



**MALMÖ UNIVERSITY**

**The role of materiality in transnational family relationships  
of Czech migrants in Sweden**

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Two-year Master Thesis (IM622E)  
Spring Term 2012

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the transnational family relationships of Czech pre-1989 political émigrés and post-1989 love/ economic migrants in Sweden and their homeland-based relatives, by looking at the practices via which these relationships are initiated and maintained and the role of materiality in these practices. The theoretical framework builds on the notion of “transnationalism from below” as a perspective which intersects migration and family studies, and posits the focus on material culture as an effective analytical tool. After setting the research in the context of Czech and Czechoslovak migration in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, qualitative analysis of life history narratives and ethnographic interviews is used to investigate the topic in question. Considering the influence of historical and individual factors, the study identifies the parallels and divergences in the two migrant groups’ practices of long-distance communication and mutual visits and in their attitudes to the role of materiality in transnational family relationships. The thesis concludes by stating that in contrast to the pre-1989 émigrés, the post-1989 migrants’ transnational connections with the homeland-based kin are more frequent and intensive. While material aspects play a more significant role in the post-1989 migrants’ transnational family relationships, material differences are more pronounced in the pre-1989 émigrés’ relationships. The historical circumstances of migration, the individuals’ perceptions of their own acts of migration as voluntary or forced and the question of whether or not they were given a license to leave by their homeland-based kin are said to have a significant impact on relationship initiation, the practices of relationship maintenance and the inherent role of materiality. The importance of individual-level enquiry of the migration experience is thus emphasized.

**Key words:** transnational families, materiality, Czechoslovak political emigration, post-1989 Czech migration, license to leave, long-distance communication, return visits, kin visits

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all my research participants for letting me into their exciting lives and generously sharing their passions, delights and worries. Their astonishing will to help out by any available means has kept my enthusiasm at the maximum throughout the whole duration of my fieldwork. I am endlessly grateful to my supervisor Prof. Maja Povrzanović Frykman for her thorough and inspiring guidance from the beginning till the end. A special thanks to PhDr. Jiří Štěpán, PhD, who was willing to give advice transnationally and share his literature materials. Thank you all those who shared their contacts and helped my little research enterprise progress in one way or another. Lastly, thanks to my partner who patiently proofread and commented, and provided me with warm meals and hot beverages in the most critical periods of writing.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis uses a qualitative analysis of life history narratives and ethnographic interviews to examine the factors which influence the conduct of transnational family relationships among Czech migrants in Sweden, with a special focus on the role of material practices and differences in these relationships. This topic is particularly significant for two reasons. First, the role of materiality in transnational family relations is still a largely understudied area within both migration and family studies. Even though the existence of material differences between countries of emigration and immigration is generally taken for granted, most studies in the migration field have so far focused especially on the flow of financial remittances. My study underlines the importance of the less obvious, day-to-day material factors in the relations within transnational families. Second, while there is a burgeoning body of research on transnational families, not much attention has yet been paid to the families in post-socialist states which have experienced the political turnover of 1989, as well as the more recent technological advances. Very little attention has then been paid to migrants from Czechoslovakia/ the Czech Republic in this regard. The in-depth qualitative methods of life history narratives and ethnography served as a unique ground for a thorough examination of the studied topic. Therefore the findings of this thesis serve as a worthwhile contribution to the fields of family and migration studies in general as well as to the body of work on Czech and Czechoslovak migration in particular.

The thesis is organized in the following way. Following this introduction, sections 1.1 and 1.2 present the aim of the study and research questions, respectively. Chapter 2 provides the contextual background for the research, in particular describing the 20<sup>th</sup> century patterns in Czech and Czechoslovak emigration, devoting a special section to Czech migration to Sweden. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework within which the study is set. Chapter 4 illustrates the methods used in this study, setting them in a wider methodological frame, describes my empirical research and introduces the research participants. Chapter 5 presents the analysis of the collected material. It is organised so that it addresses each of the three sets of questions listed in section 1.2. First (in section 5.1), the factors affecting the initiation of transnational family relationships are examined. Second (in section 5.2), I investigate the role of long-distance communication with an emphasis on the role of materiality. Lastly (in section 5.3), the role of mutual visits and the associated material aspects is analyzed. Chapter 6 presents the overall findings of the thesis. The four appendices present the letter asking for participation, informed consent form, list of interview questions and illustrative photographs.

## 1.1 Aim

The aim of this thesis is to analyse relationships within Czech transnational families, whose members live in the Czech Republic and Sweden, by looking at the practices via which these relationships are established and maintained. Material objects are approached as constitutive of economic and political inequalities playing out in the participants' family relations, as well as the potential site of their projection of these relations. My intention is to show the role of materiality within the field of migration studies and exemplify to what extent it influences transnational family relations.

## 1.2 Research questions

- To what extent do the historical circumstances of one's migration, the concerned family members' attitudes to one's migration act and the associated material aspects and practices determine how one's transnational family relations are initiated and maintained?
- In what ways have the practices of long-distance communication been influencing and reflecting the nature of the transnational relationships of Czech families before 1989 and since then? What role do material practices associated with long-distance communication play in these relationships? To what extent is this similar for the pre-1989 and post-1989 migrants?
- In what ways have the practices of mutual visits been influencing and reflecting the nature of transnational family relationships before 1989 and since then? What role do material practices associated with mutual visits, such as the transport of objects and money, and the material conditions of individuals' lives play in these relationships? To what extent is this similar for the pre-1989 and post-1989 migrants?

## 2 CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Czech and Czechoslovak migration before 1989 and afterwards

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, approximately 2 million people who currently live outside of the country claim to have Czech origins (Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky, 2012).<sup>1</sup> Czech migrants of the periods 1948-1989 and 1989-2012 are of central concern to this thesis.

Anthropologist and historian Zdeněk Nešpor (2002, p. 36) illustrates Czech and Czechoslovak migration movements throughout history.<sup>2</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup> century is said to have seen the most extensive Czechoslovak out-migration so far (Jirásek, 1999, p. 7)<sup>3</sup>. While until 1938 the main body of out-migration consisted of economic migrants, emigration during the Second World War and from 1948 to 1989 was primarily politically motivated (exile), in order to escape the oppression installed by the ruling totalitarian regimes (Nešpor, 2002, p. 36-39; see also section 2.3).

The work of Pavel Tigrid (1990), journalist and a double political émigré, describes the two main phases of Czech political emigration between 1948 and 1989. The first phase started in February 1948, after the communist<sup>4</sup> *coup d'état*, which ended the provisional democratic regime introduced in 1945 (Jirásek, 1999, p. 8). The post-1948<sup>5</sup> émigrés dispersed around the whole Western world, aiming to join anti-communist resistance (Nešpor, 2002, p. 41-43; my interviewee Josef belongs to this wave – see section 4.3). According to Tigrid

<sup>1</sup> The total population of the Czech Republic was over 10.5 million in 2011 (Český statistický úřad, 2012a).

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis, I speak primarily about migration in and out of the territory which nowadays comprises the Czech Republic. I am going to refer to both Czech and Slovak migration with regard to the periods of 1918-1939 and 1945-1993, when what is now the Czech Republic was part of Czechoslovakia (“Czechoslovak Republic” in 1945-1960, “Czechoslovak Socialist Republic” in 1960-1990 and lastly Czechoslovak Federative Republic until 1993; Votruba, n.d.). Though most people throughout the historical period in question would call themselves either “Czechs” or “Slovaks”, instead of “Czechoslovaks”, depending primarily on their native language, the place of birth and the nationality of their parents, in many statistical data as well as within families the distinctions overlap, especially since the history of the two nations and states is largely intertwined.

<sup>3</sup> Zdeněk Jirásek (1999), historian and politician, provides a summarizing perspective on the various aspects of the émigré beginnings of the 1948 and 1949 Czechoslovak exiles.

<sup>4</sup> In public discourse as well as in scholarly writings the terms “communism” and “socialism” are often used interchangeably with relation to the authoritarian regimes of the European Soviet bloc countries (Kusý, 1985/1986, p. 153). This reflects the contested nature of this terminology, deriving from the split between the official communist ideology and the way it was put into practice in the individual countries (Narayanswamy, 1988). In this thesis, I use the expression “communist” primarily in official names, such as the “Communist Party of Czechoslovakia” and with reference to the official ideology, while “socialist” is used to refer to the regime instituted by the Party and its policies as such.

<sup>5</sup> Often referred to also as the “February 1948” or “February” wave (Nešpor, 2002, p. 41-42)

(1990, p. 43), the majority of the estimated 60 000 émigrés of the post-1948 wave fled during 1948 and 1949,<sup>6</sup> while in the 1950s crossing the guarded western border of Czechoslovakia was hardly possible. Emigration resumed again in the 1960s thanks to the loosening travel restrictions in the period of a liberalizing reform movement within the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (*ibid.*, p. 43, 83; my interviewee Libuse fled at that time).

The August 1968 invasion of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic by the Soviet troops incited the second phase of Czech and Slovak anti-communist emigration to the West (Nešpor, 2002, p. 46, 53-54; my research participants Zdena and Jindrich belong to this wave). This phase of political emigration lasted until 1989 when the socialist regime fell with the peaceful student-led “Velvet Revolution,” in reaction to the power constellation changes in the Soviet bloc (Glenn, 1999, p. 192). The post-1968 émigré wave was more extensive than the previous one, more varied in terms of the character of the migration process and spread out over the whole twenty-year period, effectively constituting a series of smaller migration waves (Nešpor, 2002, p. 10, 47-49). Nešpor (2002, p. 49-51) attributes this to the population’s increasing discontent with the regime, greater easiness of travel in some phases of the period and less restrictive immigration policies throughout the West towards Czechoslovak refugees. Approximately 200 000 Czech and Slovak émigrés left between 1968 and 1989 (*ibid.*).<sup>7</sup>

The two Czechoslovak anti-communist émigré cohorts are said to have differed in terms of socioeconomic status, education level and attitude to homeland politics (Nešpor, 2002, p. 42). While the majority of the post-1948 émigrés were “intellectual and economic elite”, those who migrated after 1968 had lower social status (Nešpor, 2002, p. 42)<sup>8</sup>. According to Tigrid (1990, p. 92), the post-1968 wave consisted of three groups – people persecuted by the regime; professionals and students, unable to pursue careers in their field and punished; and former Party members, active in the 1960s reform movement. In the 1970s the majority of Czech émigrés were professionals, while in the 1980s the number of émigré dissidents and members of illegal political opposition grew (Nešpor, 2002, p. 47-48).

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<sup>6</sup> The Czechs and Slovaks fleeing the country have never formed a remarkably large proportion of the population of Czechoslovakia. According to the Czech Statistical Office (Český statistický úřad, 2012b) and the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky, 2011, G 17), the aggregate population of Czechoslovakia grew between 1950 and 1968 from approximately 12.5 million to 14.5 million. Those 60 000 who fled the regime during that period thus accounted for less than 0.5% of the total population.

<sup>7</sup> This was out of the total estimated number of inhabitants of Czechoslovakia, which grew from 14.5 million in 1968 to approximately 15.5 million in 1989 (Český statistický úřad, 2012b, Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky 2011, G 17). The proportion of those who fled in relation to the size of the homeland-based population was approximately 1.2 %.

<sup>8</sup> Also see Tigrid (1990, p. 67).

The “cult of things”, a preoccupation with material security and practicality, created and fed to the Czechoslovak society by the Party propaganda, started to fall apart in the second half of the 1980s, as the regime gradually fell into poverty (Nešpor, 2002, p. 48).<sup>9</sup> This escalated the “appearance of black economy”, the spread of vandalism, alcoholism and drug abuse as well as the “stealing of [public] property” (Mencl et al., 1990, cited in Nešpor, 2002, p. 48). People’s dissatisfaction with this state of affairs can be seen as one of the *indirectly political* reasons for emigration in the period (this was confirmed by my interviewee Vera, who fled Czechoslovakia with this wave).

The people who emigrated from Czechoslovakia before 1989 could not visit the country until the 1989 political turnover, as all of them had been sentenced in absence for committing a crime against the state by staying abroad or leaving the country illegally, and thus risked arrest and imprisonment upon entering (Štěpán, 2009, p. 30-31). While the sources studied did not mention this, my interviews underlined the consequences of the émigrés’ leaving which their homeland-based families had to bear, such as property confiscations, interrogations or the loss of well-paid positions (as discussed in section 5.1.1.1 of the analysis). The correspondence the émigrés exchanged with people in Czechoslovakia was under close watch of the State Security<sup>10</sup>, as were the activities of their families and friends or former colleagues, which Josef’s and Milan’s narratives substantiated. Their family members could only visit providing the state authorities approved of the émigrés’ letters of invitation and afforded the relatives a time-limited exit permit (Vyhláška 44, Sbírka zákonů, 1970).

To the best of my knowledge, no author has yet studied the Czech post-1989 out-migration in sufficient detail, which is why the motivations behind these movements can only be assumed based on the interviews I conducted and the scattered available data.

Since the end of 1989 migration from Czechoslovakia and later the Czech and Slovak Republics<sup>11</sup> could take place legally, allowing the people to move to other countries for a variety of reasons. However, in the first ten years after 1989, out-migration was quite low (Drbohlav et al., 2009, p. 19). Instead, there was movement between the two new states and return migration of some of the pre-1989 émigrés, such as the father of my interviewee Karel

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<sup>9</sup> Veenis (1999) observes the same phenomenon in East Germany.

<sup>10</sup> A secret police service serving the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia as an intelligence and counter-intelligence body, monitoring activities of the citizens that could be considered anti-communist. Its members placed in Czechoslovak representative agencies abroad kept an eye on Czechoslovak delegations and tourists as well as the activities of émigrés (Růžička, n.d.)

<sup>11</sup> The countries split on the basis of a mutual agreement on 1st January 1993.

and temporarily Karel himself (Nešpor, 2002, p. 57-8; Drbohlav et al., 2009, p. 19). At the start of the new millennium Czech out-migration resumed again (Drbohlav et al., 2009, p. 19). My interviewees David, Zuzana and Karel moved abroad due to a combination of love and economic reasons in this period (see section 4.3). The entry of the Czech Republic into the European Union (EU) in 2004, which made the administrative procedures tied to employment in other EU countries simpler and cheaper, prompted this trend further (*ibid.*). The narratives of the post-2004 love/ economic migrants Lucie and Alice affirmed this.

## 2.2 Czech and Czechoslovak migration to Sweden since 1948

According to Statistics Sweden, at the end of 2011, 5812 Czechoslovakia-born and 1361 Czech Republic-born individuals lived in the country, forming one of its sixty largest immigrant groups (Statistiska centralbyrån, 2012a).<sup>12</sup>

According to historian Jiří Štěpán (2011, p. 30), the authority on Czechoslovak political emigration to Sweden, “a few hundred” Czechoslovak émigrés came after February 1948. Thanks to the efforts of the Committee for Czechoslovak refugees, established in 1948, and the support of a few important Swedish political figures, eighty Czechoslovak social democrats as well as a further ninety inhabitants of some poorly maintained German refugee camps received entry visa to Sweden in 1948, as did a number of Czechoslovak students (Štěpán, 2011, p. 29-30). Year 1968 brought a further influx of Czechoslovak émigrés, some of whom arrived to Sweden even before the Soviet occupation started on the basis of student, tourist or temporary work visa and decided to apply for asylum in reaction to the course of events in their homeland (Štěpán, 2009, p. 35). The narratives of Libuse and Karel (who came with his parents) illustrated such emigration paths. Most of the Czechoslovak émigrés of 1948-1989 arrived to Sweden shortly after 1969; 4200 people in Sweden had Czechoslovak citizenship in 1970 (Štěpán, 2011, p. 31-33).<sup>13</sup> In 1990 there were some 5200 – 5500 Czechs and Slovaks living in Sweden (*ibid.*, p. 34).

As Štěpán (2011, p. 35-36) states, many of the Czechoslovak émigrés of the years 1948-1989 have attained high social status and important professional positions throughout their life in Sweden, in spite of having started their career paths in the country as manual workers. Many of my interviews bore evidence to this. Štěpán (2011, p. 36) explains this

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<sup>12</sup> The population of Sweden was close to 9.5 million at the beginning of 2012 (Statistika centralbyrån, 2012b). Out of this over 1.4 million were born in one of 205 foreign countries (Statistika centralbyrån, 2012a).

<sup>13</sup> This includes some who arrived before 1948; during or after the Second World War (Štěpán, 2011, p. 30-31).

development by the high education levels among the émigrés, as well as by their general tendency to adapt to the host society, knowing that they would stay in exile forever (*ibid.*)

Štěpán (2011, p. 47) as well as my interviewees themselves see the impossibility of return as one of the reasons for the coherence of the Czechoslovak exiles. In Sweden their joint activities were largely political (*ibid.*). Seven Czechoslovak “countrymen societies” were founded in different parts of Sweden throughout the years 1948-1989 (*ibid.*, p. 47-77). They primarily worked on spreading the knowledge about the political situation in the homeland and tried to contribute to its change, among other things by publishing articles and periodicals (*ibid.*, p. 86). Besides, most of the societies fulfilled the role of a meeting platform where the countrymen shared their experiences, practiced traditional customs, discussed both contemporary and historical topics and arranged events for their children, fostering their knowledge of Czech and Slovak (*ibid.*, p. 47-77). Some of the societies dismantled after 1989, when their political activity was no longer considered necessary. However, some have carried on with their work until today, focusing especially on cultural events (*ibid.*; illustrated also in Fialková, 2011). According to the estimates of the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Sweden, the official countrymen societies currently have between 5000 – 7000 registered members (Severská společnost, n.d.).

No sources have yet covered the post-1989 Czech migration to Sweden in terms of the reasons for migration, socioeconomic status, time of arrival and place of settlement. Though it is not possible to draw any general statements from my material due to its limited scope, I hope my analysis can illustrate at least some of the characteristics of these migrant groups.

## 2.3 Clarification of terms

This section provides interpretations of some of the terms most frequently used in this thesis which are also some of the most contested ones in the social science and historical discourse. Further concepts are discussed and explained in the analysis (chapter 5).

Throughout this work, the terms “émigré” and “exile”, often with the attribute “political”, are used extensively to denominate the people who have fled Czechoslovakia in the period of 1948-1989 to settle in countries outside of the Soviet bloc, where they have mostly obtained political refugee status (see also Štěpán, 2011, p. 8). While referring jointly to people who fled Czechoslovakia/ the Czech Republic before and after 1989 or only to the latter, I use the term “migrant”. I have deliberately tried to avoid using the term “emigrant” to denote either one of the groups, as this term carries different, highly contested and sometimes

slightly pejorative connotations and during my interviewing has turned out to be an unfavoured form of self-identification for all of the migrants.<sup>14</sup> However, wherever I have used it, I have held on to the more technical meaning of the term, referring purely to people moving out of a certain territory to another for any reasons. I have used the terms “emigration” and “out-migration” with the same intention. Where needed, I specify with the use of the adjective “political” or on the other hand the expression “to move abroad” the difference between migration conducted in defiance of state restrictions before 1989 and that conducted legally after 1989, respectively.

I frequently use the expression “homeland” with reference to Czechoslovakia or Czech Republic, meaning the national territory of the interviewees’ origin (such as in Burrell, 2006, 101). By the use of this term I do not intend to suggest that the country of origin is perceived more or less as a “home” to the interviewees.<sup>15</sup> Rather, I use this expression as an equivalent of the more general Czech “*vlast*”, which means the “native land”. Related to the word “own” (*vlastní*), it is mostly used with the aim to express one’s dear relation to the country as such. This expression has been repeatedly used by my research participants and equals the use of the term “homeland” in Burrell (2006) and Baldassar, Baldock & Wilding (2007).

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<sup>14</sup> While for the contemporary migrants as well as many people in today’s Czech Republic the term “emigrant” seems to generally denote anyone who has fled the country by breaching state restrictions in protest of political oppression, thus facing persecution (Tigris, 1990, p. 14; also in my e-mail communication with Zuzana), the pre-1989 migrants themselves often conceive of an “emigrant” as someone who “leaves the homeland in order to be better off somewhere else” as opposed to “he who leaves home because he was deprived of the possibility to live freely and according to his belief”, who is seen as an “exile” (*exulant*) (Peroutka, 1948, cited in Čelovský 1998, p. 5; also expressed in my interviews with Josef, Jindrich and Zdena). A similar derogative meaning used to be ascribed to the term “emigrant” by the propaganda in socialist Czechoslovakia, which interpreted a leaving of the country in general as a “betrayal of the homeland” (Nešpor, 2002, p. 46). This opinion has been often taken up by the Czechoslovak home-based population (*ibid.*)

<sup>15</sup> The notion of “home” came up in most of the interviews, proving to have a somewhat dilemmatic meaning for some of the research participants. However, as it is out of the scope of my research focus, it is not being discussed here or in my analysis.

### 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is rooted in the two diverse, though overlapping fields of migration and family studies, taking for its main theoretical foothold the transnational perspective. The departure point of my approach is the role of material culture in transnational family relations, which serves to set these relations in the context of historically different migration processes and enables the shift of perspective from macro-level determinants of migration to individual-level migrant practices. My theoretical framework derives from the growing body of literature focusing on transnational families, which brings to the fore the need to pay attention to the practices of “doing kinship” across national borders and long distances, until recently largely neglected in the social science field (Baldassar et al., 2007, p. 6).

#### 3.1 Transnationalism in migration studies

Migration studies is often being criticized for prioritizing an ‘either-or’ perspective on migrants’ relations with the homeland, juxtaposing the idea of the ‘immigrant’ with “images of permanent rupture, of the uprooted, the abandonment of old patterns and the painful learning of a new language and culture” (Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1992, p. 1). The critique targets the overwhelming majority of migration research which focuses primarily on the difficulties associated with the integration or assimilation of migrants in their host societies (such as in Hochschild & Mollenkopf, 2009). Resisting this view as biased, the transnational perspective sheds some light on the ways in which both migrants and the people they “leave behind” can be active and involved members of two or more national contexts (Glick Schiller et al., 1992, p. 11). The transnational perspective represents a shift of focus within migration studies to the flow of social, economic and political influences, in the form of ideas or objects, by virtue of which “linkages between different societies are maintained, renewed and reconstituted”, both on the level of individuals and wider societal units (*ibid.*). In this way the theory of transnationalism “challeng[es] many long-held assumptions about membership, development, and equity” tied to the vision of the nation state as the primary explanatory variable (Levitt, 2004). A popular approach among scholars of transnationalism in the recent years has been to emphasize the interrelatedness of individual (micro-level) cross-border activities, referred to as “transnationalism from below”, with the wider (macro-level) historical, social and economic determinants, i.e. “transnationalism from above” (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998, p. 24-29). In this context, the need for a social field approach has been proclaimed. This perspective looks at the “interlocking networks of social relationships

through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized and transformed” within as well as beyond national boundaries – across the span of “transnational social fields” (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004, p. 1007, 1009). A lot of attention has been given to various forms of “economic transnationalism” – the flows of financial resources across transnational fields – mostly of financial remittances sent by the migrants to their kin, but also to businesses and municipalities in the homeland (see for example Massey et al., 2009, p. 221-294; Landolt et al., 1999; King et al., 2011). However, some authors have realized the importance of other forms of more mundane “transnational practices” which migrants and their connections in both their host and home countries perform in relation to one another and to the national totalities in question (Povrzanović Frykman, 2010). The observation that often such practices are perceived as natural and negligible by the individuals concerned is taken for an indicator of the normality of multi-national and multi-local engagements (*ibid.*). Many studies therefore show that such engagements do not necessarily disrupt individuals’ sense of belonging or responsibility to one or another of the nation states between which they move or communicate – instead, they might reinforce them (Povrzanović Frykman, 2010, 2008)<sup>16</sup>. Deriving from such reasoning, my study is primarily based on a micro-level approach, rooted in an in-depth examination of the narratives of a group of individuals, but it does not remain at that level only. Everywhere throughout my analysis, I relate the individual experiences to the wider historical circumstances as well as to other studies on similar topics carried out in different parts of the world. This shows that my findings are not only valid within the scope of enquiry within which they were made, but also within the comparative context of transnational practices.

### 3.2 Transnationalism in family studies

The study of families dispersed around two or more nation states with varying political milieus, in different stages of economic development or with diverse social and cultural traditions has proved to be one useful way of approaching individuals’ transnational practices and setting them in the wider contexts (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002, p. 6-9). However, family studies also adopted this perspective only step by step. For decades, the discipline had been taking for granted the reifying idea of the family as a geographically constrained unit, mostly represented by a single household and reproducing the patriarchal structure of the nation state

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<sup>16</sup> Glick Schiller & Fouron (1999) present findings which prove that the opposite can be the case too.

(Baldassar et al., 2007, p. 13, see also Finch, 1989, p. 63-65). Proponents of the theory of transnationalism took a lot of effort to show that kin can “hold together and create... a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely ‘familyhood’, even across national borders,” (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002, p. 3). Loretta Baldassar, Cora Vellekoop Baldock & Raelene Wilding (2007) present one of the first in-depth studies dealing with how families dispersed around diverse continents manage to provide for one another financially, practically and emotionally, despite geographical distance, border regulations and the scarcity of face-to-face contact. Emphasizing the two-way flow of care within families, the authors see transnational families as “transnational households”, within which “normative obligations”, and “negotiated commitments” of the individual family members towards one another play as much a vital role as they do within locally concentrated families (*ibid.*, p. 15). Two of Baldassar et al.’s (2007) central analytical concepts are the “license to leave” and the family life cycle as determinants of the mutual obligations felt among distant family members, and in effect of the extent and type of care given. I will return to these concepts in more detail in my analysis (chapter 5), for which Baldassar et al.’s (2007) work has served as a rich comparative basis.

In contrast to Baldassar et al. (2007), Kathy Burrell (2006) has employed the transnational perspective in her narrative analysis of first and second-generation migrants’ national identifications. Studying “passive” media transnationalism, interpersonal and family connections, community and political activism as well as the more abstract attachments to the nation and state as such, she finds that the voluntary/ forced aspect of migration plays a vital role in the whole migration experience. Departing from Burrell’s (2006) discussion, I treat the question of voluntariness/ forcedness of the migration act as one of the primary determinants of the will and capacity to maintain transnational family relations and find it more debatable than it may seem at the first glance, as will be shown in section 5.1.1. I also adopt Burrell’s (2006) concern with the techniques and ability to communicate and travel across borders, which she has shown as crucial for the maintenance of transnational relations both within and beyond the family (sections 5.2, 5.3). Due to the similarity of research focus, I relate to Burrell’s (2006) and Baldassar et al.’s (2007) studies also in terms of research design and methodology (chapter 4).

### 3.3 Materiality in transnationalism

The focus on materiality is taken as the departure point of my analysis, reflecting the view that the material world can serve “as a crucial interpretative tool” to understand the dynamics of social relations under study (Geismar & Horst, 2004, p. 6). This is not only because the objects people own, use, exhibit or get rid of reflect the material standards of their lives in relation to others. According to Miller (1987, cited in Geismar & Horst, 2004, p. 6), “objects may not merely be used to refer to a given social group, but may themselves be constitutive of a certain social relation” or of subjective identifications. As much as objects can contribute to the maintenance, establishment or re-establishment of social relations, their presence or absence can as well change or damage these relations (Rowlands, 2002, p. 121-125). Therefore this perspective is particularly useful in the study of transnational relationships, which, due to the scarcity or non-existence of face-to-face contact, have to rely on the existence and transfer of various material objects. While some of these fulfil obvious functions in facilitating the conduct of the long-distance relationship (such as letters, telephones, photos or cars) and some can be perceived as important for their symbolic value (such as gifts, inherited objects or favourite dishes), still others may affect relationships to a great extent whether or not they are being acknowledged (such as the furnishing of a guest room or the clothes one wears) (cf. Appadurai, 1986, p. 11-12; Povrzanović Frykman, 2010, p. 9). I approach the two former types of material objects as the material culture which *accompanies* transnational (family) relationships and examine its significance for relationship maintenance. The latter type of materiality is taken up in my analysis as constitutive of material differences between family members occupying different ends of transnational family fields. These material differences were brought about by the political divide between Eastern and Western European countries before 1989, highlighted in the first years after 1989, when re-established transnational contacts enabled their first-hand comparison, and gradually flattened. They are seen as the potential root of inequality in family relationships, which may act to the effect of their weakening. In this respect I relate in my analysis to Burrell’s (2008) study of the material lives and encounters of Polish women migrants in the UK, whose experiences with the differences in material cultures of their homeland and host country parallel those of my research participants.

In my focus on the role of materiality in transnational family relations I take “materiality” to be constituted by *anything three-dimensional* which has any relevance for the relations studied. However, I also extend this understanding to physical (hands-on) assistance

as well as seemingly immaterial objects such as music or photos which can nowadays be taken or recorded, sent and downloaded without the need for any additional materials apart from those which we use for communication as such, but which still carry some connection to their original physical forms, as many of my interviews have proved (cf. Povrzanović Frykman, 2008, p. 158-159, n. 12). The same applies to money and cash-free money transfers (*ibid.*).

## 4 METHOD

### 4.1 General description of methodology and methods used

Narrative interviewing and ethnographic methods, which have both been employed in this study, derive in the broader sense from phenomenological sociology, which seeks to access the underlying meanings of people's "everyday" by trying to uncover their subjective experiences and shared intersubjective understandings (Titchen & Hobson, 2009, p. 124). The speaker-audience situation which is the core of life history narratives enables a non-violent dialectic relationship between the interviewee and the researcher, bringing forth the self-understandings of the research participant and the way they relate to the circumstances of their lives and the people around them in a more natural way than in traditional question-answer interview methods (Kohler Riessman, 2002, p. 701). This arrangement is "essential to interpretation", though it of course calls for a strong sense of reflexivity on the side of the researcher (Kohler Riessman, 2002, p. 697, see also Bourdieu, 1993/1999, p. 608-12). Ethnographic methods, which enable us to study the phenomena under scrutiny *in situ*, can be used to extend the capacity of narrative approaches to cover the participants' everyday activities which may otherwise go unnoticed (Goldbart & Hustler, 2009, p. 16-17). In studies which deal with material culture this is a particularly useful explorative tool (Geismar & Horst, 2004, p. 6-7).

A major part of the data for this research has been collected by conducting semi-structured life history interviews, done in most cases in the participants' homes and supplemented with discussions reflecting on the materiality visible there, in agreement with what Baldassar et al. (2007) describe as a "truncated" form of ethnography or an "*ethnographic interview*" (p. 19, orig. emphasis). Deriving from these circumstances, the conversations were thus quite naturally combined with "limited naturalistic participant observation" when the participants invited me to stay at their home for the night or to

accompany them to some of their daily pursuits (Baldassar et al., 2007, p. 19). During these occurrences I was enabled, at least to some extent, to “participate in their activities and [get] absorbed into” the “here and now” of their lives (Jones & Somekh, 2009, p. 138). Along the observation, photographs were taken frequently, to accompany the field notes for the purpose of analysis, and to illustrate certain parts of the participants’ narratives (some of them are presented in Appendix 4).

I approached documentary films and publications dealing with the topic of pre-1989 Czechoslovak emigration as potential supplementary material.<sup>17</sup> These works however do not take up the topic of materiality in transnational family relations, which is why I have not used them in the analysis.

Life history interviewing provides access to the research participants’ subjective understandings of the material aspects of their individual experiences while enabling their study in the “social, historical, political and economic contexts” in which they are and have been lived (Shacklock & Thorp, 2009, p. 156). This focus on the embeddedness of individual life stories within the broader contexts, also discussed in Mills’ (2000, p. 10) classical text as the ability to “look beyond personal milieux”, is what according to Cole & Knowles (2001, p. 20) takes the life history approach “one step further” from pure narrative, though in both narrative and life history research “significance is given to the personal, temporal and contextual quality of connections and relationships that honor the complexities of a life as lived as a unified whole” (*ibid.*, p. 19). According to Shacklock & Thorp (2009, p. 156), “personal account[s] in the teller’s own words... tend to be selective, contingent upon remembered events that are amenable to being told” and “consist of both ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’”. By being selective and in fact *inventive* in this way, life history narratives can be expected to convey events and memories in ways that reflect the meanings and importance the narrator attributes to them (Shacklock & Thorp, 2009, p. 156). The way a story is told can reveal the teller’s value judgments of particular events and people; bringing to light pleasant memories, which are often eagerly shared and returned to, and hinting at problematic areas for example by the narrator’s avoidance to speak about them or waving them away as insignificant (Burrell, 2006, p. 124).

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<sup>17</sup> In particular I studied the documentaries by Fialková (2011) and Jahn & Jonášová (2011), mapping the lives of Czech pre-1989 émigrés in Sweden, and the publication *Minnen / Memories / Vzpomínky / Spomienky: Swedish-Czechoslovak Solidarity 1968-1989* (2011) produced by the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Sweden.

In order to let the meanings assigned to different parts of the told experience come out in the narrative, the life history approach emphasizes dialogue “where [the research participant and the researcher] act together in an on-going, non-linear process that leads towards the construction of an account” (Shacklock & Thorp, 2009, p. 157). For this reason, where the context allows it I prefer to use the word “conversation” rather than “interview” when speaking about the talks with my research participants. This is because they were started as open life history interviews, when the pre-written list of questions and topic areas was never strictly followed. This was then usually referred to in the semi-structured second phase of the fieldwork meeting in order to “fill in” with topics not yet touched upon. The more ethnographic, the more loosely structured the conversations were. Neither were the conversations strictly chronological in content, even though some of the participants took to recounting their memories according to how the events they spoke about happened. This use of interview method allowed for a truly exploratory character of my research.

## 4.2 Empirical research

My original empirical material consists of ten conversations, out of which four were done with Czech first-generation pre-1989 (specifically 1948-1989) émigrés, four with Czechs who left the Czech Republic and moved to Sweden after 1989 and two with the relatives of two of my Sweden-based participants, namely with the brother of an émigré from 1969 and the mother of a migrant from 2001.<sup>18</sup> Section 4.3 presents short profiles of the individual research participants.

### 4.2.1 Contacting and selecting research participants

Different channels were used to establish contact with potential research participants. I approached some of them through my friends in Sweden who told me they know someone with a Czech migrant background. Further, I contacted the chairman of one of the official Czechoslovak societies based in Sweden, who forwarded my letter inviting for participation in this research (see Appendix 1) to the society’s mailing list members. This is how I got in touch with two of the participants. Another two were contacted via Facebook<sup>19</sup> groups uniting Czechs living in Sweden and two were also found using contacts given by some of the above-

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<sup>18</sup> Two of the interviews were done with married couples (pre-1989 émigrés Jindrich and Zdena; post-1989 migrants Zuzana and Karel). I refer to each of the four spouses individually in quotations, especially because the migration histories and attitudes of the individual partners differed. However, since I interviewed the spouses jointly and their narratives intertwined in the main points, I refer to the conversations as two, instead of four.

<sup>19</sup> One of the most widely used online social networking services worldwide (Beal, 2010)

mentioned interviewees. I asked some of the Sweden-based interviewees who have close family members (those with whom they have been maintaining most contact, primarily parents or siblings) currently living in the Czech Republic about the possibility of interviewing them and thus got in touch with the homeland-based participants.

My aim was to have equal numbers of research participants who migrated to Sweden before and after 1989. In order to keep my study within manageable limits, I drew the line after having done four interviews within each of the two migrant groups. I could not meet the Czech Republic-based relatives of all of my Sweden-based participants. This was due to the limited time I could spend doing fieldwork, as well as due to the fact that I am myself currently living in Sweden and could only afford to make a short trip to the Czech Republic during the semester when I worked on my thesis. Besides, some of the Sweden-based migrants did not wish their family to participate in the research or did not have any close family members living in the homeland at all. Therefore the perspective provided by the homeland-based relatives is treated here as supplementary material. It does however give an insight into the experiences of relatives of a pre-1989 and a post-1989 migrant, respectively.

As regards the choice of interviewees, to a large extent I relied on the self-selection of those registered in one of the Swedish Czechoslovak societies and in Facebook groups, and on the willingness of those I approached directly to participate, as I was limited by time and budget constraints (since I bore all the costs related to the research myself, I could not afford to travel extensively within Sweden and the Czech Republic). For these practical reasons, the aim could not be to ensure a high level of representativeness or on the other hand homogeneity of the migrant and homeland-based samples in terms of gender, age, occupation, reasons for migration as well as the period of migration of both the pre-1989 migrants and the post-1989 migrants<sup>20</sup>. However, due to the qualitative nature of the study the questions of representativeness and homogeneity are not considered crucial for the outcome of this research. While its explorative aim is well-accomplished by the depth of enquiry of individual experiences (see Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 67), its comparative scope is achieved by the inclusion of both pre- and post-1989 migrants.

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<sup>20</sup> See section 2.1

#### **4.2.2 Collection of empirical material**

The interviews in Sweden were carried out in February and March, and the ones in the Czech Republic in April 2012. With all but one interviewee, whom I met in a restaurant, the interviews were done in their current homes. This contributed to the research participants' openness and feeling at ease during the conversations, "not only ensuring a greater freedom of expression, but also situating the respondents in their own environments, surrounded by the material symbols of their life stories" (Burrell, 2006, p. 19). I therefore believe it also contributed to the quality of my material.

I met two of the research participants twice – with one of them I went to a café for the purpose of introducing ourselves to each other a week before I visited her in her home and the other one invited me to her home for dinner some time after the fieldwork visit. I stayed overnight at the house of one of the participant couples. With some of the interviewees I spoke on the phone or exchanged e-mails repeatedly both before and after the interview was done; they spontaneously shared more thoughts related to the topic of the research or I asked them additional questions to fill in gaps in the collected material. During the visits, common walks around the neighbourhood, or when they or their partners or children accompanied me on my way to and from their homes, I got the chance to informally speak with some of their family members and relate their experiences to those of the research participants themselves. This enriched my knowledge on the issues under scrutiny in this thesis, and contributed to a breadth of perspectives and observations significant for the study of the participants' transnational family relationships (cf. Baldassar et al., 2007, p. 19).

At the start of the conversations I asked the participants to read and sign an informed consent form, which also ensured them anonymity (see Appendix 2). All interviews were conducted in Czech, the mother tongue of all of the participants and mine, thus avoiding the inhibiting influence of translation in the conversations, such as the one Burrell (2006, p. 19-20) encountered in her research with Polish, Greek-Cypriot and Italian migrants in the UK.

Being able to see the participants in the privacy of their homes enabled me to pay attention even to the not spoken about material aspects of their lives, which would not have been possible if the interviews were conducted elsewhere. The fact that I could ask about the material objects I saw in their homes helped to steer the conversations in the direction of the everyday materiality of the migrants' and their families' transnational being. This included a diverse range of objects such as family photographs, guest room equipment or imported electronic medical devices (cf. Baldassar et al., 2007, 19).

On the one hand, my research participants did not need much encouragement to speak. In fact, with some of them I had a difficulty in keeping the conversations within the range of the explored topics as they often tended to digress and speak about historical events, told me the life stories of their friends and family members or spoke about their professions. Especially in situations when the time available for the conversation was limited, e.g. by the hour I had to catch the train, this often made me quite anxious and distracted when I was trying to leaf through my question topics and search for the most important areas we have not yet covered. However, in retrospect I realize that we had spoken about most of the topics I was interested in, though in some cases perhaps rather implicitly. Besides, these detours often led me to the discovery of new and highly relevant topics.

All of the conversations lasted between 2 and 6 hours. All but one of them were recorded and transcribed on the computer in Czech, giving 30 pages of transcribed text on the average. Afterwards I translated the parts quoted throughout this thesis to English, trying to capture the original meanings as closely as possible and having them back-translated to check for accuracy. Field notes were taken during the conduct of all of the interviews, with the aim to pin down some of the parts which struck me as particularly significant during the conduct of the interviews, as well as during the non-taped conversations which took part before and after the recording. I tried to fill in my field notes as much as possible after I left the site of the meeting with descriptions of the place, the participant's expressions and significant observations from the non-taped conversations. These additional field notes often intertwined with reflexive notes which I used to record my impressions of the quality of the respective conversations. They refer to the attitudes of the research participants to what and how I asked them, the frustration I felt if not being able to steer the conversations along the line of the planned list of topics as well as other "thoughts, ideas, questions and puzzles arising from [the] sessions" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 90). I frequently kept adding newly recalled observations or fresh reflections and analytical notes to my notebook even throughout the whole week after I conducted an interview. Taking reflexive notes, I tried to set the research observations and findings against the frame of my acquired knowledge, experiences, "preconceptions, values, beliefs, and social location" with the aim of acknowledging my influence on the collected material and "monitoring" [my] subjectivity throughout [the] research process" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 89, see also Kohler Riessman, 2002, p. 696).

### 4.2.3 Reflections on and limitations of the empirical research

While conversing with the research participants, I often pondered about the insider/ outsider dilemma which also concerns Burrell (2006, p. 20) with regard to her research method. I am a Czech (temporary) migrant in Sweden myself, and have most of my family and friends in the Czech Republic. At the same time I also have the experience of being the one “left behind”, when some of my close relatives and friends have moved to work and study abroad in the past. I could therefore relate to many of the participants’ stories of their migrant beginnings, return and kin visits, relationship maintenance and change, gift giving and transportation as well as to the more abstract perceptions of the relativity of emotional and geographical distance.

On the other hand, even though I was determined to ask the research participants even the questions to which I ‘obviously’ knew the answers – in order to have them make statements even about the most profane aspects of their everyday lives – I sometimes felt awkward to pose such ‘easy’ questions and realized in retrospect that I unthinkingly made do with the assumed shared understandings (cf. Bourdieu, 1993/1999, p. 620). Some sections of my analysis thus reflect the fact that particular topics were discussed thoroughly only with some of the research participants. This is definitely a limitation, however, the fact that each of the participants chose to present their transnational family relationships differently also points to the individual nature of people’s opinions about what is important in such a relationship.

Lastly, my reliance on the self-selection of the interviewees as well as their selection of further potential participants to some extent ruled out the possibility to interview migrants who were completely dissatisfied with their transnational family relationships or who broke off contact whatsoever. However, as my material is nevertheless quite varied, I believe this did not essentially affect the quality of the analysis.

### 4.3 Presentation of the research participants<sup>21</sup>

**Josef** (in his 80s) came to Sweden in 1949 when he was close to twenty. He fled Czechoslovakia out of disagreement with the communist regime, crossing the border to Austria illegally together with a friend. He stayed in a refugee camp for a month and was then offered to be taken to Sweden by a member of the Swedish Scout association. He did not finish high school in Czechoslovakia due to emigration, but completed his secondary and higher education in evening courses during his first ten years in Sweden, learning Swedish on the way and working as a construction workshop assistant and a technician. After obtaining a degree in electronic engineering he found a better-paid job in an international company. Later he started his own firm. He has kept a detailed archive of significant events that happened both in his private life and among the Czechoslovak exiles. He has been politically very active in the Czechoslovak societies in Sweden. He speaks Czech, German and Swedish fluently. He uses Czech in communication with family and acquaintances in the Czech Republic and with Czechs in Sweden. He used to speak German with his late wife, an Austrian, and his two children, who both live in Sweden and with whom he now mostly speaks Swedish. His parents and older brother have already passed away, but his three youngest siblings still live in the Czech Republic. He is in regular contact with them and his former classmates and childhood friends in his native village. He has Czech, Swedish and Austrian citizenships.

**Libuse** (in her 60s) came to Sweden in her early twenties in 1967 thanks to her Czech husband's work placement at a Swedish university. At the time they were already determined to emigrate, further convinced by Libuse's experience of being unable to get a reasonably paid job due to her family's anti-communist history. The spouses completed their university education in Sweden and since then have worked in their fields. Libuse has two adult children living in Sweden, one of them with a partner and children. Divorced twice, she keeps in touch with her ex-husbands who both live in Sweden. Libuse's mother managed to join her daughter in exile where she later died. Libuse's brother fled overseas. Until today, Libuse has kept contact with his family abroad as well as her other brother's family in Czechoslovakia/ Czech Republic and some of her friends in her hometown. She speaks Czech, Swedish and English fluently. Though retired, she is still involved in her field of work, following what is happening

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<sup>21</sup> For the sake of confidentiality, the names of all research participants have been replaced by pseudonyms throughout the thesis. The names of persons mentioned in the interviews were replaced with identifiers of their relation to the respective interviewee. Closer indicators of the interviewees' places of residence were left out.

in Sweden as well as “roughly” in the Czech Republic and internationally. She has retained her Czechoslovak citizenship and acquired the Swedish one.

**Zdena** and **Jindrich** (in their 60s) emigrated out of disagreement with the political development in Czechoslovakia in 1969 using their separate holiday exit permits. After two months in an Austrian refugee camp they applied for a Swedish entry permit. They were granted temporary foreigner passports and given temporary accommodation, jobs and the right to attend Swedish courses in Sweden, where they immediately applied for political asylum. Having both obtained vocational secondary education in Czechoslovakia, they worked in their respective professional fields until retirement. They got married in Sweden. None of their relatives emigrated from Czechoslovakia. They have kept regular contact with their mothers (both now deceased) and their siblings’ families as well as with a few of their high school friends. They have two adult children in Sweden, one of whom lives with a partner and a child. They both speak Czech and Swedish fluently, Zdena communicates in German. In the 1990s they ran a private business, importing Czech products to Sweden. They both retained their Czechoslovak citizenship and gained the Swedish one.

**Vera** (in her 50s) got to Sweden as a twenty-year-old in 1982 with her Czech partner, later husband, a convinced anti-communist, who was the main reason for her emigration. They were granted a short-term exit permit on the basis of an invitation letter written by Vera’s partner’s sister, who had already been living in Sweden for some time. Later, they enabled a few others of Vera’s partner’s close relatives to flee to Sweden in the same way. After attaining a sufficient level of Swedish, Vera took up a job in the same field she had studied at a vocational secondary school and worked in in Czechoslovakia. Since then she has attained a higher position. Divorced, she lives with her current Swedish partner and one of her adult children in the same area as her other child and ex-husband. She is in regular contact with her parents in the Czech Republic and has maintained some contact with one high school friend. Vera has given up her Czechoslovak citizenship and obtained a Swedish one.

**David** (in his 40s) came to Sweden when he was close to thirty in 2001 together with his Swedish wife. They had lived together in the Czech Republic and another European country for about two years then, while he worked and she studied. Thanks to having obtained the Swedish citizenship on the basis of marriage, David could start attending Swedish language courses and taking Swedish student benefits shortly after migration, besides taking care of a newborn child together with his wife. Even though he had completed high school

and had worked for almost ten years in a research department of a company in the Czech Republic, only the obtaining of comparable Swedish study certificates enabled him to find a low-skilled job outside of his former field. Later, David took a specialized course enabling him to work on a lower position in the field he had been employed in in the Czech Republic and after five years there got a position corresponding to the expertise he had gained in the homeland. David lives with his two young children and wife. He regularly communicates with his wife's relatives in Sweden as well as with his mother and other relatives and friends in the Czech Republic. He speaks Czech, Swedish and English fluently. David and his children have both Czech and Swedish citizenships, his wife has only Swedish.

**Zuzana** and **Karel** (in their 40s) moved to Sweden together in 2002 for four years and again in 2008, determined to stay permanently. Karel came to Sweden as a child in 1968 with his Czech émigré parents. He grew up and obtained a university degree in Sweden. Zuzana grew up, studied high school and worked for 20 years in Czechoslovakia/ Czech Republic. They had lived together in the Czech Republic and another European country for a few years until their first joint relocation to Sweden, which was followed by another one to the Czech Republic and the so far final one to Sweden. All of these moves were determined by Karel's job placements. Meanwhile, Zuzana stayed at home with their two children, studied Swedish and searched for employment. Karel now holds a managing position in a company, Zuzana runs a small business. Karel is fluent in Czech, Swedish and English, Zuzana speaks Czech and has a good level of Swedish. They keep regular contact with their family in Sweden (Karel's mother, brother, Zuzana's adult child from her first marriage) and the Czech Republic (Zuzana's parents, sister and other relatives, Karel's father and extended family) and maintain relations with their friends in both countries. They both hold Czech and Swedish citizenships, like their two young children.

**Lucie** (in her 30s) came to Sweden temporarily in 2008 and again in 2010 – since then she stayed. Divorced, she did so in order to live with a new partner, with whom she later split and now lives alone. In the Czech Republic she had gained specialized secondary education and attained a managing position in her workplace. She attended a Swedish language course and took up a cleaning job. Not willing to return to the homeland, she then started a small business. Besides, she tried importing the products of her favourite Czech firm, but did not meet with much demand. She has regular contact with her mother, who had migrated to another EU country before Lucie left the Czech Republic. Lucie lived there with her for a

short time before her decision to finally settle in Sweden in 2010. She keeps some contact with her friends and extended family in the Czech Republic, her cousin in another EU country and friends in Sweden. She speaks Czech and English fluently and has a communicative level of Swedish. She has Czech citizenship and permanent residence in Sweden.

**Alice** (in her 20s) came to Sweden in 2011 with her husband, originally from a non-EU country, with whom she had until then lived for 5 years in another EU country, where she had originally come to work. Before that, Alice had obtained a university degree in the Czech Republic. Moving to Sweden, they received some assistance from her husband's relatives, who have lived in the country for some time. While her husband works in construction, Alice is currently at home with her child. She shortly attended a Swedish language course. She is in regular contact with her parents, sister and extended family and friends in the Czech Republic, friends in the country of her former residence and communicates with her husband's Sweden-based relatives on a daily basis. Alice speaks Czech and English fluently, and is a beginner in both Swedish and her husband's native language. She holds Czech citizenship.

**Milan** (in his 70s) is Jindrich's older brother and lives in the Czech Republic, in his birth town. He accompanied Jindrich on the holiday trip from which Jindrich fled to Austria. In his youth, he had participated in international sports exchanges and afterwards maintained some contact with his Austrian counterparts. He says he would have emigrated from Czechoslovakia if it has not been for his chronological illness and his felt obligation to stay with his widowed mother. Milan had obtained vocational secondary-level training and worked together with his late wife in a factory. He is now retired. He has been in regular contact with Jindrich and his family since their emigration, as well as with some of his townsmen who also emigrated. He speaks fluent Czech and some German. He holds Czech citizenship.

**Helena** (in her 60s) is David's mother and lives in the Czech Republic, in the city where David was born. She and her husband decided to give their son an international name in case he would emigrate in the future. She has a doctoral degree and held a directorial position in a public institution in the Czech Republic until retirement. She maintains regular contact with David and his family, his wife's relatives in Sweden and in other countries, as well as with her own relatives and friends abroad, some of whom fled Czechoslovakia before 1989. She speaks Czech and English fluently and holds Czech citizenship.

## 5 MATERIAL AND ANALYSIS

A range of topics came up in my interviews, capturing the diversity of transnational activities (such as political, media, or family-oriented), both passive and active, of the individual migrants and their kin both before 1989 and afterwards. The narratives uncovered a range of various private and public transnational connections each of the interviewees used to have or maintain nowadays. The interviewees also told me a lot about their experiences with the migration process and migrant life in general, both their own and those of their close ones. It would be impossible to cover all of these topics here, though they are all equally bearing. In the unfolding analysis, I therefore chose to concentrate on only one aspect of the transnational lives of migrant Czechs in Sweden and their families – the role of materiality in the transnational family relationships. I found this topic particularly revealing, especially in relation to the host of other research which has been done in this area. I specifically relate to the studies of Baldassar et al. (2007), Burrell (2006, 2008), Mason (2004) and Metykova (2010), whose findings differ from each other as from my own work in minor aspects, but which however intersect in the more general outcomes, leading to significant conclusions.<sup>22</sup> Moving on to the analysis, I follow the research questions listed in section 1.2. In section 5.1, I first focus on the factors which influenced the transnational family relationships at the time of their initiation – at the time the migration took place and directly after. In section 5.2, I analyse the role of long-distance communication and the material aspects pertaining to it for the character and maintenance of the relationships. Lastly, in section 5.3 I look into the role of mutual visits of kin based in the opposing ends of the transnational family field, paying special attention to the material aspects of these visits as well as the material differences between the countries involved. My concern is especially with relationships among “close kin”; between parents and children and between siblings. My analysis has proved these to be the ones maintaining the tightest ties within transnational families. However, I do make references to relations and contact with extended relatives, such as cousins, in-laws or nieces and nephews, where the analysis has shown them to be relevant. Finally, in chapter 6 I present a conclusion on the role of materiality in transnational family relationships of the Czechs I have interviewed and contrast it to other aspects identified as influencing those relationships.

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<sup>22</sup> The studies of Baldassar et al. (2007) and Burrell (2006, 2008) are introduced in sections 3.2 and 3.3. Mason (2004) investigated the role of return visits in the transnational family relationships of UK-based Pakistani migrants, focusing on the role of “co-presence” in family relations and the sense of belonging to the homeland. Metykova’s (2010) article examines the use of media in the transnational practices of Eastern European migrants who came to the UK following the 2004 and 2006 EU enlargements.

## 5.1 Initiation of transnational family relationships

For most of my migrant interviewees, the circumstances of and reasons for their leaving of the homeland proved to have a determining influence on the whole conduct of their transnational family practices, the frequency of contacts and the perceived mutual obligations. The historical circumstances have rendered this development different for the pre-1989 and the post-1989 migrant groups. Yet, specific private factors, such as the interviewees' relationships with the family before migration, the circumstances of their actual act of migration, as well as the individual migrant histories and attitudes to migration of both the migrants themselves and the kin left behind, have impacted their transnational ties as significantly as the broader historical factors.

### 5.1.1 The role of historical circumstances

My material shows that the effect of the historical circumstances on the maintenance of transnational family relationships is as individualised and contested as the effect of the private circumstances. This can be explained by the fact that the individual migrants left the homeland in different periods, when the conditions for emigration from Czechoslovakia as well as settling in Sweden were very different (as I have described in section 2.1).

When I wanted to get married, I couldn't do it in Austria, because I was stateless, nor in Sweden, because we were both Catholics (...) If I were a Protestant, it would have been possible. (...) So in 1956 I asked my mother [via a letter], if she could send me my birth certificate. And she sent it. (...) But the postman in [my native village] worked for the State Security (...) and he took the letter and handed it over to the State Security and they kept it. (...) So [my contact in Austria] said, she would go there and arrange everything with my mum, so that she could bring me the documents (...) So I finally got them. But we still couldn't get married, because I was still stateless. (Josef)

Yes, [my parents] sent me for example my school certificate and that was virtually everything, we didn't need more. (...) actually, it arrived when we already worked. (Jindrich)

Similarly, while two of the post-1989 migrants, David and Zuzana, migrated before the 2004 admission of the Czech Republic to the EU, Lucie and Alice moved out of the Czech Republic only after 2004. Though the first two had the advantage of being married to Swedes in contrast to the latter two, for Lucie and Alice it was easier to obtain the documents enabling them to start a new life in Sweden:

Neither my driving license was valid, because the Czech Republic wasn't yet in the EU, so I was, just someone from some untrustworthy country where people buy, sell driving licenses, right. So I had to [pass the test for] a new one here. (David)

Yes, I have a Czech [driving license]. Or do I have the European one? No, the Czech one, I've had it the whole time while living in [another EU country]. They kept telling me I should change it for theirs, but I probably just never found the time to do it. (Alice)

A notable aspect of my migrant interviewees' experiences of family transnationalism and the broader migrant experiences is the contested nature of their migration acts as either "voluntary" or "forced", a distinction which Burrell (2006, p. 51) makes between her Greek-Cypriot and Italian (economic migrants) and Polish (war refugees and political émigrés) respondents. From the political perspective, the socialist regime in Czechoslovakia with all its restrictions could be seen as determining the nature of the pre-1989 migrations as "forced". In contrast, migrations that took place since then, enabled by the opening of the Czechoslovak borders in 1989 and sometimes accompanied by re-migrations out of the Czech Republic (as in the case of Zuzana) or multiple migrations to various countries (David, Zuzana, Lucie, Alice), can be seen as "voluntary". However, several of my interviewees perceive this distinction as exactly the opposite:

I didn't really want to [move to Sweden], I would have preferred to stay at home in the Czech Republic, because I had work there, I was used to being there (...) but my wife wanted to go home to Sweden, she wanted to give birth to her first child in her own environment, closer to her parents, and so on, so I accepted it (...), so we moved here together. (David)

I didn't really want to leave. I tried convincing my husband. We walked around [our town] and I pointed to all the beauty of the landscape, [saying] that it's not going to be different anywhere else, that bread has two crusts everywhere<sup>23</sup>. So I went, as they say, somehow more out of love. My husband was firmly convinced and said, if we don't leave now, we will never leave. He was right. We were out for a month and they closed the borders. (Zdena)

I don't know, we, children, we were never in the centre somehow. (...) I was really unhappy as a child and I felt quite excluded. So maybe because of that it was easier to leave both my parents and the communists. (Vera)

As these extracts suggest, in the case of the two Czech migrant groups studied, the question of whether one's migration was voluntary or forced is not at all dependent only on the seemingly obvious political circumstances.

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<sup>23</sup> "Chléb je všude o dvou kůrkách", Czech idiom implying that life has a bad and a good side everywhere.

### ***5.1.1.1 Material aspects associated with the historical circumstances***

As mentioned in section 2.1, emigration before 1989 usually bore political consequences for the émigrés' left-behind relatives. Apart from the fact that their activities and conversations were often being tracked, especially if related to exiles known for their anti-regime activities (such as Josef and Jindrich), the punishment they received often affected their material and psychological well-being.

Well, they were very sad, of course, and also... My dad was sacked from his chief position, well, they needed my mum [in her workplace], so nothing happened to her, just, well, just – they interrogated them, right, and there was a trial... (Vera)

We lost all of [my brother's] possessions to the state, we lost his motorcar to the state (...) One half of our house was officially his. We lost that to the state too. We made efforts for them to sell that half to us, so I could have the whole house, in case that we would want to sell it later. They were of course unwilling to do it (...) but when we received all the documents about it [6 years later] and my mother finally could go [to the state housing agency] to sort it out, they did it in a fortnight. So fast it was, because they were worried he would write about it in the Swedish newspapers or something... (Milan)

Though the interviewees stressed that material aspects played a marginal role in their transnational family relations, comments about the material losses of the left-behind kin did intertwine in the narratives with remarks about the reproaches which the émigrés' parents gave them for leaving, as well as with pondering about the remorse felt by the émigrés themselves. The political consequences the pre-1989 émigrés' kin bore have therefore to be taken in consideration with regard to license to leave, which I will discuss in the next section.

I have not encountered a similar issue in the narratives of the post-1989 migrants. However, a major material difference between their acts of migration and those of the pre-1989 émigrés was that the recent migrants could *move* abroad with as many supplies from the homeland as they wished. While Alice chose to travel only with a suitcase, Zuzana and Karel described having ordered a truck to transport most of their furniture and belongings to Sweden. David found someone through a share-the-ride website, who helped him transport his luggage repeatedly by car. In contrast, all of the pre-1989 émigrés left the homeland only with a bag packed ("as if") for a holiday. Making sure their attempt to emigrate was not detected during border controls, all of them avoided bringing anything additional, such as photos or non-seasonal clothes. This has to be kept in mind while investigating the difference in the two migrant groups' attitudes to materiality.

### 5.1.2 License to leave

One of the major private factors differentiating between the individual migrants' experiences is what Baldassar et al. (2007, p. 7) call the "license to leave" – the question of whether a migrant's left-behind family as well as the migrant herself/himself accept the migration act as an appropriate choice. According to Baldassar et al. (2007, p. 212), "[t]he manner in which a migrant's decision to migrate and settle in another country is received by her family informs their negotiated family commitments" with regard to mutual care. It can become a crucial determinant of the strength and nature of the mutual feelings of guilt and responsibility (*ibid.*). This reflects, as some of my interviews have shown, in the frequency of contact, in the topics discussed in letters and during transnational phone calls as well as in the type of gifts given to each other. Some interviewees felt a certain barrier between themselves and their left-behind relatives, which they related to their perceptions of how and why their relatives (primarily parents) have never fully approved of their migration decision:

My parents never forgave me. They like to see me, they care about me, but they still take really badly that I left them. (...) We could send more [presents], but it was a lot of work and then, they had to pick it up somewhere, had to explain what it was and I don't know what, they just didn't like it. (Vera)

Jindrich: [The only possibility to speak openly with the relatives was] when my mother came, and then you basically avoided any such kind of discussion [about the life in Czechoslovakia and in Sweden], because I don't know, it was hard to speak with them, [even though] my family, I mean my side of the family, the people were politically quite aware, (...) they were against the regime, right, because we had been quite damaged by the communists. [Zdena's] mother was never really interested in politics...

Zdena: Still, she never blamed us for leaving, whilst your mother did.

On the other hand, some have received perhaps more encouragement to migrate and settle from their family than they would have liked to get:

For example my mum said, she said that many times, we have a better relationship like this, than we used to have! Since you moved away. I don't mind it at all. You are such a nice son, you send us photos, you call us and care about us, well, then [while still living in the Czech Republic], I didn't care so much. Like, I lived my life and came for birthdays, for Christmas. (David)

Finally, some of the interviewees' transnational relationships do not seem to be affected by whether their relatives have supported their migration or not:

My parents still haven't gotten used to it, after those, I don't know how many, six years that I have been away, and even before, when I was at school [in a different city], they would constantly rather have me at home, but, well, maybe they'll finally get used to it. (...) [When we call, we speak mostly about] family

stuff, what's new at work, like that. Since we call each other (...) maybe twice a week (...) you always maintain some kind of a thread of what's going on (...) When I was still at home, we were always used to, when my mum came from work, to sit around the table with a cup of coffee and chat, what happened at work and so on, so it's something similar. (Alice)

These statements allow for the conclusion that a license to leave from the migrants' close homeland-based kin *can* affect the felt distance of relationship as well as the extent of perceived mutual obligations (Baldassar et al., 2007, p. 212). However, the variety of constellations described in my material has turned out to be about as wide as the number of interviewees in my study. This will be shown in sections 5.2 and 5.3 which analyze the participants' practices of transnational family relationship maintenance in depth.

### 5.1.3 Relationships as a choice

In general, as Burrell (2006, p. 60-61) states, the existence and maintenance of transnational family relationships is affected by a whole range of factors. Important to note here is that much more than local family relationships, transnational kinship practices are to a great extent a matter of choice; the questions of communication and visit frequency as well as the care provided by one side of the transnational family field to another are largely under the individuals' control (Baldassar et al., 2007, p. 6). My interviewees proved to be aware of this:

When I was at home for more than a month recently, [the communication] was more or less something similar. The advantage [of talking on Skype while abroad] is that if you don't want to talk to them, you don't have to. (Alice)

While the understanding could be slightly different for the pre-1989 émigrés, who have experienced a time when they were able to keep only limited contact with their family in the form of self-censored letters and phone calls, the narratives I collected show that the voluntary aspect of maintaining transnational relations plays a role in all of the interviewees' contact with distant kin. The following section helps to illustrate this further.

## 5.2 Long-distance family communication and the role of associated material aspects

All my interviewees present communication at a distance, what Larsen, Axhausen and Urry (2006, p. 263) term “communicative travel”, as a major part of their practices of maintaining transnational relationships with family, but also with close friends. The variety of techniques they use reflects not only the broader political and technological developments, but also the ages of the communication participants and the differences between their understandings of what is important in transnational family relationships. I will now look into the communication techniques which the interviews identified as significant, discussing the changes and continuities in their use, as well as the type of content communicated. I will also focus on the material aspects of this long-distance communication and the role these aspects play in relationship maintenance.

### 5.2.1 Long-distance communication before 1989

#### 5.2.1.1 Techniques and content of long-distance communication before 1989

The pre-1989 communication of the émigrés I have interviewed almost fully relied on letters. Those were sometimes accompanied by parcels, photos or documents (as in the quote of Josef in section 5.1.1). Vera recalled exchanging audiocassettes with recorded messages with her family, something she said was trendy in the 1980s, in agreement with Baldassar et al. (2007, p. 111). Phone calls were occasional, enabled by the access to public phone booths and friends' landlines, due to the high costs of private landlines and their unavailability in certain areas of Czechoslovakia (like in Baldassar et al., 2007, p. 112).

The worst was that at that time there was no such an easy option [as now]. So it was letters, but it was also possible to call, go to the post office and call the neighbours'. We did it this way, [my mother] didn't have a telephone, so we rang the neighbours' and waited, just asked whether they would be kind enough to pick her up, and then we somehow spoke. (Libuse)

However, the fact that letters were often intercepted by the State Security and phone calls were being tapped, hindered or discouraged most of the pre-1989 émigrés and their families from discussing topics which they considered truly important to their lives:

Yes, we did call, but we knew that they tapped the calls, so one rather... we are a family which speaks little, like, on the phone it was just, how are you, everything alright, say hi. (Vera)

[Communicating by letters], that wasn't a problem, but you couldn't write anything in them. (Jindrich)

Furthermore, instead of sharing stories from their day-to-day lives, they sometimes had to de-cipher their relatives' messages prompted by the State Security who tried to trick some of the émigrés into coming back:

First I received a letter from my mum, Josef, would you be so kind, dad is going to send you a letter asking you to return, saying that you will be taken care of, will get an apartment, a job and if you don't have money, a delegate will pay for your journey and so on. But do reply very politely, we will need it. So I replied very politely (...) I don't remember what I wrote, but I know, since they asked me for it, that I wrote very politely. I wrote in a very neutral way in general. (Josef)

### **5.2.1.2 Frequency of long-distance communication before 1989**

The reported frequency of the émigrés' long-distance contacts before 1989 varies widely. On the one hand, Jindrich declared writing letters "about three times a year" and having never had a telephone call with his family before 1989, and Vera recalled communicating "perhaps once a month", adding that she gradually gave up on both letter-writing and phone calls, as there was not much to say. In contrast, Zdena spoke about writing "often", though she "spoke on the phone about once", like Josef, who exchanged "many letters" with family. While Libuse did not speak about the frequency of her contacts with the family, she did imply that her communication both with her mother in Czechoslovakia (until she also emigrated) and her brother overseas had been quite active, including both letters and phone calls. Apart from family, Libuse and Josef both recalled to have kept regular correspondence with one or two of their good friends in their home towns.

In some cases, however, my research participants put up with cutting off contact with some of their close ones, like Zdena and Jindrich, who "out of carefulness (...) never pushed for anything that did not come on its own spontaneously from the other side," (Zdena). In contrast, Josef tried to find ways to circumvent the barriers to transnational communication created by the socialist regime in Czechoslovakia:

[We exchanged] many letters. I am the type of person who likes to write a lot. Always. I have that from home. (...) So I wrote in different ways. Even using a secret writing. I kept up correspondence with a [friend] (...) You write the letter with urine and you cannot see anything. And then, when you take an iron and warm it up, the urine goes brown. So you can read it. (Josef)

Although such strategies are not in focus of this thesis, they do bring attention to specific *material* practices clearly conditioned by the political circumstances, which the literature quoted here does not mention. Let me now turn to further forms of materiality associated with the émigrés' long-distance communication.

### ***5.2.1.3 Materiality accompanying long-distance communication before 1989***

Even though communication was hard to keep up, not only due to the necessity of extensive self-censorship, but also due to the possible misunderstandings with the left-behind parents who had not given my interviewees a full license to leave, all of them maintained some level of regular contact. The letters which did arrive from the homeland (or elsewhere) were always carefully stored and kept until today, in spite of numerous changes of residence. While some of the émigrés do not attempt to re-read them anymore, as they bring back sad memories of separation from the close ones or family tensions (Libuse, Vera), Josef keeps them in an orderly and frequently studied private archive (see Appendix 4, photo 13).

As the verbal exchanges could not be very emotional or otherwise fulfilling, the material objects sent back and forth have to some extent taken over the function of expressing mutual care. Photos were sent and sometimes received by all of the pre-1989 émigrés. Some were taken at special occasions, such as weddings or large public events, while others documented the families' day-to-day lives:

We stopped writing quite soon after [my arrival to Sweden], after two or three years. Then it was less and less. What should you write? That you go to work. Then children, they grow, so something about the children, sometimes photos. I sent a lot of photos. (...) On the back of the photos you can read what happened and so on. But I didn't write many letters. (Vera)

These photos served as a shortcut to providing information about what was happening at the other end of the transnational family field. Some of them were exhibited in the homes of the distant kin and some instigated reflection, reminding of the current looks and situation of those on the other side.

Apart from photos and the earlier mentioned official documents needed in order to prove one's education or identity, other objects, such that could be seen as "leisure-time" objects, were also sent. For all of the émigrés, these were primarily books (see Appendix 4, photos 1; 2), though Vera's parents sometimes added even sweet treats:

When we asked for them, for example Jindrich's mum sent books, which he was interested in. And my mum did too. (Zdena)

[They sent us] books for Christmas. Sweets, those Czech [Christmas tree chocolates]. (Vera)

However, like the letters, parcels also often got intercepted and have only been returned to the recipient many years later, after the fall of the regime (such as in the case of photos which Josef exchanged with his mother) or just "got lost" (Vera). Like in the case of some of Burrell's (2008, p. 79-80) pre-1989 Polish émigré interviewees, such experiences made the

émigrés stop sending presents or getting anything posted to Sweden. In comparison to Burrell's (2008, p. 74-77) interviewees, presented as "gatekeepers of material wealth", sending carefully thought-through parcels stuffed with 'Western' products to their left-behind kin, my pre-1989 émigré interviewees did not try sending larger packages and goods which were scarce in the homeland before 1989. In general, while Burrell (2008) suggests that the sending of money and scarce commodities and foods was not only felt as an obligation by her Polish interviewees but also expected by the relatives, this was not the case for the pre-1989 Czech émigrés I met. On the other hand, all of their narratives are characterized by a general disinterest in the value of material goods as such on either side of the transnational family fields. The émigrés' references to communication with the left-behind relatives are far from expressing any sense of felt envy or demands, though the difference in material standards was evident, as Libuse's remark illustrates:

I remember [my friend] wrote me that her [child] went to the potato picking campaign and in three weeks made money for a new ski binding. And I compared it to what my older one did, before going to America, at the work placement I arranged. [My child] would have had several pairs of skis in that time. (Libuse)

In spite of the émigrés' acknowledgement of perceived differences, the only mention of sending money came up in Zdena's description of how she had to transfer a certain sum to her niece, in order to prove she was able to support her during her planned visit to Sweden. Similarly, Milan was the only one of the interviewees to recall having received from his brother an expensive commodity not available in communist Czechoslovakia, a piece of medical equipment, which considerably improved his life with an incurable health defect.

## **5.2.2 Long-distance communication after 1989**

### ***5.2.2.1 Techniques and content of long-distance communication after 1989***

Both Baldassar et al. (2007, p. 117-125) and Burrell (2006, p. 124-126) show the effect of the worldwide technological developments on the changes in transnational family communication.<sup>24</sup> My interviews, too, stress the combined effect of the fall of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia with the upswing of developments in communication technology in the 1990s, which has set about a series of transformations in the long-distance communication of the pre-1989 émigrés. Even David's transnational communication has gone through major changes since his migration in 2001, bearing witness to the speed with which keeping in touch

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<sup>24</sup> Burrell (2006), however, does not speak about the role of internet in much depth, which should be accredited to the fact that her interviewing took place in 1999-2003 when internet was just starting to be used widely.

over the internet has rendered other forms of long-distance contact redundant. Becoming more a matter of preference than capacity by being available to virtually anyone, the varied communication techniques have made even transnational family relationships a question of choice more than ever before, as my interviews have shown. Apart from the ‘traditional’ landlines and letters, the long-distance communication techniques now include pre-paid telephone cards, mobile telephone calls and text messages (SMS), e-mail, online social networks such as Facebook, various forms of internet-facilitated calls and chat, such as the now widely spread ‘Skype’, accompanied by real-time video transfers of the communication participants if desired, as well as the sharing of photos, music, films and other, now more ‘virtual’ than material, objects over the internet (discussed in detail in Metykova, 2010).

My interviewees’ narratives illustrate the variegated development of their long-distance communication habits since 1989. None of the émigrés spoke explicitly about the difference in the nature of their long-distance communication which the political turn brought about, in terms of the removal of telephone call tapping and interception of correspondence. It seems that the sudden ability to travel to the homeland took over the excitement felt about the political development, as I will show in section 5.3.1. Yet, some of the émigrés’ references about communication with people in the homeland which they had in the first years after the fall of the Iron Curtain testify to changes in their attitude to what could be discussed in letters and on the phone:

It was a pity that when [my Austrian contact] came to Czechoslovakia [in the 1950s in order to pick up my documents from my mother], her brother wanted to go with her and visit [their] brother. But they were being observed, right. So when [their brother] came home, the State Security came (...) I didn’t know this at that time... only when she died, she was almost 100 (...) I received a letter from [her nephew], which described everything (...) (Josef)

From the interviewees’ brief references, such as “so in 1990 I wrote [to my sister]” (Josef), I derive that in the first years after 1989 the techniques used to get in touch with the distant kin and acquaintances continued to be primarily letters and telephone calls. Only Libuse mentioned that while trying to find a cheap option of communicating with her brother overseas, she took advantage of “many different possibilities, you buy a coupon and so on, we tried all such things”, which agrees with Vertovec’s (2004, p. 221) statement about the rising popularity of pre-paid cards in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

With the gradual onset of internet at that time, however, the use of communication techniques started to diversify. David, for whom living permanently away from relatives was

new in 2001, presented his efforts to make use of the ever cheaper and more available methods of connecting enabled by the internet as a necessity (like in Metykova, 2010, p. 329).

I bet on technology, because in 2001 when I came, the telephone was very expensive, calling to the Czech Republic, to my parents or friends, was terribly expensive. The first thing I did, I arranged for the cheapest calls to the Czech Republic you could get. [The company] ran it over the internet. (David)

Then I also set up a cheap connection to the internet, from the same company (...) On my computer I had something like Skype, some Net-to-phone, I had a microphone and every time I had to top it up with some credit in dollars, but then the call cost some 20 Swedish *öre* per minute. So basically over the internet I [called the landline]. (David)

Approximately over the past ten years all of the pre-1989 émigré interviewees started to use the internet, primarily Skype and e-mail, as means of their regular communication with distant members of the family (cf. Baldassar et al., 2007, p. 117-118). While they e-mail and Skype especially with their younger distant kin, such as nieces and nephews, they tend to prefer the landline when connecting with their (older) siblings, suggesting that for those the use of internet has not become as routine as for themselves:

I call my brother from Skype to phone. (Libuse)

I speak with my brother on the landline. It's mostly me who calls him. (Jindrich)

Vera, the youngest one of the pre-1989 émigrés', described different, though corresponding routines in communication her brother and parents:

*Q: So do you send e-mails sometimes?*

Vera: Yes, to my brother most of the time. Otherwise [with my parents] we call or text.

*Q: And do you call with Skype or over the phone?*

Vera: No, normally [using the landline].

Interestingly, while preferring the phone to communicate with their siblings, Zdena, Jindrich and Libuse have described using a variety of internet services to connect with their same-age friends, such as Skype, e-mail or Facebook:

With my relatives in the Czech Republic and my friends I call using Skype, anytime, virtually anytime. (Libuse)

It's absolutely fantastic to e-mail with the relatives and Skype is even better. I even got contacted by two classmates, a man and a woman, so we also Skype. Sometimes we have a date in three. (Zdena)

My interviews have revealed that for the post-1989 migrants the use of Skype and e-mail as well as Facebook as the primary long-distance communication techniques has come as natural (like in Metykova, 2010, p. 328). In addition, having left the Czech Republic at a time when the use of mobile phones was already widely spread, some of them have retained their Czech SIM cards<sup>25</sup>, which they primarily use when visiting the Czech Republic, because then communication between them and their family and friends is cheaper. Metykova (2010, p. 331) presents a discussion of such practices. Some of the post-1989 migrants have even kept the habit of exchanging text messages with their relatives and friends in the homeland or elsewhere. SMS is used mostly as supplementary to other communication methods, reminding about something or prompting longer discussions conducted by other means:

I send [my mother] a text, like hey, I put up new pictures, download them. (David)

Last week I texted David, asking whether he already got any news about his salary increase. (Helena)

We call on Skype and now and then we write an e-mail to each other, or a text message. (Alice)

Among the pre-1989 émigrés, Vera was the only one who mentioned the use of SMS in communication with her homeland-based kin. While Milan mentioned having a list of all Jindrich's and Zdena's landline and mobile phone numbers written down next to his phone, and had a mobile phone of his own, he implied that these are primarily for emergencies, but that he rarely makes use of them. Nor his brother or the other pre-1989 émigrés recalled text messaging as one of the means they would use to get in touch with their homeland kin. One explanation for this could be the fact that Vera as well as all of the post-1989 migrants and some of their parents still work and thus calling each other directly at times of emergencies might be problematic. Sending a text message instead, asking for a call back when available appears as a more convenient method (similar has been described in Baldassar et al., 2007, p. 117). In comparison, all of the older pre-1989 émigrés and their close kin were retired and thus declared to be available for mutual calls at any time.

While David described exchanging long e-mails with his mother in the first few years of his life in Sweden, which he or she often printed out and sometimes re-read repeatedly, most of the research participants agreed that nowadays they primarily use e-mail for the exchange of casual brief messages, which they do not consider worth storing. Skype seems to have taken over the role of the means used to share the day-to-day stories, successes and

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<sup>25</sup> “Subscriber Identity Module” cards which store data connected to individual mobile phone numbers, enabling communication using mobile phones (Learn Telecom, 2010).

failures as well as to express mutual concern:

Now my mum always mulls over the baby, because at her work there is another pregnant one, so she always gives me advice, what I should do, what I shouldn't do, what she has already bought and what she hasn't bought, what that woman is doing, rather like this, nothing special, normal talk. (Alice)

For David, on the other hand, the family “transmissions” on Skype still retain a sense of ceremony and effort, while one-on-one telephone calls with his mother feel more proximate:

Somehow, I don't know, I rather sit in the corner and speak with my mum on my own, rather than pushing the whole family there. That's a kind of a big event, it doesn't happen so often, it has to be arranged, everyone has to sit together, right, so maybe that's why. While when I sit on the couch and call my mum, want to tell her something, I just do it. (David)

Libuse expressed a similar attitude, concluding “when I need something, I call the landline”. David's further elaboration on the difference between his own prioritizing of “active” communication, such as phone calls, and his mother's preference for telling her daily stories in e-mails, resembles Baldassar et al.'s (2007, p. 112) findings about the variety in people's preferences as to which communication methods are more convenient for different occasions. In general though, be they phone calls, Skype talks or e-mails, most of my research participants have expressed appreciation of the “real-time quality” of the connections enabled by the contemporary communication methods, which provide them with “a window into the nuances of everyday life” of their distant kin (Burrell, 2006, p. 125-126). This being said, especially Helena's and Josef's narratives, as well as the numerous postcards exhibited in all my interviewees' homes, bore evidence to the pertaining significance of the more “traditional” letter writing in their transnational family relations (see section 5.2.2.3).

### ***5.2.2.2 Frequency of long-distance communication after 1989***

Both the political turnover of 1989 and the technological progress have facilitated easier communication. However, though the communication patterns of the individual pre-1989 émigrés changed somewhat in reaction to these developments, none of them spoke about radical increases in communication frequency with their kin. I see a number of possible explanations for this. Most of the pre-1989 émigrés have already lost their parents, the kin they kept in touch with the most since their leaving of Czechoslovakia. Now they generally maintain connections with siblings, cousins or their offspring, who mostly “live their own lives” being occupied with work, children and grandchildren or own hobbies and “problems” (Zdena, Libuse). As some of the émigrés also implied, however, the time they and their relatives have spent living apart has made them used to it as well as made them develop

different attitudes and interests (Josef, Jindrich). Lastly, especially in relation to parents, some of the past tensions over the émigrés' leaving still might not have been overcome (Vera). In spite of having infrequent contact with kin, Libuse and Zdena spoke about (re-)establishing even once-a-week communication exchanges with their youth friends since 1989, thanks to their having more time since retirement and the affordability of Skype and e-mail. This confirms my earlier finding regarding the voluntary nature of transnational relationships.

Compared to the pre-1989 émigrés, all of the post-1989 migrants have described having very frequent contact with their parents, and somewhat less frequent communication with their other kin and friends. David speaks with his mother once or twice a week, Alice "*at least* twice a week" and Lucie "almost every day". Zuzana stated that especially in the beginning of her life abroad she spoke with her mother "all the time". All of them described these conversations as long, sometimes even tedious:

Last time I spoke with my mum for four hours on Skype. I already started thinking, too bad they don't charge for Skype because the way it is for free, my parents would be able to chat 24 hours a day, especially my mum. (Alice)

Lucie, Alice and David all implied that this frequent and exhaustive communication basically replaces face-to-face contact for them, making visits to some extent unnecessary:

When you come there, you don't have anything to talk about anymore. (Lucie)

These frequent conversations, taking place regardless of whether the parents have approved of the migration or not and in spite of the fact that all but one of the post-1989 migrants work full-time and spend time with their children, might have a variety of explanations. One that came up in David's and Zuzana's narratives is that these migrants themselves in some way never fully put up with the idea of settling abroad and, like their parents on the other side of the transnational field, felt a strong need to keep in touch. Similarly, most of the post-1989 migrants' migration decisions were quite random and sudden, so that the migrants only gradually accustomed to the idea of staying abroad permanently. The uncertainty of the situation and the consequent realization of its irreversibility thus seem to have prompted both them and their parents into trying intensively to preserve mutual connections. Baldassar et al. (2007, p. 124-125) describe this as an effort to "eras[e] distance as a factor in maintaining a sense of the family network", a replacement of physical absence with a "sense of 'presence'".

An important similarity between the pre- and the post-1989 migrants is that the communication is more frequent "when something happens" (David). As also documented in

Baldassar et al. (2007, p. 124, 151), this refers to times of “crises” or family life cycle milestones, such as migration, birth, illness or death:

For example my dad was very ill the last three years, and then the last half a year he was in the hospital, so we spoke a little more often, and [when] he died, we called each other a lot... (David)

With my mum (...) we didn't call each other so much before, but now that she is supposed to come, she's a bit nervous about it (...) Now it is kind of very different, my mum is supposed to come, then they are planning to come, now the baby [is on the way]. (Alice)

Sometimes this does not only hold true for communication among kin:

[My close friend's husband] recently had a surgery, so I called quite often, right, how he's doing, and now he is doing well, so I don't have to call so often. (Libuse)

### ***5.2.2.3 Materiality accompanying long-distance communication after 1989***

Photos turned out to be as important for the post-1989 transnational communication of my interviewees as they used to be before. In fact, the proliferation of digital cameras, their gradually falling costs and the instantaneous nature of internet transfer has made photographs an inseparable part of most of the interviewees' transnational communication:

*Q: Do you send photos to each other with the family as well?*

Libuse: Yes, over the computer. E-mail, I always reduce the size, so that it's possible to send a few at a time and send them.

As with technology in general, David expressed the strongest awareness of the role the exchange of photos has played for the maintenance of his relationships with kin in the Czech Republic, which his mother confirmed (in agreement with Metykova, 2010, p. 330-331).

So we took pictures, a lot of pictures and the pictures I saved to the disk and then I burned a CD and either I brought it with me, in the bag when I went to the Czech Republic, once a year, or I sent them by post. And mum copied them to her PC (...) and looked at the pictures how we live here. (David)

My mum, dad, and grandma, ninety years old, they lived the photos. (David)

Now that we have a client<sup>26</sup> for the transfer of pictures, we send them to each other constantly. (Helena)

In spite of admitting to be overwhelmed with the amounts of photos taken and sent nowadays and to be “lazy” to sort out and print them, most of the interviewees and their distant kin do have some recent photos of their relatives exhibited in their homes. For instance, Milan keeps a picture of his brother's whole family, printed on regular paper, propped up on a book shelf

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<sup>26</sup> An application running on a personal computer, which, among other things, enables fast sharing of data between two or more computers connected to the same internet server (Webopedia, n.d.).

in his living room in the Czech Republic, while a photo of his children hangs on the wall in Jindrich's house in Sweden. In the Czech Republic, Helena on the other hand showed me a whole photographic "archive" of her son's life in Sweden, consisting of a set of albums mapping each of the years since his migration (see Appendix 4, photo 12). She had created the archive from the carefully sorted pictures David has tirelessly kept supplying her with, convinced about their "vital importance" for his and his parents' mutual relationship. Helena's narrative is a testimony to this. While showing the photos to me, she made remarks which not only proved her thorough knowledge of most of her son's and his family's pursuits throughout the years, but also manifested her great appreciation of her distant relatives' achievements and characteristics, being a testimony to the living nature of the relationship and mutual care, an instrument of which are the photographs. Miller's discussion of the ability of objects to nourish people's relations mirrors this situation (2008, p. 21, 28). Not all of the interviewees expressed the same attitude though. Vera admitted she keeps most of her relatives' photos in a box, explaining, "I don't need them. If I want to go there, I can go anytime (...) If I couldn't go or if it was somewhere in Australia, then maybe I would [put some of the pictures up]."

Similarly as with the availability of various communication methods in general and the growth of the number of photographs exchanged and shared, the volume of other material aspects related to my research participants' long-distance communication proliferated in the recent years. Once again, David serves as the strongest example, constantly upgrading the technology enabling him contact with his homeland kin:

So all the time I kept the computer running, here in Sweden, so that it was okay, and then when I came to [the Czech Republic], I kept [my mother's] one running. So that it worked, so she could look at the pictures, print and so on. (David)

David emphasizes that he has a Czech keyboard connected to his computer and a special server for the sharing of digital photographs, family videos and movies, set up primarily in order to assist his communication with the mother. These technical arrangements apparently fulfil for him a similar role as does the exchange of caring presents play for his mother and his wife. Objects of shared taste, which the two women frequently wrap and send each other as birthday presents or small surprises, symbolically express their mutual care (see Appendix 4, photo 10). The same function is however served by the pure exchange of letters, postcards and greeting cards, evidenced in the homes and narratives of most of my interviewees. The narratives show that these traditional communication forms nowadays attest to the added

concern of the sender who prioritizes them over internet communication and puts extra effort (and money) into obtaining and hand-writing them (similarly as in Miller, 2008, p. 79).

However, especially the post-1989 migrants showed also pragmatic attitudes to their family contacts in the homeland. Not being able to find a likeable and reasonably priced pram in Sweden, Alice had her sister help her choose, buy and have one delivered from the Czech Republic (see Appendix 4, photo 9). For similar reasons, David had his mother send him his bike to Sweden, while Helena sent her son's Swedish in-laws a bag of emergency clothes from the Czech Republic when they lost most of their possessions due a misfortune.

Similarly as with long-distance communication before 1989, none of the interviewees spoke about sending financial remittances from Sweden to the families in the Czech Republic, implying that material support from the side of the migrants was perceived as unnecessary and possibly humiliating by the homeland kin. Baldassar et al. (2007, p. 82-84) make corresponding observations. Helena and David were the only ones to mention the transfer of money, though in the opposite direction, during the first years of David's life abroad, testifying to Baldassar et al.'s (2007, p. 84-86) findings about the flow of financial support from parents to migrant children at the start of their careers or family lives.

The renting out of David's old apartment was of course my job, though I didn't mind, because he at least had some money out of it. (...) Of course there was also material support from our side, because a lot was needed... (Helena)

### **5.2.3 Final remarks regarding long-distance communication and its material aspects**

In general, while talking with my interviewees about their family long-distance communication, I have encountered a primary difference between the attitudes of the pre-1989 and the post-1989 migrants as well as their respective homeland-based kin.

For the pre-1989 émigrés the regular letter and occasional telephone communication they managed to uphold with their homeland-based kin meant virtually the only possibility of connection. Most of them carefully saved the received letters, photographs and other objects, much more scarce in comparison to the amount of messages, talks and gifts exchanged nowadays. However, the difficulty of sharing their "real" feelings and opinions in these exchanges made them shift focus to their Sweden-based families and interests. Far from sidelining their transnational family relations, they put up with knowing their distant kin "are doing fine", but did not seek more intensive contact than was necessary, in order to avoid

putting their relatives in a greater danger of political problems.

While the possibilities of connecting brought about by the recent technological developments and aided by the 1989 political turn do not seem to have made a radical difference in the communication patterns of the pre-1989 émigrés, they have rendered regular and possibly instantaneous connections with the kin “vital” for the post-1989 migrants.

This difference can be attributed to age and generational distance or to the popular notion that the existence of options creates further (artificial) needs. Nevertheless, though the communication between the post-1989 migrants and their distant kin is indisputably livelier than has ever been that of the pre-1989 émigrés, it would hardly be possible to make conclusions about the strength or quality of these ties based on the communication patterns.

An interesting note to add at this point, though beyond the scope of my research focus, is the role of mothers in all of my interviewees’ accounts of long-distance communication. In line with Baldassar et al.’s (2007, p. 118) findings, the mothers of *all* my migrant interviewees turned out to serve or have served as the “‘hub’ of the [transnational] family network”. This was only partially caused by the fact that many of the interviewees’ fathers had died significantly earlier. In addition, none of the interviewees spoke about having more direct contact with their siblings than with their mothers, at least until both of their parents passed away. This can be interpreted as a testimony to the stereotypical gendered role divisions in family relations. Though my interviews have not pictured the left-behind mothers necessarily as suppliers and care-package assemblers, as in Burrell (2008) and Vuorela (2002), they have ascribed them the roles of those who hold the kin together, those most informed and support-providing, confirming Finch’s (1989, p. 39-41, 71) broader conclusions about family roles.

### **5.3 Visits and the role of associated material aspects**

In this section the importance of personal visits for the maintenance of transnational family relations among migrant Czechs in Sweden will be presented and analyzed. I take a different approach from Baldassar et al. (2007) who treat the phenomenon of the visit as a whole, claiming that both the migrants and their distant kin undertake all of the visit types they identified, i.e. routine, crisis, duty and ritual, special (purpose) and tourist visits, at certain moments of the migration history (p. 139-141). The characteristics of my sample do not allow for such a differentiation. The circumstances of the pre-1989 émigrés’ lives in exile (no possibility of visiting before 1989; difficulty of enabling the kin to come over), the opening of the Czechoslovak borders in 1989, the gradual falling of travel costs since then and finally the

admission of the Czech Republic to the EU in 2004, have all contributed to the fact that the visiting patterns are relatively homogeneous within each of the two historically distinct (pre- and post-1989) migrant groups while they are quite different between the groups. Similarly, the visits of the homeland kin of the pre-1989 émigrés to Sweden have been mostly tourist visits, while the homeland visits of the émigrés themselves as well as those undertaken by the post-1989 migrants and their family in both directions take on a variety of purposes. Furthermore, the materiality associated with the visits themselves has turned out to be quite different for each of the two groups. In order to be able to illustrate the identified differences and similarities in sufficient depth, I discuss separately *return visits* conducted by the migrant to his/ her homeland, and what I call *kin visits* – the trips that the homeland-based kin undertake in order to see the migrants in Sweden or those that the migrants themselves make to other countries where their close kin have relocated. The following analysis involves a comparison between pre- and post-1989 migrants as well as between the particular experiences of my individual interviewees and looks at the role material factors play in these visits.

### **5.3.1 Return visits**

#### **5.3.1.1 Frequency and length**

Due to the threat of arrest and the subsequent impossibility to ever return back to Sweden, none of the pre-1989 émigrés I interviewed made or even attempted to make a return visit before 1989, contrary to some of Burrell's (2006, p. 118) Polish pre-1989 émigrés<sup>27</sup>. Only Josef's wife and their young child (who were not Czechoslovak nationals) visited his family in the liberalizing period before 1968.

All of my migrant interviewees' return visits thus took place since 1989. The narratives revealed that the migrant return visits are significantly more frequent and regular than the visits undertaken by the homeland-based kin in the opposite direction (Mason, 2004, p. 423, presents similar findings). The reasons for this proved to be to some extent economic (the homeland-based kin especially of the pre-1989 émigrés not being able to afford frequent travel). However, the narratives also implied that having a larger number of family members as well as other interests and pursuits in Czechoslovakia/ the Czech Republic made the migrants keener to visit their relatives in the homeland than vice versa.

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<sup>27</sup> Kára (2011, p. 5), Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Sweden 2007-2011, mentions that some of the émigrés he met did have memories of "trips to Czechoslovakia, smuggling there books and journals prohibited by the communist regime".

The first visits of all of the pre-1989 émigré interviewees to Czechoslovakia took place in the spring or summer 1990:

*Q: When did you first go there?*

Libuse: End of April 1990. I could go earlier, but I thought, as long as the weather is foul, winter and all that, I would probably just cry, it would be terrible. But this way, you know, when there is the spring and you see the beautiful green and when it all starts to bloom (...), that was really nice.

Some of them have described travelling to the homeland “quite often” for a certain period “in the beginning” (a common reference to the years immediately after 1989). In the case of Jindrich and Zdena these visits took place in conjunction with the business they ran for a few years in the 1990s. They imported Czech goods to Sweden, and thus “went there even nine times in the beginning” (Zdena). Vera characterized the late 1990s as “being alone with the children” after divorce, which gave her a reason to visit the homeland more often:

I went the most often when I was alone with the kids, because I wanted to keep up Czech and (...) the contact. So grandma and grandpa were happy and so on. And (...) I also didn't have much money, to be able to go on holidays somewhere [else]. I didn't work full-time, so I had quite a low salary. (Vera)

Referring to the recent years, all of them speak about visiting the Czech Republic “much less than before” and constantly “less and less” and for shorter periods, specifying that the visits occur between one and three times every year. The reasons they give for their receding number of visits are deteriorating health, disappointment with the current political developments in the homeland, the “immorality of the people” as well as the fading of the desire for frequent contact from either side of the transnational family field.

All of the post-1989 migrants travel to the Czech Republic once or twice a year, apart from Lucie who declared that she never goes back anymore, not having anyone to see there. While David speaks about the initial incapacity to travel to the Czech Republic as often as he would have liked to due to the lack of financial resources, none of them seems to feel limited in the number of times they can afford to travel now. Driving “down” or boarding the plane if needed, they mention that some years they even went to the homeland four times. While most of the visits last one to three weeks, occasionally there is an extended one, like Alice's two-month holiday at a time when her husband tried to find a job and new accommodation (that was “a special (purpose) visit” in Baldassar et al.'s terminology, 2007, p. 141).

My material suggests that the major factor affecting the post-1989 migrants' return visits is the need to negotiate multiple commitments, such as the need to care for their own business or children in Sweden, or the wish to spend time with relatives dispersed in a number

of countries. This is the primary reason why David's family decided to establish a regular "system of visits" to the different parts of the family, switching between David's and his wife's mothers' houses every Christmas and summer holidays.

Overall, while various factors prevent both the pre- and post-1989 migrants from travelling to the homeland at certain periods, the relative closeness to Sweden as well as the manageable prices for flights make the Czech Republic a much more easily reachable and more frequent return visit destination for my interviewees than was the case for the Australia-based migrants from Italy, Ireland, Afghanistan or Singapore interviewed in Baldassar et al. (2007) and the UK-based Pakistani research participants in Mason (2004).

### ***5.3.1.2 Content and management of return visits***

Most of my interviewees agreed that time-limited return visits fulfil a range of purposes and carry a certain sense of being special. They are often marked by the effort to manage a lot in a short span of time. All of the migrants described undertaking regular "routine visits purely for the purpose of staying in close contact with family" (Baldassar et al. 2007, p. 140), during which some of the extended family members as well as friends are visited or invited to the home of the relatives where the migrant is staying. (None of my migrant interviewees has a place of their own in the homeland.) Libuse and Zdena described making "tours" around their different relatives and friends dispersed around the country. Both spoke about connecting their trips with work-related interests and sightseeing.

Well, I don't want to offend anyone, so I visit [most of the relatives and friends], but I don't stay in one place for very long (...) Also, once I went [to the Czech Republic] for a longer period, because my friend took me by car, and I found a conference [related to my work], so I made a trip there. I used to look for [events like this] every time I went in the beginning. (Libuse)

Zdena: Yes, we do visit relatives, but that's nothing special.

Jindrich: That's not a priority.

Zdena: We visit the brother-in-law's, where our nephew lives, then we visit the niece (...) and otherwise we drive around, go to [a national park]. We rather have a look somewhere than just sit at someone's place and gossip.

Zuzana and David, post-1989 migrants, have a comparable passion for travelling around the Czech landmarks during their return visits, especially when they manage to take two or more weeks off. The sightseeing interests of both the pre- and the post-1989 migrants are often accompanied by a joy in bringing some of their close Swedish friends to the homeland, in order to show them its beauties. They note the growth of one's patriotism when living abroad.

For Vera and Alice such interests are not in the foreground, though not necessarily missing:

[We do this] less and less, because we stay for just four days. But two, three years ago (...) we went for trips around the castles, my dad took us. But otherwise mostly it is just to [see] the aunt, some relatives for a bit, cousins. (Vera)

Alice: It's mostly about the family. Like, we meet up with [former classmates], but, well (...) I don't spend much time with them. For example last time [me and my parents] went for a holiday together, which was nice. (...) We went to visit relatives, who live further away (...)

*Q: Do you have any cousins?*

Alice: Well, those are the people we mostly go to see... But actually, the cousins, perhaps we go to see them just a few times, those who live close. But I think, especially the cousins, if I lived in the Czech Republic, we would probably see each other as often as now, when I don't live there.

All of the post-1989 migrant interviewees hold a similarly casual attitude to not seeing their extended kin very often, while, on the other hand, some of the pre-1989 émigrés expressed concern about not being able to spend enough time with their homeland-based nieces and nephews, whom they perceived as more similarly minded to themselves than their siblings. Most of the migrants nevertheless mentioned the need for a careful planning and management of the trips. This enables them to fulfil the expectations of the scattered homeland-based kin and satisfy their own interests around the country, "make the trip worth it". All the migrants stressed their efforts to make return visits fun and memorable for their children, so that they develop a good relationship to the country and their distant relatives and practice speaking Czech in a natural environment (cf. Mason, 2004, p. 427, Burrell, 2006, p. 118-124).

Some of the migrant interviewees mentioned having to make a trip to the homeland unexpectedly, due to the death of a close person or a wedding ("duty and ritual visits" in Baldassar et al.'s terminology, 2007, p. 141). Deteriorating health and deaths of close kin were considered significant reasons for travelling to the homeland or another country of the relatives' residence (as shown also in Baldassar et al., 2007, p. 161-163). However, none of the migrant felt it crucial to be with the homeland kin at times of large family celebrations, such as Christmas, weddings or important anniversaries (similarly as in Mason, 2004, 425-426). Interestingly, none of them considered the obligation to travel in order to care for ageing or newly born members of the family in the Czech Republic ("crisis visits" in Baldassar et al., 2007, p. 140). The pre-1989 migrants generally implied they were already used to not being an active part of the homeland-based family after the years of forced-upon separation (during which most of their parents and some of their siblings passed away in their absence). Besides,

all of them had their own children and some even grandchildren in Sweden, which located their primary care-giving and family celebration focus there. In comparison, with most of their parents still working, none of the post-1989 migrants yet felt the need to provide old-age care to them. As regards family celebrations, having work-related obligations and own procreative families in Sweden, all the post-1989 migrants had to compromise between various commitments when deciding when and where to spend the holidays. The stage of the family life cycle either one of the sides of the transnational family field is in thus turned out to be a strong determinant of the practices of maintaining transnational family relationships.

### ***5.3.1.3 Materiality accompanying return visits***

The narratives uncovered a range of material aspects to the migrant return visits. Similarly as in Burrell (2006, p. 124), the “chance to stock up on national commodities” proved to be a popular part of these visits – for Zuzana “that’s what it’s all about.” These commodities are mostly traditional and handmade products to be exhibited in the Swedish home or given as presents to Swedish friends, or favourite Czech food and drink products. The bringing of gifts from Sweden to family in the homeland is a taken-for-granted counterpart. The pre-1989 émigrés described trying to supply their homeland kin with hardly available goods in the first years after 1989:

[A]romatic soaps, cosmetics, clothes, something for everyone. There you couldn’t get such nice things in the beginning. Especially I brought [brand-name] clothes [for the kids]. They were excited. (Vera)

Apart from helping out their homeland-based kin in this way, Jindrich and Zdena even repeatedly took their niece to holidays abroad, which her parents could not afford.

All of the interviewees said they gradually stopped trying to look out for special presents for their homeland-based relatives, since now “you can buy the same here and there” and the relatives “can afford everything” or are reluctant to accept expensive gifts anyway. Most of the interviewees thus mentioned bringing specific food products, which they know the relatives like and would not hesitate accepting due to their being too costly. Especially the post-1989 migrants then described a mirroring tendency of their homeland kin to supply them with food products to take back to Sweden.

My family would most of all like to stock me up with all the potatoes we have in the basement, apples we keep for the winter, they would be ever so happy if I could take the whole container with me, that would make them absolutely delirious. Everyone, even the grandmother, they always say, you are so far away, you are being deprived there, we cannot help you there in any way. (Alice)

Especially the pre-1989 émigrés described their efforts to offer their homeland kin, whom they generally perceive as less well-off than themselves, something their relatives would not be able to afford out of their own salaries but would not hesitate to accept (cf. Burrell, 2006, p. 114). Paradoxically, Vera, a pre-1989 émigré, and David, a post-1989 migrant, both now financially independent, spoke about the pertaining tendency of their parents and grandparents to supply them with money while visiting the homeland, which could be understood as a tendency to compensate not only for geographical, but also emotional distance.

Every time I come, I get a lot of money, because it has to be just, right, when my brother, they get money for their name days and for Christmas and birthdays. So I get money and have to spend it. And every time I come, I have as little clothes as possible, so they think I only have one pair of jeans, so they persuade me to buy a dress and a coat, [saying] you always just wear those jackets... (Vera)

Despite his unwillingness to accept such gifts, David acknowledged having been dependent on the financial support of the family in the past (cf. Baldassar et al., 2007, p. 2), in contrast to the rest of the migrant interviewees.

Once we went [to the Czech Republic] by train, because we had a pram, and we didn't have a car yet, so we took the train and my wife's parents paid for our trip. [The price] was awful. (David)

As with long-distance communication, the more recent migrants expressed much more pragmatism than the pre-1989 émigrés in their attitude to bringing goods to and from the homeland. Zuzana described equipping her house with "Swedish-design" decorative objects (that only look as if made in Sweden) bought in the homeland for less money. David told stories of transporting computers, satellite receivers and *Playstations* in both directions, in order to ensure that both his mother in the Czech Republic and his children and himself in Sweden, have access to the desired technology. The pre-1989 émigrés did not express such concerns, often commenting they generally do not find material aspects important. However, all of their houses exhibited a variety of their deceased parents' and grandparents' possessions, mostly, but not only traditional objects, sometimes handmade by one of the family members, which other relatives perhaps did not wish to keep, but which reminded them of their childhood and youth in the family home or of the kin themselves (see Appendix 4, photos 2; 4; 6).

I didn't consider anything as important as to think it was necessary to bring it. No material things. Rather some antiques, such that our grandmothers, grandfathers... rather such sensitive, memor[able objects]. Nothing else. (Vera)

The means of transportation used to visit the homeland proved to be decisive for the number of family members who could travel, as well as for the amount of objects that could be transported back and forth. It was therefore an important question for many of my research participants. The selection of a suitable means of transport primarily depended on the length of the holiday, the available financial resources, own capabilities (i.e. driving license) and health condition. Thus the potential capacity to take along presents to or supplies from the homeland was by most of the migrants perceived as an “added value”. Especially the post-1989 migrants acknowledged that the consideration of what they wish or need to take along plays a role in their decision-making about the means of transportation.

Some of the migrants spoke about providing or receiving hands-on assistance to or from their homeland-based kin while visiting. For example, this concerned technical repairs or having the grandparents look after the children while they see their friends. However, as with giving and receiving presents, mutual care-giving was seen as a rather redundant, additional aspect of the visits, which both of the sides of the family could easily do without:

Of course, when David arrives and looks around, he says, one can see you're missing a man's hand here. I say, well, of course, there are things that I don't manage myself. But I can always pay for someone to do it for me, that's replaceable. It doesn't have to be done [by the son]. That's of course ideal. But what is important is rather that the relationships work. I don't need my son to do the shopping for me. (Helena)

In a similar regard, concerns were visible on both sides of the transnational family fields regarding the sufficiency and comfort of accommodation for the visiting migrants. While Libuse, David and Alice did not mind staying with their family, the latter two in their old rooms, still equipped and decorated with artefacts from their youth, which David described as “waking up in a different world”, Vera, Zuzana and Karel implied that such arrangements “did not feel alright” anymore, which also made them reduce the frequency and length of their visits. Zdena, Jindrich and Josef shared similar attitudes and preferred renting a hotel room or a private apartment close to their birth towns. Helena and Milan described having made efforts to adjust certain spaces of their houses to the needs of the migrant relatives, in order to make their stay as easy and comfortable as possible.

### 5.3.2 Kin visits

#### 5.3.2.1 Frequency of kin visits

In contrast to return visits, some visits of the homeland-based kin were made possible before 1989, though only with extensive effort put into the repeated sending of invitations on the side of the émigrés and tiresome appointments at the so-called “passport agencies” in the homeland, where the kin intending to visit Sweden had to explain the purpose of their visits and convince the authorities they would not emigrate themselves. These visits were quite short and each of the émigrés I interviewed managed to receive only one to three such visits in total before 1989. The relatives had to come individually or in pairs at most. The most easily arranged were visits by elderly relatives, whom the state apparently “did not mind missing” (Zdena), especially mothers and grandmothers, who gave the reason of wishing to see and help out with (newly born) grandchildren. In spite of the official barriers, Libuse managed to use the arranged visits to enable her brother’s family and mother to emigrate, as well as did Vera’s husband. Libuse and her brother, who settled overseas, visited each other a few times since then in their respective migrant homes.

Since 1989, most of the émigrés welcomed most of their close and extended homeland kin in Sweden for holidays which lasted for two weeks on the average. However, very few of their homeland kin came more than once, usually being satisfied with the first opportunity to see how their relatives live abroad. This observation is in agreement with Baldassar et al.’s (2007, p. 149) discussion of “seeing with one’s own eyes” as the central precondition of assuring oneself that the distant kin are “really ok”. In contrast, the post-1989 migrants have not received visits by many more relatives than their parents and siblings, who have however come to see them repeatedly. Lucie, living in Sweden, described going to see her mother in another EU country, where the latter had relocated, though her mother never visited her.

#### 5.3.2.2 Content and management of kin visits

The kin visits among the migrants, made by Lucie, Libuse and Libuse’s brother to their relatives’ migrant homes, resembled some of the other migrants’ return visits in terms of purpose and content: they were made at moments of crises, such as illness or divorce, or out of the need for a break from their own migrant lives, but primarily to “be there”, “be co-present” (Baldassar et al., 2007, p. 141, 151-153). In contrast, most of the kin visits from the homeland conducted both before and after 1989 seem to have primarily had the character of tourist visits (Baldassar et al., 2007, p. 141). This is also why many of the homeland relatives

(and friends) were said not to be especially excited to re-visit my migrant interviewees in Sweden at repeated occasions. They instead preferred to devote their time off work to travelling to warmer and/or cheaper destinations. Kin visits were seen to have the primary purpose of strengthening (and establishing) family relations, “seeing each other”. The provision of assistance in the migrants’ daily duties (childcare) played a role especially in the visits by mothers.

### ***5.3.2.3 Materiality accompanying kin visits***

The material aspects of kin visits reflected the material and political differences between Sweden and Czechoslovakia before 1989 and mirrored the material aspects of the migrants’ return visits. Some of the pre-1989 émigrés described a shock their relatives, used to queue for everything and to “take what was available” (Jindrich), went through upon arrival to Sweden from communist Czechoslovakia, something Burrell (2008, p. 72-73) also found among the migrant Poles and that Veenis (1999, p. 94) discusses with regard to the material culture of East Germany.

That was interesting. My mother, after we went [sightseeing] somewhere (...) one evening she tells me, can you sleep? I say, of course, what do you mean? And she says, well, I don’t know, but if I lived here, I would most probably not be able to sleep, because I would be worried that when I wake up in the morning, the things in the shops would be gone. You know, that’s the contrast of the lack there and the supply and redundancy of goods here. (Zdena)

On the other hand, Libuse remembered how during her mother’s first visit, enabled shortly after Libuse’s arrival to Sweden, her mother helped her and her husband manage the household with the tight budget they lived on:

[My mother with my child] used to go for walks and brought toys that someone threw away, there was some kind of a [dump] where rich people threw their stuff, so she brought a little beautiful squirrel, we washed it, that was the most favourite toy, (...) and then she said, do you know what’s there? There is a divan. So we went at night and pulled the divan in through the window where we lived... (Libuse)

Most of the pre-1989 émigrés described not wishing for the relatives to bring anything during their visits from Czechoslovakia, to avoid interrogations and “further problems”. Only Vera described how her husband’s grandmother brought them Czech books when she visited, as well as some traditional alcoholic products, which the young émigrés attributed with nostalgic feelings. The émigrés’ general consensus though is expressed in Zdena’s comment:

Most probably they brought something, say, some souvenirs, but that wasn't anything personal. It wasn't anything we ourselves would have had asked for. Absolutely not. We were happy when they finally let them go and they could come here. (Zdena)

Most of the pre-1989 émigrés have maintained a similar attitude to the visits of their kin until today. In contrast, the objects transported during the visits of the post-1989 migrants' relatives to Sweden reflect the younger migrants' pragmatic attitude to the purchase of goods in the country in which they are cheaper. Thus, the visits of their relatives are mostly characterized by the bringing of specific commodities the migrants ask for and possibly "topped" by the addition of the migrants' favourite food products unavailable in Sweden. However, as the following quotes imply, the transport of useful objects is again seen rather as an "added value" of the visits themselves, which primarily serve the purpose of seeing each other.

My mum is coming for a visit when the baby gets born. She is bringing supplies of baby stuff from the Czech Republic. I just hope [the baby] does not wait too much, so she can actually get to see [it]. (Alice)

[W]e agreed on giving each other practical presents, nothing expensive. (...) David insists that I give them *Czech* things, not T-shirts which they can buy themselves. So most of the time I bring Czech children's books or films... (Helena)

Lastly, all of the migrants implied that they accommodate their kin in their homes during kin visits. Probably due to the rarity and shortness of these trips, this does not seem to raise any special concerns, compared to how much attention was given to the character and appropriateness of return-visit accommodation arrangements in the conducted interviews.

### **5.3.3 Final remarks regarding visits and their material aspects**

While before 1989 return visits were impossible for my émigré interviewees, and kin visits happened very rarely, the mutual closeness of Sweden and the homeland (and the closeness/remoteness of the other countries of settlement of the interviewees' close kin), as well as the Czech Republic's EU membership proved to have a strong influence on the frequency of mutual visits since 1989. However, the frequency as well as length and content of visits are also influenced by work and family commitments, the stages of the family life cycle the relatives are in, their health, and the broader feelings of mutual attachments (as discussed in Baldassar et al., 2007, p. 3).

In general, as in Mason (2004, p. 424), the act of visiting itself is perceived as important by all my interviewees. All mention the importance of seeing each other, being co-present, being the receiver or provider of general hospitality and emotional support, rather than someone who brings and receives material values or provides financial and physical

assistance. Practical considerations regarding the transport of objects between Sweden and the Czech Republic, the type of gifts carried back and forth, as well as the prices of travel turn out to be much more important for the post-1989 migrants and their distant relatives. Reflecting on the observation illustrated in section 5.1.1.1, this can be seen as an effect of the post-1989 migrants' experience of the capacity to bring along supplies to the host country already at the time of migration itself, which thus became a natural part of their life abroad. Similarly, being able to travel regularly, the recent migrants are used to exchange more practical and emotional care with their kin during mutual visits. On the contrary, in the narratives of the pre-1989 émigrés, material concerns, as well as concerns about hands-on assistance, are portrayed as marginal for return and kin visits – despite, or perhaps because of, their experiences of having to cope with material differences in their transnational family relations. This seems to be primarily because all of them and their homeland relatives have gotten used to "living their own lives" independently of each other, without an extended possibility of mutual assistance, which taught them to manage without it, as well as because many of the émigrés' attempts to compensate for their relatives' material disadvantage were met with reluctance, as most of their narratives suggested. This again points to the delimiting role of the pre-1989 emigration circumstances as well as to the varied choices of practices of transnational relationship maintenance between the two migrant groups. In any case, the fact that during most of the conversations I was able to draw attention to the directly present more or less evident materiality of the research participants' transnational practices proved to be of extensive help, since it often pointed to the importance of objects which the participants hardly ever thought about as significant in other ways than for their utility (cf. Baldassar et al., 2007, 19).

It is worth noting that similarly as in long-distance communication, the female family members, especially those in the roles of mothers, mothers-in-law or aunts, were said to take charge of most of the care exchanges related to return and kin visits, especially in the form of gifts or hands-on assistance (such as childcare, but also other household tasks). This observation speaks true of Burrell's (2008) findings about the role of women as managers of the material sphere of the household and family relations more broadly.

## 6 CONCLUSION

My study has uncovered tangible differences between the practices used to maintain transnational family relationships between the pre-1989 and the post-1989 Czech migrants in Sweden as well as between their homeland kin. These differences reflect in the frequency and content of their transnational family contact, as well as in their attitudes to the role of materiality in the relationships. My study has however also pointed to their highly individual nature of experiences and attitudes within the two migrant groups.

The analysis has showed that three major factors influenced how the transnational family relationships were initiated: the historical circumstances (including the associated material aspects), whether or not the migrant has received a license to leave, and the voluntary nature of transnational family relationships. These factors were said to have a strong, though varied influence on how the relationships are perceived and maintained since the migrants' leaving of the homeland. The analysis of long-distance communication and mutual visits of the migrants and their families provided evidence to this claim.

The pre-1989 émigrés' transnational relations were found to have been maintained by quite scarce long-distance communication not only before the political turnover of 1989, but also since then. In many of their cases contact with old homeland-based friends turned out as maintained with more enthusiasm. Correspondingly, while their return visits were found to be quite frequent especially directly after 1989, when the political turnover finally enabled them to travel to the homeland, these visits were shown not to be primarily centred around the family. The possibility to see and enjoy the landscape or to tend to their work-related interests and visit old friends was seen as an equally important part of the trips. I found that the material differences between life in Czechoslovakia and in Sweden before 1989 and the material punishment the émigrés' kin had to bear in consequence of their emigration seemed to have played a role in establishing a certain barrier between the two sides of the transnational family field. However, it seems that these factors still played a marginal role in comparison to whether or not the émigrés received a license to leave as well as to the fact of pure inability to keep intensive contact before 1989. The observation that none of the pre-1989 émigrés expressed concern for safeguarding their transnational family relationships materially nowadays, when they have the possibility to do so, or using them pragmatically, can be seen as a reaction to their unsuccess in trying to provide for their relatives in the past, but also of the long-trained ability of being able to do without such material concerns. The émigrés' relationships to the homeland kin rest especially on a regular ensuring that "they are

doing fine,” combined with more or less emotional memories of shared moments, which in all of their houses are preserved in exhibited decorative objects inherited or received from the distant kin. All of their narratives nevertheless showed that they had long ago shifted focus to their own procreative families, their work and other interests in Sweden, and to a large extent become used to having non-intensive and largely non-emotional relationships with distant kin. In spite of the non-intensive regular contact, all of the émigrés’ narratives nevertheless confirmed that one of their first destinations during return visits are the homes of their parents and siblings, and that they are always ready to provide for their distant relatives if needed.

The post-1989 migrants’ transnational family relations were found to be maintained by much more frequent and varied long-distance communication than is the case for the pre-1989 émigrés, already since the first moments of their life abroad. While their return visits have about the same frequency as the émigrés’ ones, they are generally much more centred around the family. Like in their kin visits and long-distance contact, transport and the sending of objects in both directions has a much more important function in them, most often characterized by practicality and pragmatism in relation to price differences as well as to the efforts to make communication with family even easier or livelier. Like the varied material aspects of the relationships, the mutual provision of hands-on assistance between the migrants and their family during both return and kin visits plays a more significant role for the post-1989 migrants than for the pre-1989 group. License to leave, which only one of them did not (fully) receive from her parents, seems to have affected her contact with the family in the direction of its high frequency and a strong tendency of the family to supply her materially (in spite of her financial independence), quite the opposite to how non-received license to leave has affected the pre-1989 émigrés’ relationships and in fact correspondingly to how a granted license has affected the other post-1989 migrants’ family relationships. In general, the post-1989 migrants’ transnational family relationships thus come out as much more emotional and intimate – despite distance – than the pre-1989 émigrés’ ones, as well as much more reliant on and accompanied by material aspects. I have identified three major reasons for this. One of them is the fact that these migrants’ transnational family lives were started at a time when they had the opportunity to communicate and travel extensively for manageable prices, as well as make choices about the amount of objects transported in both directions. Second, all of them ended up living abroad due to a variety of random factors, which they not only had the time to discuss with their kin (parents) at the start, but which also made them to some extent undecided about whether they wish to settle abroad. This again prompted their

tendency to keep up contact with the homeland kin, trying to overcome geographical distance and flatten out potential tensions – contrary to the pre-1989 émigrés whom the historical circumstances of their migration did not allow to be undecided, nor to discuss this with their families. Third, all but one of the post-1989 migrants now have young children, which makes them appreciate the possibility to receive assistance from their parents and makes both them and their parents seek intensive mutual contact, in order to foster the grandparent-grandchild relationships. Generally speaking, the post-1989 migrants do not see any differences in their own and their homeland relatives' material standards. If so, then the migrants are perceived as those less well-off, since they are at earlier stages of their family and career lives and their parents are not yet retired. Perhaps because the situation is reverse in comparison to the pre-1989 émigrés, it does not raise any particular concerns for my interviewees.

Despite the identified differences between the two migrant groups, the analysis also uncovered a series of similarities between them. All of the interviewees considered the sense of being co-present in spite of distance and knowing the others "are fine", as far more important than any material differences or needs which may accompany them. In fact, the material aspects of their family relations were rather seen as *accompanying* the relationships, than as *holding them together* or *determining their nature*, which is what Burrell's (2008, p. 79-80) findings about the material practices of Polish migrants suggest. Material aspects were of lesser importance not only within the transnational family field, but also in relations with friends as well as within the locally based procreative or extended family. Though not one of the primary concerns of this thesis, the narratives have also shown that all of my migrant interviewees have managed to attain satisfactory professional positions and incomes and established dependable social networks in Sweden, irrespective of the amount of contact with the homeland kin or of mutual material support. Though some of the post-1989 migrants are still at the beginning of their career and family lives, and some of them went through a period of doubting their decision to settle abroad, all of them are now financially independent from their homeland kin and have secured a reasonable status, like all of the pre-1989 émigrés. The individual differences mostly reflect the interviewees' age, professional experience and stage in the family life cycle. Lastly, my analysis has highlighted the very individual nature of the migrants' perception of whether or not their migration was voluntary or forced, which by no means coincided with the historical circumstances of their moving.

Overall, it can be concluded that the historical circumstances of one's migration determine to a large extent one's whole experience of the maintenance of transnational family

relationships. However, the analysis has also shown that age, family life cycle and length of time spent living abroad play an equally significant role for the intensity of the relationships. This was evidenced by the observation that the contemporary possibilities of unlimited communication, frequent travel and extensive material exchanges within the transnational families have a different meaning for the two migrant groups, with the pre-1989 émigrés opting to make use of them especially in relation to their non-family interests in the homeland and the post-1989 migrants utilizing them especially with the aim to keep up family relations. Material differences were shown to have a secondary role in all of the studied relationships.

My findings justify and show the need for further investigation of the individual level of the migration experience, not only within the field of transnational family relationships, but also with regard to the conduct of transnational friendships, as well as the role of gender in the conduct of all such relationships. The study has also identified the need for a more extensive investigation of the transnational practices, and the migrant lives more broadly, of post-1989 migrants from post-socialist countries. These areas were found to be worth deeper enquiry, though the scope of my research did not allow for their thorough examination.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Letter asking for participation

**The text of the letter I sent to members of a Czechoslovak society in Sweden and other contacts to ask them for participation (in Czech; English translation follows)**

V Malmö, dne 6. února 2012

Vážená paní či slečno, vážený pane,

obracím se na Vás s prosbou o účast v mého diplomovém výzkumu, který se chystám provádět během února, března a dubna 2012.

Jsem studentkou dvouletého magisterského oboru International Migration and Ethnic Relations na Malmö högskola a pod vedením konzultantky Maji Povrzanović Frykman připravuji diplomovou práci s předběžným názvem „*The role of objects in transnational family relationships: An analysis of the narrative accounts of Czech migrants in Sweden*“<sup>28</sup>. V současné době se snažím navázat kontakt s českými migranty, kteří do Švédska přišli před i po listopadu 1989, kteří by měli zájem podílet se na mého výzkumu formou narrativních, rámcově strukturovaných rozhovorů či vyprávění. Jejich tématem bude udržování vztahů s příbuznými, kteří zůstali v Československu, resp. v České republice, nebo sami žijí v jiné zemi. Mé otázky se budou týkat změn či vývoje v podobě rodinných vztahů „na dálku“, způsobu a snadnosti/ obtížnosti jejich udržování a jejich vnímání jak samotnými migranty, tak jejich příbuznými, kteří ze země neodešli. Zajímat mne při tom bude funkce předmětů v rodinných vztazích na dálku – včí každodenní potřeby i těch, kterým příčítáme symboličtější hodnoty. Chtěla bych tak přivést pozornost na materiálno jako něco, co mezilidské vztahy mnohdy ovlivňuje a částečně dotváří, upevňuje či mění.

Předpokládám, že konverzace s každým účastníkem bude trvat přibližně 1 až 3 hodiny. Na základě Vašich možností či zájmu z Vaší strany ráda uskutečním dvě či několikero setkání za účelem seznámení, samotného vyprávění či nezávazné návštěvy. Za účelem vlastních rozhovorů se dostavím tam, kde Vám to bude nejpohodlnější, kde nebudu příliš zasahovat do Vašich povinností a kde na mne budete mít dostatek času. Případně sama prostory pro naše setkání zajistím. Rozhovory bych přednostně prováděla v českém jazyce, pokud Vám to ale bude příjemnější, můžeme mluvit alespoň částečně i švédsky či anglicky.

Ve veškerém zpracování našich konverzací bude účastníkům na základě společné dohody zajištěna anonymita.

Mnohokrát Vám děkuji za čas, který jste věnoval/a přečtení mého dopisu, a doufám, že Vás můj záměr zaujal natolik, abyste s účastí ve výzkumu souhlasil/a. Pokud by Vám tedy

<sup>28</sup> „Funkce předmětů v rodinných vztazích fungujících přes hranice národních států: Analýza vyprávění českých migrantů ve Švédsku“

nevadilo se do výzkumu zapojit nebo máte nějaké dotazy, budu Vám vděčná, když mne kontaktujete některým z níže uvedených způsobů. Ráda se s Vámi setkám a v případě zájmu poskytnu k přečtení detailní projekt své diplomové práce a písemný souhlas školy k provedení výzkumu.

Předem Vám mnohokrát děkuji za odpověď!

S přátelským pozdravem,

Kristýna Peychlová



*Master's in International Migration and Ethnic Relations*

*Malmö högskola*

*Malmö*

**English translation of the letter sent to members of a Czechoslovak society in Sweden and other contacts to ask them for participation**

In Malmö, February 6, 2012

Dear sir or madam,

I am addressing you in order to kindly ask you to participate in my thesis research, which I am going to carry out during February, March and April 2012.

I am a student of the two-year Master's programme International Migration and Ethnic Relations at Malmö högskola and am currently working on my final thesis with the working title „*The role of objects in transnational family relationships: An analysis of the narrative accounts of Czech migrants in Sweden*“ under the supervision of Maja Povrzanović Frykman. At the moment I am trying to establish contact with Czech migrants who came to Sweden before and after November 1989 who would be interested to take part in my study in the form of narrative, semi-structured interviews. Their topic would be the maintenance of relationships with relatives who stayed in Czechoslovakia, respectively the Czech Republic, or live in another country themselves. My questions will relate to the changes or development in the nature of long-distance family relationships, the forms of and easiness or difficulty of their maintenance and their perception by the migrants themselves as well as by their relatives. I am primarily interested in the role of objects in long-distance family relationships – things of daily use as well as those which we endow with more symbolic values. I would like to bring attention to materiality as something that often influences and partially constitutes, strengthens or transforms interpersonal relationships.

I expect that each of the conversations will take approximately 1 to 3 hours. If you prefer, I will be delighted to arrange two or more meetings for the purpose of getting to know each other, a casual visit and the conversation itself. With a view to the interviews themselves I will come wherever it will be the most comfortable for you, where I will not disrupt your duties and where you will have enough time to devote to me. If need be, I can arrange a space for our meeting myself. I prefer to conduct the interviews in Czech, however, if it is more convenient for you, we can speak at least partially also in Swedish or English.

The participants will be ensured anonymity on the basis of a joint agreement in all stages of the processing of our conversations.

Thank you very much for the time you devoted to reading my letter and hope my research purpose made you interested to take part in the study. If you do not mind taking part in the research or if you have any questions, I will appreciate if you can contact me using one of the means listed below. I will be pleased to meet you and in the case of your interest will provide you with the detailed project of my thesis and a written consent of my university to the conduct of this study.

Thank you very much in advance for your reply!

Kind regards,

Kristýna Peychlová

## Appendix 2: Informed consent

(in Czech; English translation follows)

### Informovaný souhlas

Souhlasím s poskytnutím rozhovoru/ů na téma udržování rodinných vztahů mezi českými emigranty ve Švédsku a jejich příbuznými v Československu/ České republice pro účely diplomového výzkumného projektu „*The role of objects in transnational family relationships: An analysis of the narrative accounts of Czech migrants in Sweden*“<sup>29</sup> prováděného Kristýnou Peychlovou (dále „tazatelka“) na Malmö högskola v období leden-červen 2012.

Plné osobní údaje účastníků výzkumu budou známy jen tazatelce.

Získaná data budou použita výhradně pro účely studijní, nikoli komerční či jiné.

Přepisy rozhovorů budou tazatelkou plně **anonimizovány**. Jiné osoby než tazatelka je nebudou mít v plném znění k dispozici.

Souhlasím s tím, aby citace z mnou poskytnutého/ých rozhovoru/ů v tazatelčině volném překladu do angličtiny byly použity pro vědecké a studijní účely ve výsledném textu diplomové práce, v prezentacích výsledků výzkumu a v případných dalších publikacích souvisejících s daným výzkumným projektem: ANO – NE

Žádám, aby mi byl anonymizovaný **přepis** dán ke kontrole a schválení dříve, než s ním bude nadále tazatelka dále pracovat: ANO – NE

Souhlasím s tím, aby byl proveden zvukový záznam se mnou prováděného rozhovoru:

**ANO – NE**

Souhlasím s tím, aby byly v souvislosti s prováděným/i rozhovorem/y pořízeny fotografie předmětů v mé domácnosti, na pracovišti nebo jiných, které například nosím u sebe, a aby tyto fotografie byly použity pro vědecké a studijní účely jako doplňující ilustrační materiál v závěrečné podobě diplomové práce, v prezentacích výsledků výzkumu a v případných dalších publikacích souvisejících s daným výzkumným projektem:

**ANO — NE**

Potvrzuji svůj souhlas s výše uvedeným.

Jméno a podpis účastníka výzkumu .....

Podpis tazatelky .....

Dne ..... V .....

---

<sup>29</sup> „Funkce předmětů v rodinných vztazích fungujících přes hranice národních států: Analýza vyprávění českých migrantů ve Švédsku“

**English translation of the informed consent**

I consent to giving an interview on the topic of the maintenance of family relationships between Czech migrants in Sweden and their relatives in Czechoslovakia/ the Czech Republic for the purpose of the thesis research project „The role of objects in transnational family relationships: An analysis of the narrative accounts of Czech migrants in Sweden,“ conducted by Kristýna Peychlová (henceforth “interviewer”) at Malmö högskola in January-June 2012.

The personal details of the research participants will be known only to the interviewer.

The obtained data will be used exclusively for study purposes, not commercial or otherwise.

The interview transcriptions will be fully **anonymized** by the interviewer. No other persons apart from the interviewer will have access to the full version of the interviews.

I agree that quotations from the interview(s) conducted with me in the interviewer’s translation will be used for scientific and study purposes in the final text of her Master’s thesis, in the presentation of the research results and in any other potential publications related to the research project: YES – NO

I request that I will be provided the anonymized interview transcription in order for me to proofread and approve of it before the interviewer works with it further: YES – NO

I agree that the interviewer makes a sound recording of the interview(s) conducted with me:

YES – NO

I agree that in relation to the interview(s) conducted with me, the interviewer takes photographs of objects in my household, in the workplace or others which I for example carry with me, and that these photographs be used for scientific and study purposes as supplementary illustrative material in the final version of the thesis, in the presentation of the research results and in any other potential publications related to the research project:

YES – NO

I hereby confirm my consent to the above-stated.

Name and signature of the research participant .....

Signature of the interviewer .....

Date ..... in .....

## **Appendix 3: Interview questions and topics**

### **Rough list of interview questions and topic areas**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

- clarify: this interview is part of my Master's thesis research into migrants' practices of maintaining relationships with family who stayed in the country of origin or moved elsewhere
- clarify: main focus will be on the material aspects of the migrant experience and cross-border relationship maintenance
- ask participant: anonymization technique: pseudonyms used for people, and places if preferred by the participant
- ask participant: can I record the interview using a sound recorder?
- if asked for: transcription of the interview provided to the participant for approval and clarification of factual information upon request
- clarify: my own translations into English of some of the sections of the interviews only will be used in the body of the thesis
- clarify: I would prefer this whole interview to be more of an open conversation. Feel free to speak as long as you wish on a particular topic, and try to say as much as you can about it. Don't worry about making digressions. I might be trying to steer the conversation along the line of a particular set of topics I am interested in, but I am mainly interested in what is particularly important for you personally.

#### **“DEMOGRAPHIC” QUESTIONS (let ensue from the conversation and ask afterwards to fill in the gaps)**

- When and where were you born?
  - What is your nationality? Citizenship?
- Which languages do you speak? How well?
  - Which language do you speak most often?
  - Here in Sweden – how often do you speak Czech?
  - When did you last speak Czech here in Sweden outside of the home?
- Profession/ Occupation? (Before retirement...)
  - Attained level of education? Gained in Czechoslovakia/ Czech Rep. and/ or in Sweden?

#### **“LIVING”**

- Where do you live?
  - In which country? Which city?
  - Why that place and not another?
- How long have you been living here/ there?
  - at one place (apartment) or more?

- do you remember the addresses?
- Have you lived in some other places before?
  - other countries, different places in them?
  - remember addresses?
- What do you do these days? How would you describe your “life in/at [see above answer]” consist of?
  - Work life? Study life? Retired life? Free time?
- At which point, in which period did you start speaking about [Sweden] as a place where you “live”?
  - Based on what?
    - (Rather let ensue from the conversation and context: In which country is your home? Do you have more homes? What does “home” mean for you?)
- Do you move between two or more countries or places?
  - Which ones?
  - For what purposes? How often? How long are the trips?

## “FAMILY”

- Do you have family in Sweden?
  - Which members?
- Do you have family in the Czech Republic?
  - Which members?
- And in (an)other country/ countries?
- When did you last see your [relative(s) here in Sweden]?
  - How often do you see each other?
- Are you in touch with any of your relatives in the Czech Rep.? (Why yes/ no?)
- When did you last speak with someone from your relatives in the Czech Republic?
  - in what form? Landline? Mobile phone? Skype? Other?
  - other contact? E-mail? Sms? Paper letters? Facebook? Other?
  - What did you speak about?
  - How often do you phone, e-mail, sms...?
- Do you go to the Czech Rep.? (Why yes/ not?)
  - When did you last go?
  - How long did you stay?
  - What did you do there?
  - Would you call this “typical” of what you do when you go there or not? Why?

- How often do you go? (Now – in the past)
- What do you normally do there? How would you describe the trips?
  - “tourism” /work / care – for parents/ children/ grandchildren? Running errands – authorities, doctor visits?
  - Who do you usually meet when you go there? Friends, family, colleagues...?
- Where did you stay last time? Where do you “normally” stay?
  - (- Do you have the keys from the place?)
- Does someone from the Czech Rep. come over here to see you? Why yes/ not? Who?
  - When was the last time somebody came? Who? What did you do?
  - How often does someone come?
  - What do they here/ what do you do together?
- When you speak with your family members in the Czech Rep., what do you speak about?
  - Are there things you don't speak about?
  - Do you feel differences in understandings – of the relationship? Of your and their life standards and your lives in general?
- What do your encounters/ reunions look like?
  - ceremonial/ ordinary?
  - Is it difficult to start chatting? Are there “silent moments”, when you don't know what to speak about? Something that's not being told, that's uncomfortable to speak about?
- Do you give each other presents? Do you bring something to each other from the other country? Why yes/ no? What?
  - Special meanings?
  - Are the presents welcome/ approved of on both sides? Or is there a feeling of uncertainty/ inappropriateness when they are being given/ received?

## **QUESTIONS FOR PRE-1989 MIGRANTS**

### **(MOST USED IN ADJUSTED VERSION FOR POST-1989 MIGRANTS)**

- How did you emigrate?
  - Did someone know about your plan to emigrate?
  - How did you get in touch with your relatives when you were abroad?
  - Did your relatives agree/ disagree?
- How did you maintain relationships with family in Czechoslovakia before the Velvet revolution?
  - With whom? How?
  - How often?

- What did you generally speak/ write about?
- What did you **not** speak/ write about? Why?
- Did you manage to see your relatives before 1989?
  - How? How many times? Whom?
  - Was the encounter warm? Spontaneous? "Like you've parted yesterday"? Embarrassing? Constrained?
  - Could you see any differences?
    - In attitudes? Lifestyle? Satisfaction with life? Attitude to the difficulty/easiness of life in emigration?
    - Material standards? Clothing? Household equipment? Food? Attitude to spending? Salary? Holidays?
    - Education?
  - Did you or your relatives have political problems because of your emigration or mutual visits?
- When did you first see each other after the Revolution of 1989? When did you first back go to the country after November 1989?
  - first feelings, impressions, reactions, memories, behavior?
  - when, where, how long?
- How much did you communicate since then? More than before? Same? Less?
- (- Did you think about moving back? What about your family's attitude? Approach of the state?)
- Has your communication with family in Czech Rep. changed since the Revolution?
  - Frequency? Channels?
  - Topics? Attitudes?
- Changes and differences in: Life standards? Lifestyle? Daily business?
  - Coming closer or growing apart?
- Entry of the Czech Rep. into EU in 2004 – any changes?

## **OBJECTS, MATERIAL STANDARDS & RELATIONSHIPS**

- Do you have [here/ in your room/ apartment/ house/ office] any objects brought from the Czech Rep./ Czechoslovakia?
  - When did you bring them? Did someone else bring them? Why?
- How much did you bring when you first came to move to Sweden?
  - What did you have with you? Do you still have some of it still? Here?
- Did your relatives send some things after you? How?
  - How many times/ how often? Any difficulties?

- Did you bring something you did not need here at all?
- Was there something you really missed/ needed and couldn't bring/ forgot? Did you manage to bring it later? Or to substitute it?
- Do you have something [here] that you keep as a keepsake/ in memory of something? Why? Story?

What do you have here that you brought/ someone brought to you from CR?

- Books? Paintings?
- Clothes?
- Furniture? Technology? Kitchen utensils?
- Other “large objects”?
- Letters? Documents? Photos?
- Presents? “Talismans”? Jewellery? Other small things?
- “Banal Things”: pencils, pens, plastic boxes, office equipment....?
- Newspapers, magazines? calendars?
- Keys? (Telephone numbers?)
- Food? Making supplies? Being brought by family? Substituting for certain ingredients?
- Cosmetics? Medicines?
- Do you collect something?
- Do you carry something “Czech” with you? Even a photograph, keychain, pen...
- Have you done so before?
- Do you prefer some exclusively “Czech” products to other ones?
- Do you regularly bring something there and back? Food? Does your family send you something? Why? Story?
- Is there some Swedish product which you cannot be without when in CR? Or which you miss when you are travelling?
- When you think about what it looks like in your relatives’ home(s) in CR – is it different from your house/ apartment here?
  - Can you see a difference in how things are done in the household? (handling food, recycling, money spending, attitude to the amount of decorations around the house, the “age” of the objects used in the household...)
  - (- Was this different for you when you came here?)
- How long did it take you to start living on such a level/ in such a way you felt “good” about it? (You attained such living standards that suit you, felt “equal” to the locals with the same education...)
- Are you satisfied with your salary?
- Did you ever feel you are being better off than your relatives back in Czechoslovakia/ CR?

- What about things, presents brought to your relatives to CR from Sweden?
- What kind of things?
- Are they being appreciated? How are they accepted, perceived?
- Are they being used?
- (- Have you managed to bring/ send them something before 1989? Directly after?)
- Is there something you always wanted to bring to your relatives in Czechoslovakia/ CR but couldn't? Due to size, political constraints, other reasons...
- Do you have a memory of transporting something in a very complicated manner from here to there (or the other way around)?
- What would you like to/ are you planning to take with you there next time? To whom? Why?
- Are there things your Czech relatives insist you take with you when you are returning here from CR?
- And vice versa?
- Do you think your relationship(s) would be different in some way if you never migrated?
- "Better?" "Worse?"
- Would you say material aspects play a major role in it/them?
- Are you in some way closer in this sense to other Czech migrants or people in general here in Sweden? Why?
- Do you ever see other Czech migrants here?
- When did you last see them? What did you do?
- Are you good friends? Who are your closest friends at the moment?
- How often do you meet? What do you do?
- Doing "Czech" things? Food, symbols, customs, holidays, songs, films, arts?
- Have you ever been a member of one of the Czechoslovak societies in Sweden?
- Did you take part in their events? What kind?
- Would you say you have more in common now than upon your arrival to Sweden? Or vice versa?
- (- Were there things you shared with other (Czech) migrants when you moved here? Things brought from Czechoslovakia/ CR? Recipes? Shopping and money saving tips?)
- Do you meet both those who came before and those who came after 1989? Why yes/ not?
- Differences in understandings, life attitudes?
- Differences in relationships with family in CR?
- Differences in material standards, consumption patterns? Different attitudes to "things"?
- Do you follow what's happening in CR?

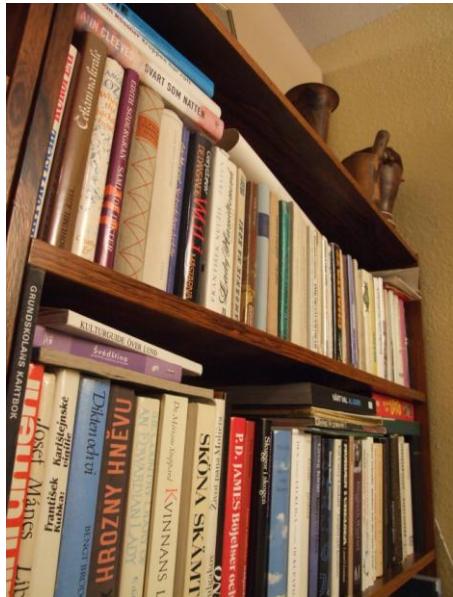
- newspapers, internet news, TV?
- politics? Culture? Social and economic reforms?
- Do you speak about it with your relatives there? Differences?

**LASTLY:**

- Do you have any other thoughts? Stories? Experiences?
- Could I take photographs of some things around the apartment/ house/ things you have with you...?
- Can I call or come once more in case I need to ask some additional questions?
- Please give me a call or e-mail me in case you have some more thoughts regarding our interview – anything!
  - Objects we did not speak about
  - People we didn't speak about
  - Conversations with friends and acquaintances
  - Experiences, stories, thoughts...anything!
- Could you recommend someone else I could meet and talk to? Could you give me their contact details?
- Thanks!

## Appendix 4: Illustrative photographs

**Photos taken during some of the interviews, illustrating the objects brought and sent by different members of the transnational families to each other**



1) A bookshelf hosting both Czech and Swedish books, sent by or inherited from Libuse's relatives, including a pocket Swedish language guide written in Czech, which she bought in case that some of her Swedish friends or grandchildren wanted to learn some Czech phrases; Libuse's living room in Sweden



2) A mix of Swedish and Czech books, the latter sent by relatives from pre-1989 Czechoslovakia or purchased after 1989, and ceramics decorations, part of Zdena's mother's inheritance; shelf in Jindrich's study in Sweden



3) Scandinavian brand ceramics and glass received as presents from Helena's son and his wife stand next to the traditional Czech "cibulák" blue-and-white ceramics in a cupboard in Helena's dining room in the Czech Republic.



4) Common Swedish spice packages and Czech decorative ceramics spice jars in Jindrich and Zdena's kitchen in Sweden



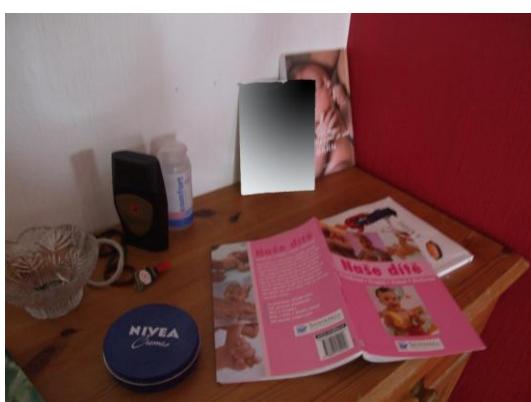
5) "Typical Swedish" souvenirs and photos of son's family in Sweden exhibited on a cupboard in Helena's dining room in the Czech Republic



6) Czech traditional handmade corn-husk dolls (which Libuse's mother used to make) next to a variety of souvenirs received from both Czech Republic-based and Sweden-based relatives or brought from own travels; Libuse's living room in Sweden



**7)** Czech children's books next to colour pencils and other toys for a Sweden-based grandchild; guest room in Jindrich and Zdena's house in Sweden



**8)** Books about baby care in both Czech and Swedish, received from mother and borrowed from the library; Alice's bedroom in Sweden



**9)** Pram ordered from the Czech Republic with the help of Alice's sister; Alice's balcony in Sweden.



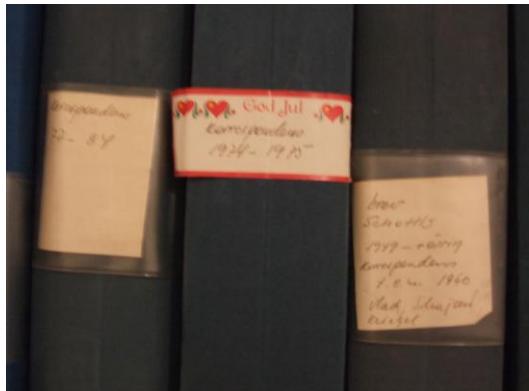
**10)** An Easter greeting with spring flower seeds that Helena received from her son's Swedish wife and mother-in-law.



11) A promotional calendar from a cultural event happening in 2011 in the Czech Republic, received from relatives, hanging next to a Swedish calendar in Jindrich's study/ guest room in Sweden



12) Helena's photographic archive in the Czech Republic documenting each of her son's family's years abroad



13) Josef's archive of correspondence with family in Czechoslovakia as well as with Sweden-based countrymen and other acquaintances; Josef's study in Sweden