life along the Costa del Sol.' In this statement, she contrasts her own life with the retired Northern Europeans or Northern Europeans of other social classes than her own. She assumes that the two categories of Swedes enjoy both money and time to live an easier life. In comparison, she works in the service sector within a Swedish enterprise directed towards the Scandinavian population. She tells me that she assumes a raise in her pay is not possible due to wage regulations of the local labour market. She also

compares her salary to the higher salaries paid in the Swedish labour market in Sweden. She works long hours and is therefore unable to enjoy a free and easy-going tourist lifestyle. Instead, as a service provider, she is part of setting up an infrastructure for such lifestyles through her work (cf. Gavanas 2017). The group of migrants that Lena compares her own life with resembles the consumption-led economically active migrants that Karen O'Reilly (2003:303) has researched. Lena is positioning herself as a different kind of migrant on the Costa del Sol, in that she is of the working class and much younger of age, but also through her settlement, co-habitation and ownership of an apartment with a Spanish partner. This makes her more permanent and stable despite her transnational in-between position. In Lena's account, the practice of othering takes place through comparing differences in relation to how she understands social class, age, and degree of settlement. Specifically, the social class is a relevant differentiation parameter when positioning oneself and others in the narratives of migration, according to Floya Anthias (2002:512, 502).

Other interviewees, especially professionals who have also come to the Costa del Sol to work, depict the Spanish working life in similar words as Lena does in her account. They talk about a working life of long working hours with a siesta schedule; working from nine in the morning until nine at night with a siesta between half past two and five in the afternoon. They claim that entrepreneurial migrants who own a restaurant or a café have to extend their hours through the daytime until the last guest leaves at night. Consequently, a common and frequent feature seems to be the change of companies and company owners in the area due to a Spanish working life that is too demanding. The interviewees tell me stories of how entrepreneurs try their luck a few years and leave when the area has proven to be too tough a place for business. Many claim that the conditions of the coastal labour market cause the international population to become transient. On the other hand, to set up a business oriented towards the Swedish population as part of the Swedish infrastructure, is a deliberate choice by the entrepreneurial migrants, instead of choosing to work within a more secure labour market in Sweden.

One consequence of the transient circulation is a widespread anonymity on the Costa del Sol. This has both positive and negative implications in how to shape collective belonging and how to feel safe and secure. On the one hand, the widespread anonymity gives way for individual transformation, to change oneself and one's life. The interviewees claim that the relocation is a possibility to start a new way of life. Research about the privileged northern European migration to the Mediterranean countries acknowledges this standpoint as a common feature in lifestyle migration trajectories (Benson & Ostbaldiston 2014; Benson 2016). On the other hand, the migration stories contain narratives of a negative effect of circulation and anonymity. The interviewees convey feelings of uncertainty of the whereabouts of particularly other Swedish migrants. They narrate stories of how other migrants come down to the coast and make up stories about their situation and past life. Mysterious revelations often appear in the migration stories as the interviewees speak of sudden disappearances, when Swedes in trouble, in a haze, have left their entire households with furniture and family photos. Other Swedes have sold their material things on the fairgrounds of Fuengirola on Saturdays. A possible interpretation of the stories is that they are urban legends of the Costa del Sol, in relation to it being a place of criminality, of hiding and of an underworld of drugs; a symbolic narrative of the region. Fictional novels have also been published in Sweden depicting the region along a similar vein.<sup>2</sup> In addition, while portraying other Swedes as unreliable, unpredictable and temporary

in their dwelling on the Costa del Sol, many interviewees identify themselves in opposing and different terms, as being trustworthy, having a permanent base in the Costa del Sol and as 'good' residents.

The narratives of sudden disappearances and unreliable social bonds frame how the circulation on the Costa del Sol has an impact on the everyday lives of the Swedish migrants. The narratives cannot be interpreted as *just* urban legends used to differentiate oneself as a permanent and reliable migrant compared with other Swedish dwellers. The content of stories also seems to be based on actual experiences and views, which have shaped the interviewees' understanding of their place of residence as fluid and transient. In addition, they highlight the need of a stable community formation as a way to handle the uncertainties and insecurities of social relations and the local labour market. The next section will discuss engagements in diasporic practices as a strategy to add stability to the post-migration experience.

### Diasporic practices manifesting collective belonging

The Swedish migrants on the Costa del Sol comprise a transient population of tourists, seasonal visitors, temporary dwellers or permanent residents. From the position of being permanent residents, the interviewees regard their fellow Swedes as a shifting and inconsistent population, comparable to the British population on the Costa del Sol (e.g., O'Reilly 2000:104). Simultaneously, the interviewees produce collective belonging through engagements in practices and activities of work and leisure with other Swedish dwellers on the coast. As in many lifestyle migrant communities (O'Reilly 2000; Croucher 2012a), there are migrant institutions, organizations and private enterprises associated with the country of origin. These formally organize activities and events, often through cooperation with several actors. In this particular case, many of these are located close to the homes of the interviewees in Fuengirola, which is one of the coastal towns that has the most densely located infrastructure associated with Sweden and Swedishness, catering a Swedish or a Scandinavian population in the Swedish language. The interviewees are or have been engaged in the Swedish infrastructure through employment, voluntary work or ownership of a private company. In addition, they are all, in different degrees, engaged in diasporic practices in arenas where the Swedish migrants come together, get to know each other and help each other out when dealing with the local community (cf. Woube 2013). For some of the interviewees, the engagements are a means to shape collective belonging. Others are engaged in the Swedish infrastructure in order to get employment to be able to live along the coast. Hence, they use the Swedish infrastructure and the Swedish social networks as channels of support and information, which are common migrant strategies when settling in a foreign country (Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton 1992). I interpret the activities and engagements within the Swedish infrastructure as features of a specific *social form* based on the social relationship of people sharing ethnic origin, living outside the country of origin, and who are linked to a place, in line with the definition of diaspora of Vertovec and Cohen (1999: iii–xxviii).

Many interviewees attribute great meaning and value to be able to work, spend free time, socialize, and be part of the Swedish infrastructure. They tell me that they regard the Swedish infrastructure as one of the key incentives for relocation to the Costa del Sol area, in order to shape new social networks, to be able to find employment and to handle a practical everyday life locally. The Swedish presence

functions as comfort and security when living in a foreign country. The interviewee Karin, who was born in 1981, came to the coast as a language student and stayed thanks to a Spanish partner. At the time of the interview, she had been a resident on the Costa del Sol for five years. She highlights the significance of sharing a place of residence with other Swedish citizens in the following way:

I think for me it makes me feel a bit more at home, I think so. To know that there are others in the same situation, that there are Swedes around me. It is a security. And just being able to get Swedish ingredients if you want to bake Swedish gingerbread for Christmas. For me, it means a great deal. I do think so.

Karin expresses the comfort of living in a region with other Swedes, with whom she shares a nationality, language, cultural background and transnational migrant position. She points to an existential and emotional security of sharing an experience of living with other nationals in Spain. A possible interpretation of *others in the same situation* is to share a migrant position on equal transnational terms. Despite having lived for many years in Spain, an orientation around Swedish matters and issues is a central theme in the migration stories. This comes to light through the common notion of expecting Sweden to be open for the interviewees' return if or whenever their residence abroad comes to an end (Woube 2014:150). In addition, the orientation towards Swedish matters is manifested through daily transnational connections that enable the Swedish migrants to move, travel and communicate with Sweden. Through their Swedish citizenship, they claim to have a 'right to return' to their country of origin and frequently do return during vacations or longer periods. The 'right to return' is related to the dream of returning to the homeland among migrants in diasporas and exiles around the world (Clifford 1994). Diaspora scholars even argue that the theme of return functions as a collective symbol for diaspora communities (Safran 1991; Cohen 1997). Even though these ideologies are shaped differently, the imaginary and actual migrant practices of returning to, and interacting with Sweden as part of the everyday life and lifestyle resembles the symbolic theme of return as a core feature that shapes togetherness in diasporas. Along the line of Roza Tsagarousianou's (2007) understanding of diaspora, the diasporic togetherness shaped among the Swedes relies on sharing the practices of being connected, in communication and in exchange with the country of origin; it does *not* include being dispersed from a desired but inaccessible homeland. Dispersion is often formulated as a characteristic of diasporas (Faist 2010). Transnational ties seem like building blocks of a *migrant consciousness* that the Swedes share and shape, in accordance with the second aspect of the diaspora definition (Vertovec & Cohen 1999:iii–xxviii). It links to the experience of sharing a social position as migrants with active transnational ties to the same country of origin. The sameness works as the starting point for collective identification and a sense of belonging.

The transnational movements of Swedish migrants have an impact on activities and *cultural (re)production* produced formally within the Swedish arenas; events and opening hours are scheduled on the basis of the ebb and flow of the circulation. Traditional Swedish holidays and festivities are celebrated as well as local diasporic events, which can be interpreted as part of shaping a diasporic community, through cultural reproductive practices, along the lines of Vertovec & Cohen's diaspora definition (1999:iii–xxviii). One local diasporic event is the trade fair 'Suecia en España' (Sweden in Spain), which takes place each year in November when there are many Swedes in

the region. The event includes seminars about settlement in Spain, exhibitions by Swedish private enterprises and organizations, and entertainment by various local Swedish performers. The trade fair is directed both towards Swedes living in the area, but also towards the local community through exhibitions of products and services that Swedish-owned companies offer to the local community.

A common perception in the migration stories about cultural reproductive practices, such as the trade fair 'Suecia en España', appears in the account of the interviewee Lars. Lars was born in 1943; he is a retired former officer of the Swedish Armed Forces. He moved to the area as a retiree, having now lived along the coast for seven years. He tells me:

Lars: Of course, when there is something Swedish going on down here, then you participate in that.

Annie: Swedish ... what do you mean?

Lars: Well, national days, then I like to participate and help out. [...] If a Swedish ship is arriving, a warship, then you feel something for that.

Like Lars, the interviewees mention visiting, participating in, and feeling a connection to the national Swedish holiday celebrations or events associated with Sweden or the Swedish diasporic migrant group. I interpret this as an engagement that is closely tied to an obligation due to nationality, to sharing a migrant position, and feeling affinity and membership to the same diasporic community. There are also interviewees who express dislike and make a mockery of the events, while emphasizing their love of Spain and preferred orientation towards Spain and Spanish matters. Simultaneously, they are informally engaged in cultural reproductive practices. They may buy Swedish food at the Swedish grocery store or at the Swedish furniture store IKEA in Málaga, which also sells food associated to Sweden, in order to make a dish or a meal that the interviewees regard as Swedish.

## Internal divisions

As shown, diasporic practices unite the Swedish migrants (Olsson 2017). Simultaneously, the practices of identification that appear in the migration stories show how change and a transient population lead to unstable positions and identifications. This results in fragmentation and divisions among the Swedes; the interviewees highlight how they also identify with different smaller internally divided entities of the Swedish population. The internal divisions are based on sharing a motive for migration and in shared post-migration living conditions. This next section will discuss how the interviewees shape internal divisions as an additional strategy in order to handle the circulation of people along the coast.

Due to the transient nature of the Swedish population, it is common to stress the position as permanent residents among the interviewees. They are a diverse group of different ages, gender, living conditions, reasons for dwelling, patterns of dwelling, and so on, but all of them have lived in the region for many years. They are incorporated into the local community and speak Spanish fluently. They feel that they belong on the coast; at the time of the interviews, they had no intention of returning to Sweden. Despite their diversity, they all position themselves in similar ways and in contrast to temporary Swedish dwellers through their long-term duration of residence in the region, their knowledge of the Spanish culture, society and language, and their social relations within the

local community. Statements like the following express this: 'I can find information in this country and there is a very good feeling to that,' as Sofie puts it. She is born in 1975, a resident on the Costa del Sol for the past eight years, and works administratively within a company that directs its services to other Swedes. She emphasizes that she has enough knowledge of the Spanish language and local practices to manage on her own and handle her everyday life in the Spanish society, without the help from other Swedes. She does not need anyone to interpret or translate local language, customs and norms. This makes her independent from the Swedish infrastructure when coping with practical everyday life. The statement also indicates a more stable and permanent position thanks to her language skills. Yet, she is still dependent on the Swedish infrastructure for employment. The account also points to the possibility for Swedes to manage a social life in the Swedish language in the Swedish arenas, although knowledge of the local language, customs and practical matters in relation to local authorities is needed to establish oneself on a permanent basis. It is a frequent practice for the fellow nationals to ask for help from Swedish migrants with better language and regional knowledge to mediate or translate and help with local practicalities of everyday situations (cf. O'Reilly 2000; Haas 2012). In the eyes of the interviewees, other Swedes are identified as an *internal other* through their lack of interest and knowledge of Spanish culture, society and language, in addition to their all-encompassing orientation towards Sweden, Swedish issues and affairs, and their presumed intense social relations with other Swedes on the Costa del Sol (Woube 2014:84). International research on privileged migrants abroad are common (O'Reilly 2000; Fetcher 2007).

The permanent residency of the interviewees is an important factor when they differentiate themselves from other Swedish dwellers. However, in order to build reliable social relations, there is a more prominent articulation of the importance of sharing living conditions. This relates to the reasons for migration and forms the basis of the varied internal divisions within the Swedish population that appears through the migration stories. Karin, born in 1981, belongs to a common category of migrants that arrived as language students in their twenties, met a Spanish partner, and their stay as students turned into migration due to love. Her immediate social network consists of other Swedish female migrants within the same category, who also went to Spain as students and stayed due to love to a Spanish national. They are now professionals within the international labour market on the Costa del Sol. She comments on the circulation of people in the area:

I am not affected by [people coming and going] because those that I hang out with have lived here quite some time and almost all, yes all of them seem to stay here. Some of them have left but not anyone that I have been particularly close to.

As indicated, Karin has befriended migrants, with whom she shares circumstances, livelihood and social position through the intersection of young age, professionalism, permanent residency, nationality and gender. By seeing this circle of friends, she does not feel that the transient and changeable nature of the population influences her life, even though the statement shows that she does have to take into account the possibility of friends moving away. The circular and transient nature of the international population can also be interpreted as a precondition for her professional life, as she is working within the service sector that caters for the international population in the Swedish, Spanish or English language.

There is another type of internal division of professionals working at the same, often international workplace, where the employment conditions differ depending on work position. At one interview occasion, when I meet Andreas, born in 1964 and a permanent resident for seven years, he is late and I call him to see if he is on his way. He asks me to meet him at his workplace because he has not had time to eat lunch. I go to his job and at the end of the interview, another interviewee comes hurrying to see Andreas. This is Eva, born in 1958, who also works at the same institution and has lived in different places in Spain for 26 years. She is frustrated and tells him that they need to talk because there is a controversy about how to handle a work-related situation among the employees. She turns to me and says: 'As you know, Andreas is my rock at this workplace!'

Through the controversy, the different categories of employees at the institution come to light in Andreas' migration story. Andreas and Eva are part of a group of international professionals who work together with the permanently employed Spanish personnel and international staff employed through contracts that need to be renewed after a couple of years. The body of personnel is changeable and follows the demand for their services. This creates an insecure workplace with unreliable work conditions and conflicts among the employees due to mixed employment conditions and work cultures. Andreas' and Eva's positions are permanent and stable, but had they wanted to change work, there are limited possibilities on the Costa del Sol where their competences are needed. Therefore, Andreas and Eva, as a part of the group of permanently employed personnel, turn to each other in order to make their claims stronger and to cope with a changeable work situation of colleagues in circulation. Andreas and Eva differentiate themselves from other staff through their permanent position, permanent residency and their language skills, in addition to a shared nationality and a common perception of working culture originating from the Swedish labour market. They also share a similar motif for their migration decision in that they find Spanish culture and language fascinating, and stress the importance of living in a multicultural and international region, such as the Costa del Sol. Consequently, they position themselves as different in relation to the permanently employed Spanish personnel, in that they do not share the working culture, and to fellow Swedish staff who might work temporarily on contract at the institution. Eva and Andreas claim that the other Swedes of the staff remain too orientated towards Sweden while living on the Costa del Sol. The latter differentiation factor carries a contradiction as Eva and Andreas criticize the very same practices that they too must remain orientated towards in order to create a fruitful and efficient work atmosphere with the Swedish staff, who are temporarily employed there. Eva and Andreas have to relate to the two sets of working culture traditions on a daily basis. They are familiar and feel grounded in both, even when the different working cultures cause conflicts and controversies. Floya Anthias (2002:512) affirms that ambiguities and contradictions are common traits of identification in narratives about migration, as disconnected comparisons from different locations often form the basis of identification.

Another internal division of Swedish migrants is the parents of children, attending the Swedish school. This group is based on collective belonging through networking and befriending one another in connection with the children's attendance at the school. The parents form social networks associated with the children's education at school during weekend gatherings and after-school activities, when parents organize football practice, dance classes and so on (Woube 2014:158). This group often shares an incentive for migration, which for some is to live a family adventure abroad. For others, such as the

category of affluent parents, the migration might signify a way to live the good life in a better climate; some of the mothers are housewives and the fathers are business owners, working on-line with Swedish-based businesses and commuting to Sweden.

The interviewee Majken, born in 1959, is a parent of a child at the Swedish school. She has a regular routine of bringing her daughter to school at 9 am and then continuing with other Swedish mums to a nearby café for a cup of coffee in the mornings. Majken has lived on the Costa del Sol since she was 9 years old and attended the Swedish school when she was a child. Some of her own classmates are now parents of children attending the school but she is also friends with parents from Sweden, who have moved to the region as adults. The daughter's attendance at the Swedish school, and Majken's Swedish circle of friends, enables a strengthened connection to her country of origin. Majken is married to a Spanish man and owns a bookshop directed towards a local clientele. When I ask her about her life, she tells me she lives her life on one single, long street using a scooter to get from the one end, where her house is located, to the other, where the Swedish school is placed on a crossing street. Her bookshop is conveniently located somewhere in the middle of the long street. She claims that she never visits the beach promenade; she lives a life far from the tourist-influenced lifestyles of the international population that resides and visits the coast. In addition, she positions herself as belonging locally through her shop, her Spanish husband, her Spanish in-laws and the circle of friends of Spanish nationality, which is significant for feeling a sense of stability despite the transient population on the Costa del Sol. Yet, she stresses that her Swedish friends, although they come and go, enrich her life because they are in steady connection with Sweden and keep her updated on trends and news from the country she has left and does not visit on a regular basis. Instead of perceiving the steady movement of Swedes in the region as problematic, this is beneficial, according to Majken. She is able to position herself as belonging to the present-day Sweden *and* to the Swedish population on the Costa del Sol. Consequently, Majken's circle of Swedish friends shares a social position as female, middle or upper class, Swedish migrants with children at the Swedish school.

The internal divisions of the Swedish population that I have presented in this section are based on informal ties of friendship between people with similar life conditions and shared reasons for dwelling on the Costa del Sol. Hila Zaban (2015) has acknowledged how similar life conditions, common native language, religious affiliation, as well as common interests and tastes, divide the lifestyle migrant Jews in a neighbourhood in Jerusalem that she has studied. In the current study, the interviewees seem to create internal divisions as a security and comfort in a region with a diverse and transient population. At the same time, these networks also involve ambiguities and disconnections in their changeable nature, because they rest on temporary grounds. They will only last as long as the members of such smaller groups of migrants share living conditions; that is, the mothers of children at the Swedish school keep on meeting and staying friends as long as the children attend the Swedish school. The friendships might not last past the graduation date, or if some of the members of the group return to Sweden to live.

## Concluding remarks

This article shows how the migration stories convey experiences of living in a region characterised by flexible and transient circulation of people, which influences the shaping of collective belonging. On the

one hand, the migration stories show that the migrants create a sense of collective belonging through diasporic practices, which could be interpreted as giving rise to something like a diasporic community of Swedes. The identification practices of stressing both difference and sameness within the group of the Swedish migrants highlights a diasporic community that is changeable, diverse and ambiguous, yet lasting, constant and a source for everyday diasporic engagements and commitment of great importance to the interviewees. On the other hand, the contradictory nature can be interpreted as a reason for needing to shape more reliable, albeit temporary, internal divisions within the diasporic community. This strategy is based on resemblance, similar reasons for migration and on sharing living conditions on the Costa del Sol.

I have shown how different diasporic and transnational practices are part of the constitution of a diasporic community of Swedes. These practices, however, appear to work in opposite directions in this process. The diasporic practices shape stable, lasting and formalized activities of the community formation. Over time, the practices have created and established a long-term collective Swedish presence along the coast. Yet, the transnational practices, such as travel, communication and connections, lead to unstable and temporal dwellings, identifications and involvement in the Swedish diasporic community. This illustrates how the transient nature of circulation of people gives the diasporic community a fluid and flexible structure that varies not only during the seasons, but also over the years. This in turn shapes a layered and internally divided diasporic community, within which even Swedish residents who appear to be permanent and settled migrants, express hesitation about their permanence and definite settlement on the Costa del Sol.

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