I was a little bit nervous when I asked Yaw Kyeremeh, a Ghanaian friend of mine in Berlin, whether he could help me to find a room in his home town in Ghana, where I planned to do field work. Before he came to Germany Yaw was a secondary school teacher, cocoa farmer and member of the chieftaincy lineage in a big village in the Brong Ahafo Region. He had left the country in the 1970s when it experienced a dramatic economic decline, which made it increasingly difficult to make a living. In Germany Yaw secured his legal status by marrying a German woman and worked as an unskilled worker in the building industry. In the early 1990s when Berlin experienced a building boom Yaw founded a small subcontracting company for clearing out old buildings, which had economic difficulties at the time of my field work. I felt uncomfortable to ask him for a favour because I had found that Ghanaian migrants, in particular former asylum seekers, were suspicious when I showed interest in their private affairs. But, in fact, Yaw’s reaction was unexpectedly friendly. He was delighted to invite me to stay in one of his houses in Ghana. He elaborated extensively on the beauties of his home town, on the comforts of his house including imported furniture, flush toilet and electricity, and the respect he had earned in Ghana for the support he gave to his extended family and other migrants from the area. Yaw was proud to display his social identity as a successful man, which he had acquired in Ghana. A couple of weeks later we sat together until the late evening in his wife’s shop in Berlin. When I was about to leave Yaw said that he would have liked to be able to invite me to stay in his flat over night but that it was not nice enough to entertain guests. The same man who had three houses in Ghana was ashamed to take me to his flat in Berlin. In contrast to his status identity in Ghana, his migratory trajectory in Germany was something he was very reluctant to tell me about. These more painful parts of life were much more hidden and came out only by bits and pieces during my field research in Berlin. Often Yaw presented them in a bitter and sometimes reproachful tone. Once he said that he regretted deeply having left Ghana because he
could now be a highly esteemed and important person in Ghana. Instead of this he would lead a hard life in a country where he was not respected. But despite this negative appraisal, he helped several of his children and relatives to migrate to Europe and when I asked him before I went to Ghana whether I could do something for his family he said that I could bring one of his relatives to Germany.

These kinds of contradictions and tensions in regard to social status and the estimation of the success of the migratory project, which were embedded in Yaw's life history, were issues that increasingly interested me during my field research. I called the transnational dynamics among Ghanaian migrants by which the gain of status in the country of origin is produced by a simultaneous loss of status in the receiving country: *status paradox of migration*.

Migrants who build up the symbolic representations of a middle class status in the country of origin by doing a working class jobs in the country of immigration appear to be a relatively wide-spread phenomenon in the contemporary world. It happens in particular in cases in which labour migration takes place between nation states with high differentials in wages and buying power. But although the empirical phenomena I am referring to seem to be characteristic of a certain type of transnational labour migration, it appears strangely underrepresented in the migration studies literature. I mean, of course, there are many descriptions of a single aspect in the literature, which fit into my analytical description of the problem. But normally authors refer to only one side of the paradox: either processes of racialisation and marginalisation of migrants in the receiving countries or conspicuous consumption and other status oriented activities of migrants' in the sending countries. Rarely, both aspects are put in relation to each other and even rarer I could find to attempts of theorisation of the observed inconsistencies.¹

¹ The multiple and simultaneous inclusion of migrants within the sending area and the receiving area was studied and conceptualized in the framework of rural-urban migration by the Manchester School (Epstein 1967; Gluckman 1961; Mitchell 1959 [1956]). Different from the Anthropological study of rural urban, forms of double incorporation of migrants and their impact on status identities were often neglected in the case of international migration to Europe and North America. But there are also some exceptions to this rule. Elwert (1984: 67) makes a remark on the compensatory function of a high status in the home village for to the working class status of Turkish migrants in Germany. Goldring (1998) elaborates on transnational practices that contribute to a positive status in the receiving area but does not refer to inconsistencies of the transnational status production. Ruba Salih (2003) mentions the management problem of distributing resources caused by simultaneous incorporation in respect to social status. Similarly to my case description, Glick Schiller and her colleagues (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994; Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001a, 2001b) highlight the contradictions and inconsistencies in regard to status caused by simultaneous incorporation for the case of Haitian migrants.
The question emerges as to why, although social inequality and social status are central issues of migration studies, the described *paradox of migration* was so frequently overlooked. The reason for this is not difficult to identify. Migration studies as well as research on social inequality has been dominated by a *methodological nationalism* (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). Researchers focus primarily on processes, which take place within the borders of one single nation state. But because the status paradox of migration requires references to two countries and the transnational social field, which connects them, it has just not been observed within a single research project. Before I come back to a more thorough description of the empirical case I want to take up the question of methodology in migration studies, which led to this under-representation of transnational social phenomena. Wimmer and Glick Schiller argue that several shortcomings and self-restrictions of the social sciences were caused by the inscription of the nation state as quasi-natural form of the modern world within the analytical framework of study. But although this critique is well received it raises an important follow-up question? What kind of methodology would be adequate if *methodological nationalism* is not?

I think two possible pitfalls should be avoided by answering this question in particular: the first pitfall would be to understand the cited critique as a kind of therapeutic liberation; As if after understanding the self-imposed and ideological restrictions of a *methodological nationalism* we would be able to see the world as it is. Observations are necessarily based on certain presuppositions and pre-selections by which they are constituted. An unprejudiced observation of the world itself, even if it would be possible, cannot be a sufficient condition for a valuable scientific contribution within a highly differentiated and complex socially constructed field. Therefore, the alternative to methodological nationalism cannot be having no methodology but *only* having a different, which allows for more or more adequate observations and theorisation.

The second pitfall, into which some authors of the transnationalism paradigm seem to have stepped and which is emphasized by critics of transnationalism (Bommes 2003: 102; Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004: 1178) is to understand transnationalism as a *methodological anti-nationalism*. It was pointed out several times by now that it makes no sense to deny the relevance of nation states for the contemporary world but the task can only be to contextualise its significance within a broader frame of reference (Glick Schiller 2004; Glick Schiller and Fouron 1999; Pries 2005; Salih 2003: 5-10). This means if a *methodological transnationalism* shall be more than a mere inversion of *methodological nationalism* it must also allow for the observation...
Methodological Transnationalism and the Paradox of Migration

Boris Nieswand

of practices and institutions, which are not transnational but might matter in respect to the empirical case and the intellectual problems under examination. A constitutive feature of many migrants’ ways of living is that they are simultaneously and repeatedly incorporated in two or more nation states and transgress in their everyday practices the borders of these political units. Therefore, if these complex “pathways of incorporation” (Glick Schiller, Nieswand, Schlee, Darieva, Yalcın-Heckmann and Fosztó 2005) into different socio-spatial and political units and their forms of interaction are to be studied, this research must be done within a methodology, which allows observing multiple and simultaneous forms of incorporation (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). In accordance with remarks made by other authors (i.e. Mannitz 2002: 3) but stressing the differentiation between methodology, empirical observation and theory I suggest the following working definition for a methodological transnationalism: Methodological transnationalism is an analytical framework allowing for the description and analysis of multiple and simultaneous forms of incorporation and non-incorporation of migrants and non-migrants in different socio-spatial contexts and institutions within a global society without prejudging the primacy of one of them.

To demonstrate the use of the general analytical framework I come back to my ethnographic case: transnational Ghanaian migrants. The described paradox of migration refers to two different statuses relating to two national arenas of ascription and the transnational link, which brings them together in the experiences and practices of the migrants. In this context I want to elaborate on the specific national shape of the transnational status inconsistency experienced by Ghanaian migrants to Germany.

Ghana was the first sub-Saharan African colony to become independent in 1957. Optimism was great and based on a well functioning education system and Ghana’s economic status as a middle-income country. It was widely expected that after having overcome the confining bonds of colonialism Ghana would catch up soon with the so-called developed world. The political strategy to realize modernisation was, in accordance with the dominant development discourse of that time, to induce a “Big Push” by intense state activities. This included substantive investment in state-owned industries, expansion of transport infrastructure, the health care system and the educational system (Siebold 1988, Rimmer 1992). Education was seen as a major means for achieving collective modernisation and legitimising individual claims for social mobility and participation in the modern sector (Foster 1965). However, the policy of the “Big Push” failed.
During the 1960s and 1970s Ghana experienced a sharp decline of the economy, which cumulated dramatic crisis with its peak in 1982.

But the modernisation strategy only failed in certain respects. Its success in terms of expansion of the educational system corresponded to a failure in terms of achieving a sustainable and substantive economic development. In a census of kinship units in a village in the Midwest of Ghana – a region with significant but not extremely high rates of emigration – my research team and I found a connection between educational degrees and transcontinental migration, which was also highlighted by other researchers (Peil 1995; Twum-Baah, Nabila and Aryee 1995a; Twum-Baah, Nabila and Aryee 1995b). 8 percent of the 1410 persons included in our census lived outside Ghana, 4 percent lived out of Africa. The degree of education among the migrants was significantly above the district average; migrants were concentrated among those with a moderate amount of education. The problem for the moderately educated group is that the supply of people with this level of education is by far larger than the demand on the Ghanaian labour market. Nevertheless, partaking in the school system generates expectations of inclusion in the modern sector. According to the dominant “social imaginary” (Taylor 2002: 106-108) on education, personal status and societal development, educational degrees should be ideally convertible in a corresponding status positions in terms of income, life-style and occupational prestige. By talking to students in Ghana I learned that they had relatively realistic expectations about their relatively bad live chances. But, nevertheless, these expectations appeared incongruent to them in respect to the promises of their educational degrees. To take an ethnographic example: Daniel, a student of a poly-technical school in his early 20s in the Brong Ahafo Region wrote, in a class room essay style, the following text on my computer:

"WHAT I WANT TO DO IN FUTURE"

If God permits, I would like to be a BUILDING ENGINEER in the future. The first reason why I like to do this work is that I will gain a lot of money from it. Secondly, technicians are those people who can give more skills to people or give more jobs for people to earn their daily bread. Before every country can develop, it practically depends upon the technicians in the country. (...) Finally, it will help me a lot to care for my family and also to help those who do not have, especially infants

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31 persons out of the 43 transcontinental migrants on whom we could collect educational data had middle school or junior secondary school degrees, five persons had a Secondary School degree, six had different types of tertiary education and only one woman had no education at all. Particularly noteworthy was the finding that 72 percent of the transcontinental migrants had an educational degree above the primary level but below a secondary school degree. This proportion is about twice as high as the district average (Dormaa-District-Assembly 2003).

This problem is documented at least since the 1960s (Foster 1965).
Daniel’s text explicates the social imaginary in which formal qualification corresponds ideally to high income, prestige and functional importance for the society as a whole. “His dream” appears to be a citation of normative discourse about how education should function in “modern societies”. This impression is substantiated by a comment of the sociologist John Meyer. He mentioned that all controversies on school knowledge and school curricula “build around a strikingly shared vision: (...) the (...) society could arrange rational instruction that would prepare children to be better and more effective adults who would both have better lives and contribute more to social development” (Meyer 1992: 24). Daniel’s dream in this respect is not naive but it is an explication of a modernist consensus about how education should function in an ideal world. But although it appears to be a particular global social imaginary to which Daniel relates it has at the same time a particular local shape. For instance Daniel’s emphasis of the caring for the family and the children resonates with his experiences of being a member of an extended family who is dependent on the support of relatives. Moreover, Daniel’s dream appears to be a much more unambiguous explication of the modernist imaginary on education and its promises than we would, probably, find among Western European students of his age. I met in Ghana frequently narratives of people which matched, like in Daniel’s case strikingly with assumption formulated within scientific theories of modernisation. This was in particular surprising for me because I had learned to reject this corpus of theories as interpretative schemes of the social world during my own studies. Paradoxically, it appears that the hopes and expectations directed towards the modernist social imaginary on personal status, education and societal progress had become a relatively local or regional cultural feature of Ghana and other African countries. The feeling of loss, deprivation and exclusion from an imagined global modernity that many people experienced in Ghana after independence made probably its promises appear more desirable. Additionally, the insistence that education should make a social difference, which is maintained against empirical counter-evidence in present day Ghana, is also connected to a historical experience of the role of education in Ghana. “Education” as Phillip Foster has pointed out 40 years ago and, as I would add, the modernist imaginaries that

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4 A similar situation of loss and felt exclusion from an imagined global modernity was described by James Ferguson for the case of Zambian mineworkers (1999).
gravitate around it played “a more crucial role in relation to status and social mobility [in Ghana, B.N.] than it did at comparable stages in western development” (Foster 1965: 300).

But after all Daniel’s reality turned out to deviate from of “his dream”. After having finished his polytechnic education in the building sector, Daniel could neither find an appropriate job nor continue education. He hopes now, if somebody in his family will provide him with the capital, to sell jeans at the local market. His ambitions of social achievement by education were crushed in the light of the social conditions. Another young man, who was less successful in school than Daniel, sketched an alternative vision of Daniel’s modernistic dream. He wrote just one sentence on my computer: “Kofi goes abroad”.

In fact, for many people the imaginary of modernity and its promises changed from being a temporal vision of the Ghanaian nation-state to be a geographical elsewhere. Migration provided an exit option for those who could establish themselves in Europe and North America. It appears to be a possible means for achieving the material and symbolic awards, which were promised by education. In fact differentials in wages and buying power made it possible for migrants to acquire substantial wealth abroad, compared to the standard of a middle-scale town in Ghana. To take an example: A secondary school teacher at government school in Ghana, who can be considered as member of the modern middle class, earned in 2004 the Cedi equivalent of about 90 Euros per month before tax deductions. In comparison to this, a cleaner in Western Germany earned according to the generally agreed wage between 7 and 8 € per hour. Although the taxes and deductions in Germany are much higher than in Ghana and the teacher might have some additional sources of income it would take presumably 2 to 4 days of work as a cleaner in Germany to earn what would be converted in Cedis the monthly wage of the secondary school teacher. Global inequalities create strong incentives to migrate from states with low wages and weak currencies to states with high incomes and strong currencies and to transfer surpluses to the countries of origin (Nieswand 2005). But as I have noted above, the material evidences of middle class status and social achievement in Ghana, in particular houses and cars, clashes often with precarious legal status and a working class position in Germany.

In Western Europe in general, and in Germany in particular, Ghanaians met relatively unfavourable conditions when the mass labour migration started. When the number of Ghanaian migrants to Germany increased most significantly, between the mid-1970s and the early 1990s,
political asylum was one of the few ways to enter Germany to achieve a temporally legal status. The adaptation to the often degrading procedure of asylum seeking, the legal insecurity caused by the uncertainty of the outcome and down levelling of status caused by the fact of being an asylum seeker left its impact in the experience of migration to Germany for those who went through this process. Moreover, educational degrees and language skills of Ghanaians were in most cases devalued in the German context. Germany was much less than Great Britain or the United States, where conversion of cultural capital was easier, a destination for elite migrants. Most of the migrants to Germany were persons with medium and higher education who could find only unskilled work. This evoked the feeling among many Ghanaians that they played a serving role for the dominant German segment of the society, although they felt entitled to occupy better positions. Additionally, the experiences of racist discrimination contribute to the general experience of devaluation and the feeling of being unwanted.

In this respect for most migrants their migration did not solve the problem of status inconsistency but just shifted it from one national arena to two national arenas. Moreover, and more complicated: The paradox of migration is a transnational form of status inconsistency, which manifests itself differently within the two involved nation states. In Germany the migrants often lack the social audience, the resources and the occupations to communicate successfully a middle class membership and in Ghana they have to manage the information about the conditions under which they earned the money to acquire the material evidences of a middle class status in order not to discredit their achievements.

I argued that the empirical example of the status paradox of migration demonstrates the usefulness of applying a methodological transnationalism. The observation and analysis requires the reference to different socio spatial units and their specific forms of interaction in regard to the social phenomenon under examination. Only by focussing on cross border practices and on the modes of incorporation within the involved nation states the paradoxical dynamic of winning status by loosing it becomes observable. By putting the different aspects of the migrants’ status in a broader picture it becomes clearer how and why these on the first glance disconnected and contradictory forms of representation of migration relate to each other: the marginalisation in Western Europe and the images of success in the countries of origin. To substantiate my point that methodological transnationalism should not be misunderstood as methodological anti-
nationalism I stressed how the particular nation-states and their institutions, like schools and immigrations laws, matter for the understanding of the transnational life-worlds of the migrants. Approaching the end of my presentation, I just want to hint at the possible implications of these elaborations on methodological transnationalism and the status paradox of migration for the revived debate between assimilationism and multiculturalism. A central issue in the German discussion on migration is the connection between social and cultural integration of migrants into the German society and social inequality (Kraus and Schönwälder 2006). One of the most profiled representative of assimilationism in Germany, the sociologist Hartmut Esser (2001), argues partial cultural segregation of migrants, which multicultural policies should enable, decreases the over-all degree of integration of society and is negative for the migrants’ own aspirations for social mobility. In order to avoid class formation along ethnic lines political intervention should aim at cultural and structural assimilation instead of recognising minority status of migrants within a multicultural policy framework. Excluding the contested issue whether Esser’s analysis is empirically correct or not, I would argue in the light of my empirical case his argument bases on a methodologically problematic assumption. It raises the critical question, whether it is legitimate to understand the status position of migrants exclusively from the side of the receiving society. How relevant these transnational forms of status production are for the general understanding of social inequality within the global system is, above all, an empirical question, which is far beyond the scope of my case study. But, nevertheless, the dogmatic closure made within assimilationist and integrationist theory, declaring simultaneous and multiple forms of incorporations as transitory or marginal phenomena (Esser 2001: 99), is not suited for facilitating the empirical observations that would be necessary to provide satisfying answers to the theoretical and methodological challenges, which derive from the described empirical case.
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