“I believe that all people need to move about. Actually, some have difficulties in doing so. They stay in their home neighbourhoods where they’ve grown up and feel safe. I can understand that, but my wife and I, we didn’t want that. We are more open to new ideas.”

This anthology is about seniors on the move. In seven chapters, Nordic researchers from various disciplines, by means of ethnographic methods, attempt to comprehend the phenomenon of Nordic seniors who move to leisure areas in their own or in other countries. The number of people involved in this kind of migratory movement has grown considerably within the last 20 years. Costa del Sol, along the Mediterranean coastline and Österlen in Southern Sweden are two examples of locations that have become attractive to lifestyle migrants. The warmer climate and the expectations of a certain quality of life are recurrent pull factors. The quote above gives voice to one of these seniors, stressing the necessity of moving.

The anthology contributes to the international body of literature about later life migration, specifically representing experiences made by Nordic seniors. As shown here, mobility and migration in later life have implications for identities, traditions, feelings of belonging, family and friends, health, images of old age, societal planning and policies, and even for religious attachment. The book presents a joint statement, intended for international scholars in the field, but also for Nordic policymakers and practitioners involved in the daily life and needs of the people who move in later life.

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Nordic Seniors on the Move
Nordic Seniors on the Move
Mobility and Migration in Later Life

ANNE LEONORA BLAAKILDE & GABRIELLA NILSSON (EDS)

LUND STUDIES IN ARTS AND CULTURAL SCIENCES 4
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Transnational Voluntarism
among Senior Swedish Migrants
on Costa del Sol in Spain

Annie Woube

In this chapter I will discuss when, where, how and in what context transnational competence occurs; how it is enacted, in which way it is used and what makes it significant in voluntary work. The aim is to offer an empirical assessment of how the transnational voluntary engagement of Swedish lifestyle migrants is valued and is significant for them as senior citizens and permanent residents on Costa del Sol in Spain. The following snapshot from my ethnography gives one example of the voluntary engagement in the lives of these senior Swedish migrants:

I am in the midst of one of my meetings with 76-year old Margareta, a Swedish national and permanent resident on Costa del Sol, when the telephone rings in her living room. It is not the first telephone call during our conversation. Margareta has been busy on the phone since I entered the apartment. A Swedish friend of hers had collapsed in her home prior to our meeting. The friend had phoned Margareta to ask her to call Helicopteros Sanitarias, a private emergency and doctor service in the region, since the friend is a non-Spanish speaker. Margareta had been deeply concerned and had asked to make a couple of phone calls before our chat, to make sure someone could spend time with the ill friend when the ambulance staff had given her the appropriate attention and care.

We are now finally sitting on Margareta’s couch speaking about her connections to Sweden while living in Spain, and her role within the Swed-
ish lifestyle migrant group on Costa del Sol, when the phone rings once more. She picks it up and all I am able to hear is her part of the conversation, which originally is in Swedish:

And what is it about this time? Why don’t you sign up for my course? [Margareta asks and starts laughing]… Sure, we can do that. Do you have a special appointment when you need to be there? … Listen, was the name Edificio Mónica? … Listen, what is his number? … Then I’ll give it a try and we’ll decide the time and then I’ll call you back. I have your number somewhere but I’ll write it on the same note. … I HAVE IT SOMEWHERE BUT IT MIGHT BE PRACTICAL TO HAVE IT ON THE SAME NOTE. [She is raising her voice so the person on the other end of the line will hear her properly] … Let’s leave it at that, Arthur, and I’ll keep in touch.

She hangs up the phone and gets back to sit on her green couch again. She leans back and says sighing:

Well, that is one of those things I constantly have to be engaged in. [She points towards the phone] People who have lived here such a long time but haven’t learned how to speak. This was a person who wants to speak to his landlord, but can’t because he doesn’t know a word of Spanish. And he has lived here at least 10 years.

Interviewer: And then they call…?

Margareta: …then they call me.

Interviewer: … for you to call the landlord? With the errand? And you have to be the translator?

Margareta: Exactly. Yes, that happens all the time. All the time. Well, I do get some money.
Introduction

The quote above gives one example of the voluntary engagement in the lives of senior Swedish lifestyle migrants. In this chapter, I draw on empirical material collected in the work with my upcoming doctoral thesis; this consists of an ethnographic fieldwork among lifestyle migrants on Costa del Sol. In this chapter, I focus on the accounts of four seniors and their different types of voluntary engagement – Margareta, Tilde, Lars, and Simon. One of them (Lars) can be termed retirement migrant, whereas the other three are lifestyle migrants.

Lifestyle migration, as a research concept, is sprung out of academic research concerning the voluntary, exclusive migration from the northern, colder countries to southern, warmer countries around the globe. The concept encompasses a range of mobility movements in close relation to tourism, prolonged travel, and permanent dwelling in areas of tourism (see O'Reilly 2000; Geoffrey & Sibley 2007; Benson & O'Reilly 2009). While lifestyle migration comprises migrants of all ages, one specific form of lifestyle migration – retirement migration – is dedicated to migration during retirement. According to the editor-in-chief of the Swedish-written newspaper Sydkusten, Mats Björkman, there are about 30,000 registered Swedish citizens living along Costa del Sol. However, there is a noted flow of people with connections to the area, dwelling there temporarily without registering residency. Therefore, there is no exact knowledge about the number of Swedish citizens involved in retirement and lifestyle migration along Costa del Sol.

The telephone call in the quote above is a consequence of a lack of regional interest and Spanish language skills among a main part of the Swedish retirement migrants. Similar to other Northern European citizens, many of these migrants do not speak the Spanish language; according to the interviewees in the present study, they do not engage in matters concerning the region, and need assistance in their everyday interaction with the Spanish host society. This is confirmed by research concerning retirement migration to destinations along the Mediterranean Sea (see Casado-Díaz et al. 2004; Helset et al. 2004). Many have entered lifestyle migration in the search of a holiday atmosphere of freedom, relaxation, and
enjoyment in a purpose built destination for tourism. They can spend their senior years in such a laid-back environment until they become too ill, or are in need of medical care, which often leads to a return to the country of origin. The ethnography on location shows that for many seniors, the general intention is not to migrate permanently during retirement, but to use the coastal area and its opportunities for leisure during their senior years.

Method and material

The chapter is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted during a total of five months in 2009 – 2010 in the coastal town Fuengirola, situated on Costa del Sol in the south of Spain. Inspired by the phenomenological approach (Frykman 2006; Frykman & Gilje 2003), the intention of the fieldwork was to acquire an understanding of how, when and why transnationalism is set at play for those who reside on a permanent basis in the region. The main gateways to the senior Swedish migrant collective included the many different places where they spent time, such as the Swedish church, Swedish restaurants, social clubs and other Swedish establishments, where I made informal contacts and had conversations on a daily basis with Swedish senior. This chapter draws primarily from recorded conversational interviews with four senior Swedish lifestyle migrants who were all permanent residents, and in most of the cases had been for a long time, in Fuengirola or its surroundings.

Three of the interviewees, Margareta, Simon, and Tilde, have lived on Costa del Sol since the 1960s and 1970s, that is to say, during their professional years. They are similar in having made a career in offering different kinds of services to fellow Swedish nationals, residing on Costa del Sol temporarily or permanently, or while being tourists. A more common trajectory leading to retirement migration is similar to that of senior citizen Lars. He is 66 years old and a retired officer from the Swedish Armed Forces, whose migration story is different from the other participants in this chapter in that he migrated permanently as a retiree; thus, he did not spend his professional life on the coast. In this sense he embodies the definition of retirement migration (see King et al. 2000; Rodríguez et al. 1998).
That is to say, he migrated when entering retirement.

I met these seniors on four separate occasions, one interviewee at a time. Each interview was dedicated to a different theme concerning the fact that the interviewees had made the decision to migrate and establish themselves on Costa del Sol. Hence, the first interview session focused on the emigration experience as such; the second focused on the elderly migrants’ connection and contact with their host country versus their home country. The third conversation dealt with ways to create belonging and a sense of home, and during the fourth occasion, we spoke of civil issues such as citizenship, social responsibility and loyalty to the two countries in question.

This chapter will focus specifically on the material, which concerns transnational voluntarism and mediation. More specifically, the chapter concerns the voluntary help provided by these migrants through their transmigrating capital to other seniors on Costa del Sol. It will be shown, that the transnational voluntarism and mediation, provided by senior Swedish migrants, are not only beneficial for the receivers of the services, but also for the Swedish migrants who are voluntarily engaged themselves.

Transnational Voluntarism

For the four seniors who have been interviewed in this chapter, the outcome of a transnational everyday life is to simultaneously lead a life in reference to norms, routines and practices originating from different places and settings, such as Sweden, Spain, the Costa del Sol area, and the Swedish collective on Costa del Sol. A transnational competence of how to master and combine the norms and practices of a transnational life can emerge and become an integrated part of the everyday life, through time and experience on location. How the interviewees do this in reference to voluntarism and mediation will be shown in the present chapter.

The ethnologist Marianne Liliequist states that in order to obtain a cultural competence, one must understand the cultural codes of a society, i.e. socialization. Socialization is an on-going process throughout life as individuals adapt to new cultural codes and use the options available to them in order to cope with life (1993). In a similar vein, the anthropologist
Michael Jackson claims that “in most human communities the measure of the worth of any knowledge is its social value” (1996:36). Hence, competence sprung out of connections in-between multiple localities, i.e. a transnational competence, can be viewed as an asset or a capital in the Bourdieuan sense. Mastering a transnational competence tends to enhance one’s social position among other senior Swedish migrants on Costa del Sol. The transnational competence is used while working voluntarily and mediating knowledge pertinent to other elderly Swedish migrants in Spain. This is also a widespread practice within the British migrant community in Spain, according to the sociologist Karen O’Reilly (2000; see also Haas 2012).

The voluntarism in question can be defined as “unpaid work provided to parties whom the worker owes no contractual, familial or friendship obligations” (Wilson & Musick 1997:694). However, I want to emphasise the fact that there are cases of payment involved in the voluntarism which I am about to present, but the payment is minimal, and it is a means of extending the monthly pension. That is to say, the senior lifestyle migrants do not earn a living from their services but they view the voluntarism as an ideal practice of engagement during retirement when extra money is considered a bonus. In addition, swapping services between one another is a most common practice of paying back. My study shows that there are both formal and informal practices of helping other Swedish lifestyle migrants. Formal voluntarism takes place in the many organizations of the Swedish migrant group living along the southern Spanish coast, where many devote their free time to the cause of organizing activities within social clubs. Informal practices are initiated by private persons, without any involvement of organized clubs. Thus, the study is not about senior Swedish migrants engaged in charity work through a charity organization or specific helping programme (which is for example the case in Haas 2012).

The practices of volunteering and mediation are characteristics of the making of a transnational social field on Costa del Sol (cf. Faist 2000), since the volunteering practices are primarily based on a transnational competence, which is transmitted in different ways. The concept transnational is the result of having acquired multiple bonds connecting the senior
Transnational Voluntarism

Swedish migrants’ lives across the territorial borders of Sweden and Spain, since current migration is inclined to involve more than definite, completed, “singular journeys but [instead] tend to become an integral part of [lifestyle] migrants’ lives” (Ibid.:13). The multiple bonds that transcend borders “generate transnational practices, relations and institutions of different kinds – social, political, financial, cultural”, writes the sociologist Per Gustafson (2007:17). The result is migrants who create transnational social fields and incorporate transnational experiences that are shaped by the free flow of news, memories, and stories; besides frequent trips in-between the localities linked to the migrants’ lives.

Voluntarism and mediation based on a transnational competence

Many senior Swedish migrants living permanently on the coast have spent their professional years catering for the Swedish population on Costa del Sol. As retirees, with a Spanish pension, they have been able to continue, changing this activity from a paid full-time profession, during their professional years, to an activity based on voluntarism during retirement. In some cases, it is a continuation of the professional work, but now based on the retiree’s decision to devote time and ambition to a cause. In the following, I discuss four individual examples of transnational voluntary practices conducted by senior Swedes permanently residing on Costa del Sol: Margareta, Simon, Lars and Tilde.

Mutual positioning and the internal other

Margareta, introduced through the telephone call with Arthur, can for instance decide when and how she wants to work, and for whom, which gives her a sense of freedom. However, she tells me that her work is also a means to earn extra money and extend her monthly pension from the Spanish welfare system. The work that she does as a retiree can be understood as a way for Margareta to continue and preserve her position as an independent, self-sufficient woman who can care for herself. This stems from the context of her professional years, when she migrated alone as a
single parent with two children and had to provide for her family. As a retiree, such a position comprises indications of successful aging (Baltes & Baltes 1993; Laslett 1989). Instead of viewing aging as a period of passiveness, loss of status and isolation, the senior years have become associated with active and independent retirees enjoying life. Thus, Margareta’s positioning of herself is charged with a positive view of retirement.

From the telephone conversation, it is evident that Arthur, a fellow elderly Swedish migrant, has called Margareta on several occasions to ask for help on practical matters related to the local Spanish community, even though he has lived on the coast for 10 years. Her reply of “why don’t you sign up for my course” is a brisk invitation to one of the language courses in Spanish that Margareta teaches to the elderly Scandinavian migrant group. She is engaged in translation and mediation of everyday practical matters for Swedish elderly migrants in their contact with the Spanish host country. As a permanent migrant, she has built her life around providing service for the group of other elderly Swedish dwellers on Costa del Sol.

In order to analyse Margareta’s voluntary work and mediation services from the positions taken by her in our conversation, I have been inspired by the theoretical concept translocational positionality (Anthias 2002, see also 2012, 2013). The concept, developed by the sociologist Floya Anthias, aims to highlight the identification process of the migrants in their narrations through a focus on articulated position “placed in three locales and their intersection: the society of migration, the homeland and the [lifestyle] migrant group” (2002:500). Margareta places herself in relation to both the Spanish host society, and to elderly female members of the Swedish migrant group. While comparing her life with other female Spaniards of her generation, she assumes that they have never worked outside their homes and have no other interests than their families, and the Swedish female migrants have moved to Costa del Sol with husbands who (according to Margareta) provide for their wives. In reference to this, she clearly positions herself as a self-sufficient and independent woman. Margareta’s positioning is in line with the anthropologist Tomas Hylland Eriksen’s statement that identification is primarily collective and is based on contrasts in social relations (1996). In addition, the identification made by Margareta above is established in reference to the social categories of gen-
The specific telephone call with the fellow Swedish national, Arthur, not only depicts the everyday practice of voluntarism, sanctioning Margareta’s position of being an independent woman. It is also evident how Margareta undertakes and is assigned a mediator position by others, due to her many years of living in Spain, her accumulated language skills in Spanish, local knowledge, and contrarily, the lack of these competences amongst the majority of Swedish migrants dwelling on Costa del Sol. She is able to help Arthur when he needs to speak to his landlord, since she masters both the language and a transnational competence of the cultural and social parameters that govern a relationship between landlord and tenant in a Spanish context.

However, throughout our conversation she expresses resentment and annoyance towards the group of elderly Swedish migrants needing her help, i.e. she is ascribing them a subordinate position compared with her own. The fact that she has a long history in the region, and Spanish language skills, has provided her with an important capital in reference to others, which was also one of the findings in O’Reilly’s study among British migrants on Costa del Sol (2000). Thus, contradictions and complexities are hidden in the mediator position given to Margareta by other elderly Swedish migrants, and in the subordinate position given to other elderly Swedish migrants by Margareta. The positions assigned to Margareta depend on other elderly Swedish migrants being assigned a subordinate position by Margareta.

In the telephone conversation with Arthur, it is apparent that the outcome of being given a mediator position carries a sense of obligation and even burden associated with the practice of helping out. Margareta will help Arthur, but she also feels a need to comment on the fact that if he had
joined her language course, he would be able to talk to his landlord himself. Margareta’s annoyance directed to elderly Swedish migrants in Arthur’s position is expressed in the following account.

They spend time with each other, they play golf, they have parties, they go to Swedish restaurants, Swedish bars and so on. It is so Swedish, so Swedish, really it is just the climate they are interested in. And they know very little of Spain and the Spanish. Most of them don’t even have Spanish television. But in those days when I moved down here, there was nothing else. There was no Swedish television and all those things.

Margareta’s statement highlights how she is positioning herself and her transnational experience in relation to other elderly Swedish migrants within the same collective. Thus, she is expressing the practice of creating an internal other (cf. Gerber 2011; Volčič 2005). The concept of the internal other aims to conceptualize the practice of contrasting the self to others within the same group. For instance, the ethnologist Sofie Gerber discusses in the dissertation Öst är väst men väst är bäst (2011) [East is West, but West is Best] how Eastern Europe has always been marked as the internal other of Europe, and how this is expressed by young Germans who grew up in the German Democratic Republic, informally known as East Germany.

When Margareta in this way is construing her peers as internal others, she initially adheres to the fact that she might be of the same generation and nationality, but then she emphasises a difference in her lifestyle and interests compared with other elderly Swedish migrants on Costa del Sol. The act of positioning others as internal others stems from the time when Margareta devoted her professional life to establishing various supportive activities important to the Swedish lifestyle migration collective. This included working with Swedish media on the coast, administrating one of the social clubs for elderly Swedish migrants and teaching the Spanish language etc. She did this while managing and adapting to the norms and regulations of the Spanish host country. Thus, her aspiration to integration has been significant for the establishment of a Swedish lifestyle migration collective on the coast.
Today, on the other hand, she meets elderly migrants of Swedish origin of her own age, who are living and enjoying the fruits of her efforts without any desire to have a deeper engagement with the host society. It may seem contradictory, but she is still in need of the elderly Swedish migrants, representing the internal other, since they are providing her with the possibility to continue her services and earn some extra money. They enable her to keep positioning herself as a self-sufficient mediator between the Swedish collective and the Spanish society.

Transnational mediation through modern technology

Three of the interviewed Swedish migrants in this study stress their long-term relationship with the Costa del Sol-region and its local customs, norms and language. The decades of being permanent residents have given them a transnational knowledge and competence of living in Spain as a Swedish national, which they share in different ways.

Another of these migrants is 82-year old Simon, who mediates his transnational knowledge to friends and acquaintances by the means of modern technology. When I visited his home for the first time, Simon surprised me by being equipped with a computer with the most recent technology. In my own initial and narrow-minded view, his shuffling way of walking was too far apart from being a person online in contact with acquaintances via modern software applications, through which Internet-users can chat and make voice and video calls over the Internet. When I sat down on the bed and reached for my voice recorder, Simon opened a drawer and handed me a similar one. Simon’s interest in technology and everyday usage of Internet and digital communication was most obvious and visible.

During the interview, he told me that he has integrated into his everyday life, a habitual practice of keeping himself up-dated with news and events in Sweden, mainly through the Internet. On a daily basis, he takes part as a listener and viewer of the public debates through Swedish radio- and television broadcasts online. Simultaneously, Simon is equally interested in Spanish news and public debate, which he follows through analogue media outlets, such as Spanish national and local television, radio and newspapers.
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His dual interest and engagement in Spain and Sweden has a specific aim in that he writes a monthly newsletter in Swedish about the societal and financial development in his two home countries in relation to his own life. The newsletter is a form of mediation of a transnational competence that is sent out to friends and acquaintances, mostly in Sweden, together with pictures related to the themes presented in the newsletter and an essay about a specific chosen topic, often about his childhood in Sweden. Thus, Simon’s transnational mediation is directed to a Swedish social network in Sweden. This contrasts with the voluntarism and mediation of the other interviewees in the present chapter, who direct their voluntary services to the Swedish lifestyle migrant group on Costa del Sol. Instead, he can maintain close connections to family, friends and acquaintances, while continuing to move between Sweden in the summertime and Spain during the rest of the year. Retirement migrants share this practice of keeping up connections (Gustafson 2008; Huber & O’Reilly 2004). Technology connects and holds the transnational condition together while Simon is sharing his time between his two home countries. That is to say, his daily activities online remain the same even though he changes home country during the summer.

The practice of transnational mediation through modern technology, in Simon’s case, puts him in a position of being an active, engaged, and committed elderly migrant, despite a deteriorating and ill body, which would otherwise assign him a position of being passive, less mobile and confined to his apartment in the eyes of a narrow-minded researcher. He told me that this was possible due to the development in modern technology. Through the mediation practice of sending a monthly newsletter online, he positioned himself with a high transnational capital, with strengthens his position within his social network, as well as within the Swedish lifestyle migrant collective, in reference to other Swedish lifestyle migrants with less knowledge and less connection with the region.

Voluntarism in social organisations

A third form of transnational voluntarism common among the four interviewed Swedish migrants is their engagement in social clubs. According to
the sociologist Per Gustafson, a significant characteristic of foreign retirement migrant communities is for the members to be part of a social organization (2008). When approaching the Swedish lifestyle migrant collective through social clubs, it does not take long before a network of relationships and affinity becomes noticeable. A lot of people clearly make use of the establishments and, based on the number of visitors, value the organizations as important in their everyday life. Several of the elderly Swedish migrants I meet praise the importance of living in Fuengirola, where most of the Swedish establishments and private enterprises are located – or in its proximity, because of the network of establishments, which have a clear ambition of being venues for the elderly Swedish migrants.

In the present study, both Lars, a 66-year old Swedish national, and Tilde, a 75-year old Swedish national, devote a considerable amount of time to volunteer work in social clubs directed to Swedish or Scandinavian lifestyle migrants. For Lars, the engagements in the social club, Clúb Nórdico, were the incentive and motivation for carrying out a migration during retirement.

Well, I actually searched for something like this. To be able to spend time on something other than what I had done before. I wanted to spend time on, not so much the cooking, but rather to devote my time to amuse people, rather than lead them.

Lars nourished a dream of setting up a restaurant in Spain while working professionally for the Swedish Armed Forces. On location in Fuengirola, Lars could make his dream come true unexpectedly, but not in the shape of a restaurant. Instead, Lars found a social club, which came to function as a substitute for the restaurant he had wanted to open.

I had a colleague from the Swedish Armed Forces who was the chairman in something called Clúb Nórdico, so we joined it, and then Clúb Nórdico became a little bit of what I had dreamed about. I worked here during the days and more than that. I held many parties here. I started something we call pub evenings which we have one Thursday every month and then I could do exactly what I wanted; tell some stories, sing along with people,
have guessing games. In addition, to improve the economy of the club I started Wine and Bingo. It is not some kind of boring bingo, where people are sitting like this. Instead, the atmosphere is exciting, and there is much fun. And I think this was just what I wanted.

With the engagement in Clúb Nórdico, Lars was able to realize his dream of organizing parties and social events for elderly Scandinavian migrants, mainly Swedes. Clúb Nórdico has elderly migrants from all the Scandinavian countries as members, but the majority belong to the Swedish nationality. Among the daily offers of the club is a café with internet access for members, availability of Scandinavian newspapers, books in Swedish and socialization opportunities with other elderly migrants. In addition, the club organizes Spanish language courses, dance classes, health check-ups with a Swedish nurse, seminars on different topics related to their lives as elderly migrants on Costa del Sol, and other kinds of social activities, such as spring dinners and travels around Spain.

Despite wanting “to devote time to amuse people, rather than lead them” during his senior years, the transition from a professional life in the Swedish Armed Forces in Sweden to volunteering fulltime for Clúb Nórdico on Costa del Sol, has not meant a lost position as a leader for Lars. At the time of our conversation, he had spent four years as the chairman of the club, through which he has been able to keep his social status of being an active organizer in a leading position. He is well-known as a prominent figure among the Swedish lifestyle migrant collective on the coast in general, which becomes quite clear during one of the interview sessions in a Swedish restaurant. During the interview, many Nordic migrants walk by, saluting Lars and maybe stopping for a chat. More so, he tells me that his previous career in the Swedish Armed Forces is reflected in the nickname given to him by other retirees, “The Officer”; an acknowledgement of him as a leader.

In comparison with Margareta, Simon, and Tilde, Lars has a limited knowledge of the Spanish language and a low transnational competence. However, Clúb Nórdico is an organization with the aim of bridging the Swedish migrants and the Spanish society through its activities; for in-
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stance, by offering Spanish language courses or lectures about Spain and Spanish culture. As a chairman of the club, Lars is a supportive organizer of the transnational practices making Costa del Sol a transnational social field (cf. Faist 2000).

Lars reveals to me that his experience of living as a retiree on Costa del Sol, while working voluntarily full-time for the club, is very valuable for him. Being a retiree on Costa del Sol has implied being fully active in the club. Now he is happy to leave the heavy workload as a volunteer behind and use the club as a regular member for social purposes instead of as an organizer.

Exclusive transnational positions

Tilde is another elderly Swedish migrant I met during my fieldwork. Like Lars, Tilde is also engaged in volunteering for Swedish organizations along the coast. For Tilde, her voluntary engagement is a way of leading an active outdoor life while meeting people, facilitated by the milder climate and higher temperatures in Spain. This has enabled her to transform her professional career into an active volunteer lifestyle. Her engagement is shaped by her knowledge about local habits, norms and orientation, in addition to mastering the Spanish language. Therefore, she often organises events in relation to the Spanish host society, such as booking guided tours in different places. She is engaged in several clubs, but decides for herself the type of activities she wants to help out with. Therefore, the volunteer work differs from her professional life in that it contains a certain amount of freedom.

During the spring of 2009, Tilde was engaged in the local division of the global organization SWEA, Swedish Women’s Educational Association, which is an association for Swedish women living outside of Sweden. As members of SWEA, the female migrants are part of an exclusive, privileged and affluent migrant group, creating a transnational elite in the context of global migrants (cf. Lundström 2010a, 2010b). At the time of our meeting in April 2009, Tilde had a special assignment for SWEA. She was organizing a hat parade with lunch in Fuengirola. She tells me:
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Each and every one that comes for lunch is supposed to wear a hat. We meet by the church square at half past one and then we walk together to the restaurant not far from there. Previous years I have even called Fuengirola TV. And they have come to photograph us and film us and then we have talked about Sweden and that one likes to wear a hat in the spring in Sweden and that it would be nice to wear one here as well. And then we go to lunch with our hats and we award people in the categories: most beautiful hat, funniest hat, and the best general impression. Maybe you want to come?

I accept the invitation, and one weekday in May, I join 30–40 Swedish ladies in their 50s, or older, for lunch, all wearing hats. We meet by the church square of Fuengirola city centre surrounded by people sitting under the pergola, curious about our activity. There is no Fuengirola TV present, but an editor-in-chief of one of the Swedish magazines is taking pictures of the many inventive creations on the heads of the ladies. It is a merry atmosphere when we march to the restaurant through the streets, looked upon by cheering Spaniards and others standing outside their shops and companies. The restaurant is called La Farola, which is located on Plaza El Yate, a square in the form of a courtyard surrounded by white buildings, at all angles, with balconies. Similar squares can be found in many Spanish towns.

The restaurant has prepared our tables, placed like a horse shoe in the middle of the square under big, white sunshades to protect us from the sun. The luncheon offers a cheerful and undisturbed get-together with red wine and rather typical seafood dishes from the region. The women at my end of the table have lived in the region for 10–20 years, and we speak of how they miss Sweden, but that cheap airfare has made a spontaneous trip to children and grandchildren possible. Our chat is interrupted with a game and the possibility of winning a bottle of champagne. While we are eating, laughing and playing games, the waiters watch our hats to decide which one is the most beautiful, which is the most fun, and which outfit and hat makes the best impression.

The hat parade is an event and a spectacle that manifests connections and inter-linkage between female Swedish migrants living on Costa del
Sol, as well as between Swedish women living abroad in a global context. Similar hat parades are repeatedly organized within the SWEA organization throughout the world. Hence, the hat parade in its annual repetitiveness can be understood as a public ritual (cf. Klein 1995). The hat becomes the prop of the ritual, expressing ideals of the upper social class and bourgeois elegance. According to the Swedish ethnologist Birgitta Svensson, performative signs of gender, such as a hat, are very direct and obvious expressions of identity construction (2012). The hat parade of Swedish female migrants can be viewed in a wider historical context in that Swedish women in Spain are frequently related to the female cultural icon called La Sueca (Spanish for the Swedish woman), which appeared during the 1960s and 1970s in Spain. La Sueca was portrayed as an (overly-) sexualized, liberal, blond Swedish female in bikini with a deep desire for a Latin lover during her short vacation. Any blond Northern European woman came to be associated with the moral disaster that La Sueca provoked in the Catholic, conservative regime of General Franco (1936–1976) (Cardona & Losada 2009:64ff). La Sueca is, thus, a sticky icon that has remained associative to the Swedish woman since the 1960s and 70s. The Swedish female migrants in SWEA are included in this association, due to the exoticism, despite their elderly bodies.

Thus, the hat parade produces a counter image of the sexualized and liberal Swedish woman. Within the SWEA-context, the Swedish woman is presented as virtuous, modest, stylish, and with a sense of humour since some of the hats are, indeed, creative. Tilde, in the position of a voluntary organizer of the event is thus supportive of these ideals, which is also in line with the SWEA-identity. Through her voluntary work, she becomes a good and proper SWEA-member, since her practice of working voluntarily within the organization connotes expressions of upper social class and bourgeois ideals. She is not just supporting and doing voluntary work for any organization, she is working for a social network of privileged Swedish women abroad in an exclusive transnational position.
Valued voluntarism in a transnational context

Transnational voluntary work and mediation is a significant part of the everyday life of the interviewed elderly Swedish migrants living on Costa del Sol. In many ways, the voluntary practices depicted in the present chapter have offered the elderly Swedish migrants a continuation of a lifestyle led while working professionally, which has smoothed the transition from professional work to retirement, in line with Haas’ study of British retirement migrants on Costa Blanca (2012). That is to say, the voluntary work and mediation of transnational knowledge are valued for offering a possibility to remain engaged for a cause. This applies, whether it be writing a reflective monthly letter about news and development in Spain versus Sweden, as in the case of Simon, or organizing a get-together for privileged Swedish female migrants in Spain, as in the case of Tilde. Both examples rely on a transnational competence acquired during more than 40 years of living in Spain. However, the direction of the voluntarism varies; Simon directs his mediation of a transnational knowledge to other Swedes living in Sweden, and Margareta, Lars and Tilde offer their voluntary services to the Swedish lifestyle migrant group at Costa del Sol.

The voluntarism is a social practice offering a possibility to remain in a social context or enter a new social context on location. This allows an outgoing and extroverted everyday life, enabled by the mild climate, where the elderly lifestyle migrants can keep socializing with others through face-to-face meetings in organizations like Clúb Nórdico, or elsewhere, and through the Internet. An everyday life, such as this, stands in contrast to a general notion of retirement signifying loss of occupational networks and roles (Ibid.).

A side effect of volunteering and mediating during senior years is the freedom to choose when, where, for whom and for what one wishes to devote one’s time and energy. However, this does not leave out situations of feeling the obligation of having to engage with people, when the elderly lifestyle migrants have no desire to do so. As in the case of Margareta, this may shape expressions of creating an internal other. In addition, for some of the elderly lifestyle migrants, the mediation of a transnational
knowledge is a means to extend a slim pension, which is an incentive for the continuation of voluntary practices during retirement years.

International retirement migration specifically causes challenges for the senior citizens in that it signifies a transformation in both lifestyle and place of residence. As noted above, this can lead to a loss in both social position and social network. However, the elderly Swedish migrants participating in this study have remained in a position with financial resources, enabling them to travel back and forth between their two home countries. Some of them can even afford double places of residence, which facilitates the preservation of their social network (cf. Gustafson 2008).

In addition, they have been able to keep resourceful positions, which they shaped when they were professionals. For instance, both Margareta and Tilde uphold similar or almost intact positions as retirees, since their positions are based on a high transnational capital from having lived in Spain during several decades. It was their livelihood as professionals when working with services catering for the Swedish collective on Costa del Sol, and it remains to be the base of their position as mediators of a transnational competence to other elderly people in the Swedish lifestyle migration collective.

Simon is also positioned with a high transnational capital, which is the foundation in his work of mediation and of great value for him during his everyday life. He migrated thanks to his substantial financial capital in the beginning of the 1970s. However, over the years, his position as a Swedish migrant with financial resources has been altered, but this transformation in life came about prior to retirement. That is to say, retirement as such did not mean a loss in status for Simon, but the source of status can be viewed as having changed during the latest years from financial capital to transnational capital.

Lars made a similar alteration when entering retirement. However, his position transformed from working as a professional general and leader in the Swedish Armed Forces in Sweden to voluntary work in a social organization, with a position as a leader in this new context.

In conclusion, the elderly Swedish migrants participating in this study exemplify active and engaged senior citizens, who practice voluntarism and mediation of local knowledge and language. They do this in different ways,
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but they all do it in a transnational context, and they have made this practice into a core component, valuable during senior years abroad.

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References


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