‘Diasporic’ transnationalism and ‘transnationalism through mobility’.
An attempt to build a comparative theory of transnationalism, taking cabaret dancers as an example
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Abstract
Transnationalism has become one of the fundamental ways of understanding the contemporary practices taking place across national borders. Meanwhile a substantial body of work provides varying empirical examples, describing the forms that transnationalism can take and ‘what transnationalism is’. However, we are still missing a common theoretical framework to help us understand why transnationalism is appearing in such variable forms and what is connecting this diverse range of morphologies. The goal of this article is to lay the first stone in the building of a common theory. My attempt is theoretically modest as I do not aim at establishing an encompassing study of ‘comparative transnationalism’, rather, I shall try to bring together two schools of transnationalism – deux courants théoriques – which have appeared in the scientific literature during the last decades. One I would like to call diasporic transnationalism and the other transnationalism through mobility. The first type developed out of studies on sedentarised migrants, the functioning of social capital based on ethnic or family ties and the consequent emergence of transnational fields. Theoretical ideas about the second type are based on concepts like circulatory migration and the migrants’ knowledge of ‘how to keep moving’, to the extent that mobility becomes a main feature of transnationalism itself. I propose that in order to gain new theoretical insights into transnational practices it is worthwhile combining the ideas, approaches and concepts of the two schools. Using the example of cabaret dancers in Switzerland, I shall show how these women develop a very specific form of transnationalism which combines features of both models. The transnationalism of the dancers is the result of the transnational nature of the sex industry, the women’s ability to form ‘weak’ ties with a range of local actors, their own resourcefulness in terms of mobility and the opportunity structure of the local context in Switzerland. However, I propose viewing transnational formations as being situated on a continuum between the poles of mobility and diaspora: Most transnational (or diasporic) morphologies embody elements of both in different combinations.

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Cabaret - the word evokes pictures of Paris, the Belle Époque after the opening of the famous Moulin Rouge in 1889, glamorous women in glittering costumes moving to the rhythm of the music. Anyone expecting a dazzling spectacle like this would certainly be very disappointed by a visit to a cabaret in Switzerland, for nowadays they bear no resemblance to this image. When the first cabarets in Switzerland opened towards the end of the 1920s, the dancers belonged to foreign musical groups touring the main cities and the dancers travelled with a
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large following and big trunks to transport the wardrobes for the variety shows. In those days the dancers’ performances were highly artistic, also in Switzerland. Now the live musicians have disappeared and been replaced by digital recordings. The shows presented by the dancers today last only a few minutes; the women do dance to music but the sexual-erotic aspects are always the most important: the whole point is for them to get their scanty clothing off as quickly as possible. This evolution in the show itself has been paralleled by another trend: where, in the 1980s, half the dancers came from countries in Western Europe, by 2005 this number was down to 2%. Today, the young women we find in cabarets come mainly from Eastern Europe (about three quarters) and some of Central or South America, and Asia. These cabaret-dancers represent a heterogeneous group who embody a particular form of female mobility. Some of them are genuinely ‘world travellers’: they work in erotic clubs in Switzerland, Japan, or Lebanon go home regularly to be with their children or their families or to continue their education.

The cabaret dancers will serve us to establish some theoretical reflections about transnationalism. Transnationalism today is central to understanding and explaining practices taking place across national borders. Meanwhile a substantial body of work provides varying empirical examples showing which forms transnationalism can take on and ‘what transnationalism is’. However, we are still missing a common theoretical framework demonstrating why transnationalism is appearing in such variable forms and what is connecting this diverse range of morphologies. The goal of this article is to lay the first stone in the project of comparative theory building, a project in which obviously a whole range of social scientists are engaged at present. My attempt in this article is modest insofar as I do not aim at establishing an all encompassing study of ‘comparative transnationalism’ – future scholars are invited to advance such a project: Rather I shall try to bring together two ideal-type schools1 of transnationalism – *deux courants théoriques* - which appeared in the scientific literature during the last decades. One I would like to call *diasporic transnationalism* and the other *transnationalism through mobility*. The first type developed out of studies on sedentarised migrants, the functioning of social capital based on ethnic or family ties and the consequent emergence of transnational fields. Theoretical ideas about the second type are based on concepts like circulatory migration and the migrants’ knowledge of ‘how to keep moving’, to the extent that mobility becomes a main feature of transnationalism itself. In this paper the two sets of ideas will be brought together: my argument is that combining these two sets of ideas is

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1 School might be a strong terminus for these two theoretical approaches: It shall only be understood as an approximation insofar as it serves to highlight the main features of these two ideal types.
epistemologically fruitful because each transnational morphology contains mobility and diasporic elements and we should be able to describe their interconnectedness theoretically. The aim is therefore to show how cabaret dancers working in Switzerland develop a very specific form of transnationalism which combines certain features of both the models described.

Furthermore, by analysing the transnational morphology developed by dancers, I will challenge some of the implicit ‘givens’ of transnational and diaspora studies. In contrast to the established (and sometimes harshly criticized) tradition of conducting so-called ethnic ‘community-studies’ within transnational and diaspora research (see Amit and Rapport 2002; Baumann 1996; Dahinden 2008), I have chosen for this study a professional group – cabaret dancers. In order to overcome the danger of ‘groupism’ (Brubaker 2004) and ‘methodological nationalism’ (Beck 2002), I decided to adopt a conceptual design that does not start with the ethnic or national group as its unit of analysis, nor is it the sole object of study (for de-ethnicized research designs see Glick Schiller et al. 2006; Wimmer 2007). Rather, a sociological group whose boundaries are defined in professional terms serve as the empirical example.

In the first section of the paper, the two schools of transnationalism and their main ideas will be introduced. Afterwards, a short description of the study and the research premises on which this paper is built are presented. The next paragraphs contain the discussion on the mobility and diaspora aspects of the transnational morphology of the dancers. In the concluding remarks I propose a continuum of transnational morphologies between mobility and diaspora.

1. Two schools of thinking about mobility and sedentariness of migrants with regard to their transnationalism: Investigating the interconnections

Since the early 1990s, studies on transnationalism have proliferated and transnationalism has become one of the fundamental ways of understanding the contemporary practices taking place across national borders. International migration is probably the mode of transnationalism which has been most debated and analyzed, next to other modes like transnational social movements or transnational business networks. When overlooking this vast body of work discussing transnationalism of migrants, one has different options as to how to classify or systematize it (for an excellent recent overview see Levitt and Jaworsky 2007): One could try to systematize the work and theoretical knowledge according to
dimensions or domains of transnationalism like economy, politics, culture or religion (see, among others, Vertovec 1999). One could attempt to distinguish between network transnationalism (transnational social relations) and transnational subjectivity (cognitive classification with regard to group membership) (see for instance Dahinden [under review]), or between occasional and durable transnational practices, or distinguish between different generations of migrants (Portes et al. 1999). One could also systematize according to gender aspects (Pessar and Mahler 2003) or differentiate between the various types of transnational social spaces (Faist 1999; Pries 2008).

For our purposes, another classificatory dimension will be the main focus: the degree of mobility and sedentariness of the migrants and its implication for their transnational morphologies. Ideally we can distinguish between two different schools with regard to this dimension, two schools based on different, almost dialectically opposite presumptions. On the one hand, we have a series of authors theorizing the complexity of transnational processes, focusing on established migrants settled in the host countries. They try to understand the rules behind the development, continuation and specific morphology of the long- or short-term transnational fields linking the migrants with their countries of origin or with third countries. They are interested in the social space which arises between different countries and which are transnational in nature (among others Dahinden 2005a et 2005b; Guarnizo et al. 2003; Ostergaard-Nielsen 2003; Schiller et al. 1995). These works could be classified as the diasporic transnationalism school.

The deployment of the term ‘diaspora’ as well as its adjective ‘diasporic’ have been questioned for good reasons by many authors (for instance by Brubaker 2005; Clifford 1994; Tölölyan 1996): Still, I think nonetheless that this concept best describes the key element of this school or model of transnationalism: Social scientists are dealing here with migrants who are wage-earners in the Fordist sense as employees of local firms or migrants who are ethnic entrepreneurs: These migrants participate in transnationalism by exploiting social capital (Bourdieu 1980; Portes 1998) based on the principle of ethnic and/or family solidarity and mutual support. This type of migrant constructs transnational political, economic or social fields between the host country and the country of origin (and/or third countries). They send remittances home, create ethnic businesses in the transnational space, join political associations and are involved in long-distance-nationalist projects, or receive visits from cultural groups from the home country in order to maintain their specific collective identity, etc. ‘Diasporic’ characterizes this school of transnationalism insofar as the social scientists focus in their community studies.

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2 This overview is for sure incomplete as it is not the aim of this article to establish a classification of the body of literature dealing with transnationalism.
on migrants who are characterized by core elements which are ideally understood to be constitutive of diaspora (Brubaker 2005; Safran 1991; Tölölyan 1996): they deal with dispersed, sedentarised migrants, characterized by some sort of (symbolic or physical) ‘homeland orientation’ and by the maintenance of their ethnic boundaries (in the sense of Barth 1969), thus preserving a distinctive identity vis-à-vis the host society.

There is a second, very different school – represented (mainly but not exclusively) by French sociologists and anthropologists - which I shall call here transnationalism through mobility. In this case, the focus of research is no longer the long-term, settled migrant in the Georg Simmel tradition (1908) -‘The foreigner who comes today and stays tomorrow’ - but a constant and continuous form of circular mobility. The central element in the work of this set of authors is that they choose as a central theme that mobility which has become an integral part of the migrants’ strategy. This type of migrant does not leave their country with the aim of settling in another country, they tend to stay mobile in order to maintain or improve their quality of life. One may think here, first of all, of highly skilled people, executives, international officials, managers in multinational companies, who move frequently, a transnational elite who profits from globalization (Sklair 2001). But this type of mobility is also widespread among people who are not by any means highly skilled and do not hold highly skilled jobs. Alain Tarrius (1993; 2002) for example, speaks of the new nomads who by creating circular territories, can at one and the same time belong here and there, there and here. He describes how Algerians contribute to a very thriving economic exchange between Marseille, Belgium, Italy, and Spain involving a wide variety of goods, notably household electrical appliances or electronic equipment. They are not diasporic entrepreneurs in the sense of the first form of transnationalism, but nomadic entrepreneurs. They are not aiming for success away from their native town, nor do they want to settle in France, Italy, Switzerland or anywhere else. Mobility is precisely the capital that is needed for transnationalism of this kind to develop. Practices of ‘shuttle migration’ described by Morokvasic (2003) for Polish women, or ‘suitcase trading’ (commerce à valise) by Tunisian (Schmoll 2005) or Moroccan women (Peraldi 2007) follow the same principle. It is a commercial activity that basically depends on the women’s mobility know-how and physical movement: Moroccan women cross the Ceuta enclave to Morocco to sell garments made in China, they also carry cosmetics, household goods and food items, and they sell them elsewhere. The distinctive thing about this model of transnationalism is the importance of the mobility capital of the people involved and the different make-up of their social capital. These suitcase traders do not aspire to be integrated as wage-earners in western cultural
models and are not migrants in the Fordist sense of the term. Moreover, their social capital is not based on strong or diasporic relations but on “weak” relations (Granovetter 1973): trust and solidarity are built up with friends and acquaintances and not so much with close relatives.

In sum, whereas mobility – understood as the more or less continuous movement of the migrants - is mostly absent in the first ideal type, as the sedentarized character is the main focus, the different settlement practices are often neglected in the second ideal type. It is obvious that the various authors in these two schools have included some elements of the other in their work (for example Tarrius 1993) – however, my argument is that this has not been done in a systematic way.

In the following I will combine these two sets of ideas and analyse how mobility as well as diasporic features characterize the dancers’ transnationalism.

2. The study – premises and design

It is interesting to note that in the international literature female migrants who sell sexual or erotic services – and cabaret dancers are included in this category – are generally absent from studies focussing on migration or mobility, but they do appear in studies examining the trafficking of women in the context of criminological or feminist research (critically Agustin 2006; Anderson and O’Connell Davidson 2004; Thorbek 2002). In other words, mobile women working in the sex industry are often not seen as transnational migrants, nor as members of a diaspora. They are not considered to be economic entrepreneurs, nor are they seen as playing an active part in globalization by building transnational networks and fields.

Migrants selling sex are – often without further reflection – mainly seen as victims of trafficking and not perceived as transnational actors equipped with agency and the capability of reflexivity. This might be the result of one specificity: cabaret dancers or sex workers in general are not only transnational workers, they also work in the very specific milieu which is the sex industry. It need hardly be said that scientific analysis in this field faces specific problems, because it is surrounded by ambivalence of one kind or another dictated by moral imperatives and the subject of sexuality contributes greatly to the many ambivalences running through this debate (Chancer 1993). Foucault (1977; 1978) has shown that not only is

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3 The sex industry covers all services of an erotic sexual nature offered on a commercial basis. This type of services includes not only prostitution, but also massage parlours, dating bars, escort services, night-clubs, table dancing, lap dancing or other forms of dancing, erotic phone services, films and videos, etc (Agustin 2007). As theories on sex working are very polarized – especially in the French-speaking world – I shall not enter into a fundamental discussion, the aim here being to theorize these aspects in order to understand the dancers’ situation, not to engage in polemics or formulate moral principles.
sexuality set in a microphysics of power but that it sits at the junction of ‘body’ and ‘population’ in a way that makes it subject to two different disciplinary fields. His and other studies have demonstrated clearly that there is no such thing as ‘sexual essentialism’: sexuality is not biologically given but is a historically constructed human product (Butler 1990). As with other aspects of human behaviour, the concrete institutional forms of sexuality at any given time and place are products of human activity. They are imbued with conflicts of interest and political manoeuvring (Rubin 1984:267). In this line of thinking, this study investigates which forms of transnationalism these sex workers develop, which mobility or diasporic elements might be found and how their specific form of transnationalism is related to their work as sex workers in the context of (globally and locally) constructed ideas about sexuality and sex.

The article is based on a study conducted in Switzerland in 2005 (Dahinden and Stants 2006). This research was interested in the working and living conditions of cabaret-dancers in Switzerland and uses two types of data source: first, we conducted 30 interviews with key persons from the federal and cantonal authorities, employment agencies, advisory bodies and night-club owners in Switzerland. In these expert interviews we tried, on the one hand, to approach the legal situation and authorization practices with regard to cabaret dancers and, on the other, to shed light on their working and living conditions from different perspectives. Second and more important, we approached the subjects’ view of their own working conditions and biographies by means of 70 interviews with cabaret dancers. These interviews were mainly conducted in their respective mother tongues (German, English, French, Russian, Rumanian, or Spanish). We were not only interested in the work of the cabaret-dancers in Switzerland, but also in their decision-making processes in coming to Switzerland as dancers, in their life trajectories in general as well as in their future plans. For the interviews a questionnaire was developed consisting of closed as well as open questions, that were translated into the main languages of the dancers.

The dancers questioned came from 11 different countries, a large proportion (49 women) were from Eastern Europe.

3. Understanding the transnational morphology of cabaret dancers

3.1 Features enhancing mobility and circulation

In this first section, I shall elaborate the aspects which foster the “transnationalism-through-mobility” type among the dancers. Two main elements can be identified which enhance the
circulation aspects: their legal situation in Switzerland and the transnational nature of the sex industry.

*Cabaret-dancers in Switzerland: A mobile population by law*

The situation of cabaret dancers has been of concern to the Swiss federal and cantonal authorities, NGOs working with women, aid agencies and the media for the past 20 years. Attention has been called to the precarious nature of the working and living conditions of these dancers – principally by NGOs and politicians – and this has led to many legal and administrative changes at federal and cantonal level, aimed at stricter regulation of activities in this field. Accordingly, there exists nowadays a specific short-term residence permit (L permit), commonly known as a ‘dancer’s permit’. At present this permit is granted for 8 months a year at most, after which the dancers have to leave Switzerland for 4 months before they can come back to work in a cabaret. Often the women come to Switzerland for several years and go back home, or elsewhere, for a few months. Under the law currently in force the permit for cabaret dancers is the only permit not dependent on civil status and is issued to unskilled women from non-European countries wishing to work in Switzerland. A short-term ‘dancer’s’ residence permit is granted to cabaret dancers aged 20 or over. A dancer cannot change her field of activity: she is only entitled to work as a dancer in bars and nightclubs, etc. With a view to providing better protection for the dancers – after various cases of exploitation were publicly exposed, forcing the authorities to act – a number of measures have been introduced in recent years. Now the employment and residence conditions for cabaret dancers are laid down in detail. Professional services, for instance, the nature of their activities, gross monthly wages and social deductions are precisely set out in a model work contract. This explicitly stipulates that the dancers are not allowed to incite customers to consume alcohol, nor to offer them sexual services. Prostitution is thus prohibited. All additional charges agreed with the employer – e.g. relating to board and lodging, travel expenses between home and place of work – must appear in the contract. As regards the minimum wage, the itemized breakdown and payment of the wages are included in this basic

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4 While many different words exist in everyday usage to describe the work done in night-clubs – go-go-girls, strip-tease dancers, etc. – the Swiss law defines the dancers as being “persons (who) present an item as part of a musical show during which – to a musical accompaniment – they undress themselves partly or completely” (Directives of the ordinance limiting the number of foreigners OLE, Annex 4/8c, fig. 1.2). To give a more exact ideal of the scale of the phenomenon, there were 1531 dancers with a short-stay permit in Switzerland in December 2006, and in 2004, 5953 dancers were recorded entering the country (Federal Office of Statistics 2005).

5 For a description and discussion of the legal bases, see Mock (2003) and Dahinden and Stants (2006).

6 In Switzerland prostitution is not prohibited as such, but it is forbidden for dancers.
contract to prevent inadmissible deductions. The cabarets are also bound by various regulations concerning the stage or the area of the dance surface. Lastly, no permits will be issued for establishments that provide separate rooms to which clients and dancers can withdraw.

This type of permit is thus linked to a high degree of mobility among these women; indeed it actually forces them to be constantly on the move as they have to leave Switzerland after 8 months at the latest. In addition to their global circulation, the women move every month to a different cabaret within Switzerland, since the contract tying them to one particular cabaret is generally for one month only.

_Becoming a transnational actor in the transnational sex industry_

A Russian dancer explained: “I was living with my mother not far from St Petersburg. We had a tiny apartment. My mother has a small pension. I finished university and I couldn’t find a decent job. I had done a bit of arts school, so I can dance and I decided to go away somewhere as a dancer. I had the choice between being a market vendor with a higher degree or earning more by dancing, even if this job isn’t any better than the other.”

The reasons that motivate the dancers to become mobile are without exception economic: all the women interviewed aspired to a better economic situation. Those who had work in their country of origin - 80% of the dancers had been integrated into the labour market before leaving their home country for the first time – said they did not have enough money to meet their needs, or they wanted to earn more money to assure their future, perhaps buy a house, set up a business or continue their education. So for these women their mobility was considered as an economic strategy.

These women’s economic aspirations can be put in practice and implemented thanks to transnational networks and people already in the transnational system of the sex industry. The women who come to work as night-club dancers in Switzerland are mainly recruited by

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7 These are areas separated from the rest of the cabaret by thick curtains to permit intimacy between a dancer and a client and are used for sexual services. Although they are forbidden, separate rooms still exist in most cabarets.

8 It should be noted, however, that only women from Eastern Europe mentioned further studies as a reason for migrating. The life situations of these women differ considerably depending on where they come from. Dancers from Eastern European countries are younger, less often married and with children when compared to the dancers from the other two continents. Furthermore and in contrast to the dancers from Latin America and Thailand, the dancers from Eastern Europe have an above-average level of education; some even have a university degree. However, today, the chances of finding a job at home matching their qualifications are very slight. We find women with post-graduate degrees working as secretaries, dressmakers, saleswomen or in the tertiary sector. This makes that most of the east European women working in cabarets in Switzerland come from a middle-class background, i.e. from families with a high cultural capital.
friends or acquaintances that already have some experience in the sex industry. They play an important role as go-betweens with the agencies that find jobs for the dancers in Switzerland, obtain the necessary papers and contact the cabarets. One dancer from the Ukraine told us the following: “A friend of my cousin’s who had worked as a dancer in Switzerland gave us the telephone number of an agency there. We phoned, and the man asked us to send some photos and an email address where we could be contacted.”

In fact, we are dealing here with chain migration (Fawcett 1989; Massey et al. 1993) – or chain mobility -, although it differs from other traditional chain migrations – e.g. the guest workers in Switzerland – in that we have one more ‘chain’ than normal: the contact between the dancer and the agency is made by an acquaintance. The contact between the employers and the future migrants are made by placement agencies and not by friends or acquaintances, as is the case with other groups of ‘guest workers’. It should be noted that the dancers’ relations with the people who form the ‘chain’, who put them in contact with the agencies, can be described as ‘weak’ in the sense of Granovetter (1973): they are not close friends or family but passing acquaintances and the women have not invested anything in terms of time or emotion in these relations. It seems quite understandable that this part of the ‘chain’ is not formed by close friends or family, for the simple reason that working in the sex industry is taboo and most of the dancers told us that they did not tell their families what their work in the cabarets involved.

The other ‘chain’, the agencies, operate either in the dancers’ country of origin or in Switzerland, and sometimes cooperate amongst themselves. They are themselves transnational players and they set up networks which in some cases are world-wide. Here no dancer is directly engaged by a cabaret: The cabarets cooperate with agencies who present them with photos and short descriptions of the potential dancers. The cabaret owners choose the women and it is the agencies that arrange the papers and contracts, also taking care of the visas for the women.

In this way, through acquaintances and agencies, the dancers are integrated into what I shall here call the sex industry, which is on the whole strongly transnational in character, and in different respects. First, as already mentioned the placement agents are embedded in a transnational network of night clubs (and maybe other products of the sex industry) placing

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9 Of all the interviewed women, only 6 person have been informed about the possibility of working as a dancer in Switzerland by way of newspapers of Internet, all other mentioned social relations.

10 It should be mentioned that these recruitment processes lay the women open to the danger of exploitation: the women often have to pay huge sums of money for the agencies’ services especially the first time they come to Switzerland to be a dancer. This places them in a situation of dependence where they can easily be pressurized.
the women in different countries. The fact that the sex market is transnational explains why some of the dancers have become transnational players on mobility. A good third of the women interviewed had already worked as dancers in another country – many in Japan, others in Lebanon, South Korea, Bulgaria, Italy or Australia.

Second, some of the women told us they had already been working in the sex business in their own countries. In these cases, the local sex industry - where we often find sex tourists from Western countries, as is the case for women from Thailand - served as a launching pad for the transnational sex market. The story of one woman from Latvia illustrates this kind of situation: “After 12 years of schooling I did a four-year training course to become a child psychiatrist. Perestroika brought a political and economic crisis. At that time I was living with my parents and my brother. Both my parents had lost their jobs, my brother had fainted several times from sheer hunger, so I decided to work as a prostitute in Riga, where I could earn enough money with the tourists.”

But there is another aspect that deserves attention and that sheds a different light on this transnational character of the sex industry: sex is not the only thing the dancers sell; they also sell it in part because of their ethnicity. The category of gender combines with that of ethnicity to make these women seem ‘exotic’ and questions of ‘otherness’ come into play here. Asked why cabaret owners prefer to employ only women from outside (western) Europe, one owner told us that this corresponded to customer demand for exotic women. Representations of gender, which are social and cultural constructs, are thus closely linked with representations that construct an exotic ‘other’, a process which has its deeper roots in the colonial world. This phenomenon of exoticization is reflected in the sex industries in the countries of the North. There is a clear hierarchy among the sex workers which runs along ethnic lines: the more a woman is ‘racially’ construed as “other”, the lower her status will be among the sex workers (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998). In this respect, nightclub owners mentioned that there was a specific demand for women from Eastern Europe because they are well-educated, tall and blonde. They are thus regarded as the ‘upper class’ among sex workers, which reflects a specific process of racialization. We might speak of a ‘symbolic transnational character’ as we are dealing here with ethniziced or racialized gender representations which are dispersed globally.

In sum, the economic aspirations of the dancers, as well as a demand for ‘exotic’ women, makes the dancers mobile. Their ‘staying mobile’ is enhanced by the conditions of a ‘dancer’s
permit’ and the transnational nature of the sex industry in general, and the transnational action radius of the placement agencies in particular.

3.2. ‘Diasporic’ elements: To ‘settle down’ in order to stay mobile

Until now we have mainly collected arguments showing how the dancers develop transnationalism through mobility. In this chapter we shall look at an analysis of the diasporic elements in their transnationalism.

Discrepancy between working reality and legal bases: a burgeoning business sense?

The legal regulations in force in Switzerland have, in effect, turned cabaret dancers into traditional wage-earning migrants as they have a binding labour contract. Unlike the typical migrants of the transnationalism-through-mobility school, like suitcase traders or male nomadic entrepreneurs, the dancers do not work in the informal economy but in a highly regulated setting and they are not self-employed, but employed by a concrete employer. Dancers are not involved in the product market, they do not sell electronic equipment, cosmetics, clothes, or similar things, as is usually the case with the migrants in this school of thought: What they sell is their body, their sex, their ethnicized sexuality, but also conversation and a listening ear. We might therefore consider that their status as wage-earning migrants represents in itself an element of diasporic transnationalism. The dancers are bound by state regulations; this is normally not the case for freely circulating traders, but rather for diasporic migrants. Their work situation represented in the model contract is similar to that of established migrants, some parts of the contract concern legal regulations all workers in Switzerland are subjected to. Thus, the situation of the dancers is in this way similar to that of the sedentarized, diasporic migrants.

Still, notwithstanding the legal regulations we described above, almost all the cabaret dancers engage, at least from time to time, in activities that do not appear in their work contract, or which are explicitly forbidden. They work longer hours and more often than is allowed in their contract; they encourage customers to drink alcohol, chiefly champagne, as they are often given a percentage of the café-owner’s margin on alcohol sales: and they offer sexual services both during working hours and in their free time. The dancers thus find themselves in a legal vacuum that places them beyond the reach of controls or legal protection and in the

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11 Selling champagne to the clients is the main source of income for the cabarets. So it is in the interest of the cabaret owners to have the dancers incite customers to drink. Entrance to the cabaret is free of charge for clients, but if they want to talk to one of the dancers, they have to buy drinks. Champagne is thus intimately liked to the imaginary of a cabaret et to the economic survival of these enterprises.
informal part of the economy, similar to the suitcase traders or the nomadic entrepreneurs. But this is where these women’s economic motivations are reflected. For in fact, these activities are undertaken to some extent on their own initiative, which shows the economic nature of their mobility and their mercantile spirit: the dancers make financial gains through the additional services they offer illegally. Thanks to these services they earn an extra CHF 1,000 a month on average (approximately € 600). One Russian woman told us: “Sexual services are our main source for earning money. It wouldn’t be worth coming here for the wages we get.”\(^{12}\) One is tempted to say that these women are strategic economic and social players who are adept in managing a form of ‘opportunistic capitalism’ on the outer edges of legality by selling their ethnicized sex.

But the story is more complicated than it may seem: some dancers perform these additional services because they are not fully aware of the services that are actually part of their job description and they have only a vague idea of the rights and obligations contained in their work contract. It may be that they do not understand the contract because they do not speak the language in which it is written. The discrepancy between law and practice in the dancers’ work may also be the result of coercion – whether it stems from outside pressures, or a situation of dependence or exploitation in connection with cabaret managers, placement agencies or even clients. When this is the case, the dancers find themselves in an inextricable situation. They drink alcohol, for instance, because they do not want to run the risk of not having their contract renewed, champagne being the main source of income for the cabarets.

We could conclude by saying that these conditions are serious barriers to the mobility of these women. Most of the dancers are, so to speak, walking a tight-rope from which they could easily fall. The precariousness of their situation is due both to the conditions attached to the ‘dancer’ permit, and to the context of sex work in general. However, it does not affect all the dancers in the same way. Some of them find themselves in a very difficult situation which may even result in coercion. As the study has shown, this is particularly true for women who come to Switzerland for the first time. A considerable portion of the dancers come to

\(^{12}\) Although some of the dancers’ activities can be classed as prostitution, as they are classical economic-sexual exchanges (Pheterson 2001), the dancers do not see themselves as prostitutes and so avoid taking on an identity as such. Many women say that some of their clients have become good friends. It is interesting to note, as Ljuslin has shown (2007), that on the one hand, the dancers have developed strategies of comparison based on principles of hierarchy to differentiate themselves from women working in the sex industry as street prostitutes or in massage parlours. They recognize that, in general, part of their work does consist in engaging in sex against payment, but they consider it as very different from what they imagine happens in massage parlours or on the street: it can be refused, it is set in a context of social relations (conversation, flirting, regular visits), it takes place in a ‘classy’ setting far removed from the sleazy, unhealthy conditions experienced by other (foreign) prostitutes; it is valued at its due worth.
Switzerland just once and never come back: These women develop neither transnationalism through mobility nor diasporic transnationalism: they move once, return and then stop circulating.

But what are the conditions that enable others to profit from this situation of ‘opportunist capitalism’? In order to be able to exploit these opportunities in the shadow of legality, the women must develop a whole series of vertical, locally anchored relations: they have to ‘locally integrate’ and kind of ‘settle-down’, while at the same time developing diasporic elements in their transnational morphology.

*Developing vertical, locally anchored networks: the ‘strength of weak ties’*

Some women are able to exploit the uncertainties of the situation and achieve their economic ambitions. These are the women, who in the course of their stays in Switzerland, manage to build up a network of different actors, who in turn provide them with various contacts to help them increase their income and deal with the precarious nature of their situation. These dancers come back again and again to Switzerland and go to dance in other countries. Circulatory and diasporic elements are in this case superposed.

Who are the most important actors with whom the dancers form ties? First the placement agencies should be mentioned: often the dancers hear from their colleagues – once they are dancing in a cabaret – which agencies are able to put them in a ‘good cabaret’ and which do not demand exaggerated amounts for the placement services. Dancers often change their agency during the first stay in Switzerland according to the new information they receive. Second, the women accumulate detailed knowledge as to which cabarets are worth working for, and which ones are not: This means, they can evaluate which owners do behave correctly – in terms of payment of salary, no coercion, and so on – and which ones should be avoided. If the owner of a cabaret is satisfied with the work of a dancer, she can count on him/her to give her another contract in a few months’ time, which renders her situation less precarious. This way, some dancers can after a while chose – always in contact with their agencies – which cabarets they will work in. But also the clients are important actors in these new networks of ‘locality’ in Switzerland: We have examples of how dancers form alliances with their clients in order to complain or to demand their rights in situations of exploitation. And finally, notwithstanding the strong competition between the dancers, these colleagues are important as they are a source of a different kind of information.

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13 For a typology of the cabarets see Thiévent (2008).
Interestingly enough, these newly knotted relations are all weak or fugitive in nature: We know from network analysis that the ‘strength of weak ties’ as Granovetter (1976) said, lies in their potential for accessing information. Weak, fugitive and so-called bridging ties are important with regard to information diffusion, while strong ties promise solidarity, reciprocity and social support (Burt 2005; Flap and Völker 2004; Scott 1991). This way the dancers create locally anchored social capital consisting of weak ties, giving them access to information that allows them to be able to stay mobile – they get to know where to earn most without taking risks. Put differently, they are kind of ‘diasporic’ while staying mobile.

Strategies for permanent settlement: from mobility to diaspora?
The dancers’ future prospects differ greatly, of course, but basically they are always linked to the economic factor. Even if most of the women would like to go home or to keep circulating (at least for a little longer), some of the dancers would prefer to settle in Switzerland: in other words, they aim at diasporic transnationalism. However, the short-term dancer’s permit does not provide any possibility of obtaining another permit that would enable them to remain legally in Switzerland in the long term. One of the only ways of obtaining a residence permit is marriage to a Swiss or to a foreign national holding a residence permit. Half of the dancers see marriage as a means of settling in Switzerland. In this case, transnational mobility is thus a means of becoming settled, as this woman tells us: “I don’t like this work. I would like to dance but not to have to drink alcohol and go into the separate rooms. If I don’t get married, I’ll come back to work in the cabarets again and try to find someone to marry me.”

Many of the dancers try to make friends with clients – also under this perspective, clients are important actors in this new local network – put differently, they try to tie ‘strong’ bonds with the clients. Others insist that they would only marry for love and disclaim any intention of making a strategic marriage, but at the same time they are aware that marriage would enable them to obtain a residence permit that would allow them to change their field of work. Marriage as a migration strategy has been much discussed in the literature (Beck-Gernsheim 2007; Brennan 2002). As far as the dancers are concerned, it is important to note that marriage projects often only take shape once the dancers are in Switzerland and are seldom the primary motive for their mobility. So, some dancers use various strategies to achieve diasporic transnationalism.

4. By way of conclusion: A continuum of diasporic and mobile elements in transnational morphologies
The cabaret dancers who were the focus of this study represent a heterogeneous group embodying a particular, contemporary form of female mobility: Overall the case study reveals that the dancers develop different morphologies of transnationalism and that these are the outcome of the interplay between mobility and diasporic features.

I propose, therefore, that we think of transnationalism as a continuum between the two poles of mobility, one the one hand, and diaspora on the other. Most morphologies of the transnational might be defined as a combination of the different features of the two ideal types described.

The case study under examination in this paper reveals that the following elements foster transnationalism through mobility. The dancers clearly have an economic outlook that makes them into transnational and mobile actors: Furthermore, the characteristics of the transnational sex industry, as well as the legal situation in Switzerland, enhance the mobile character of their transnational morphology. First, therefore, the legislation in Switzerland with regard to the ‘dancer’s permit’ forces the women to be continuously on the move. Second, the agencies are embedded in a transnational network and place the women in night clubs in different parts of the globe, which encourages their mobility. Third, the sex industry displays features of specific transnational constructions of ethnicized sexualities, creating a demand for specific ‘types’ of women and supporting the mobility aspects. This way, the dancers represent a highly mobile workforce; they go back home from time to time, circulate and have no intention of settling anywhere else, certainly not permanently. With regard to the two ideal types described, this figure represents the mobility extreme on the continuum.

But on the other hand, because of the migratory situation – limitations imposed by their residence status, their status as wage-earners, lack of knowledge of the national languages and of their rights – the entrepreneurial transnational operating space of the dancer is restricted and they find themselves constantly on the boundary between legality and exploitation. This precarious situation is a barrier to the dancers’ mobility and has different outcomes; some dancers go back and stop circulating. With regard to the continuum, we might say that in a way they fall out of the transnationalism paradigm.

Others profit from the opportunities: they create and build up social capital consisting mainly of weak ties with agencies, cabaret owners, clients, NGOs and other dancers, allowing them to access a wide range of important information which helps them to stay mobile. Their mobility - ‘savoir bouger’ - is conditioned by the inclusion of diasporic elements in their transnationalism. They establish a locally anchored network of actors and as a result they accumulate knowledge about how to earn the most money while avoiding the risk of
exploitation. Going back to the mobility-diaspora continuum, we could say that this group of women is placed somewhere in the middle, adopting mobility and diasporic features. Finally, others try to get even more diasporic as they settle in Switzerland by marriage, thus forming strong ties with a husband (in spe). They might develop further features which we classified as typical for the diasporic transnationalism model.

In sum, circulatory and diasporic elements can be found in this case study and they accompany and condition each other. However, the weight of the individual element in building a transnational morphology varies not only from case to case, but also in the course of the life cycle: mobility can be replaced by a diaporic stance, or vice-versa, as seen in the case study.

I should like to add a few more concluding remarks: From this case study, it appears that transnational practices cannot develop separately but are linked to the constraints and opportunities imposed by the context. The contextual conditions which influence the emergence of transnational practices and the different forms of transnationalism depend on social, political and legal factors and on gender power relations. Cultural, socio-economic and political constraints block certain possibilities for transnational action and foster others. This might be common-sense knowledge in transnational studies, but I argue that the articulation of local, transnational and global aspects stills needs more theoretical attention in future.

Another important point which has been brought to light in this example is the following: Although the research design has been de-ethnicized by analysing a group whose boundaries are not defined in ethnic or national but in professional terms, ethnicity seemingly sneaks in through the back door again. First, the regulatory power of the nation state is formative for the situation of the dancers: the conditions of the ‘dancers permit’ is not only a result of the (ethnicized) migration politic of the Swiss State, but at the same time is central for the formation of the specific transnationalism of the dancers. Second, ethnicity is of high importance in this transnational imaginary of sexuality as it creates a demand for migrant sex workers. So de-ethnicizing research designs does not mean ignoring ethnicity (or nationality) in the analysis of social phenomena.

Finally, my aim with this paper was to contribute to building a theory of comparative transnationalism and I am aware that this might too ambitious. However, I maintain that we need a common theoretical framework for transnationalism.

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