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Migrants' New Transnational Habitus: Rethinking Migration Through a Cosmopolitan Lens in the Digital Age

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This article puts forward a cosmopolitan reading of international migration, focusing on the role played by ICTs in generating new ways of living together and acting transnationally in the digital era. After underlining some of the complex dimensions of the transnational debate and the limits of methodological nationalism, I will argue that revisiting the national–transnational nexus by adopting an 'inclusive cosmopolitan' stance would lead to a better understanding of the dialogically ubiquitous condition of the modern migrant. An analysis of Internet use by Romanian professionals in Toronto and their transnational families will shed light on the mechanisms through which ICTs produce connected lifestyles, enhance the capacity to harness otherness, and facilitate socialisation beyond borders, thus generating new transnational habitus.

Keywords: Transnationalism; Methodological Nationalism; Cosmopolitanism; Transnational Habitus; Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs); Online Migrants

Introduction

> For me it's not a ritual, but a way of being. Every morning I send an email to say hello to my sister [who lives in Toronto]; I also regularly send her sms text messages throughout the day. She is my confidante and adviser. I talk with my parents [in Romania] on Skype at least once a week, and my brother from Berlin [Germany] often joins us. [. . .] We chat for hours on Skype when there are important decisions to be made within the family, though if need be one of us might end up making the trip to Romania. [. . .] The same goes for my work. I'm in daily contact with colleagues from headquarters in London, as well as colleagues from Bucharest, Munich and Rome . . . Generally I would say that I'm more aware of what happens in the world than I am of events in my neighbourhood (43-year-old female, Switzerland).

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Once seen as a 'double absence'—'Not here, nor there' (Sayad 1999)—the contemporary migrant is developing new ways of being together within a web of social ties that span borders. He or she is able to master new geographies of everyday life and strategically use his or her multiple belongings and identifications within a ubiquitous regime of co-presence engendered by the technological developments of the twenty-first century. In a world transformed by the digital revolution and complex globalisation processes, international migrations enable transnational everyday practices still unheard of as recently as a decade ago. Moreover, the widespread use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) generates a multiplicity of flows characterised by the simultaneity and intensity of transnational exchanges. Indeed, the above quote by a Romanian migrant living in Switzerland illustrates the chasm between such modes of communication and early-twentieth-century letters sent by the Polish peasant in the United States to stay in contact transnationally (Thomas and Znaniecki 1998), or the audio tapes with which Algerian migrants living in France used to communicate with relatives back home in the 1980s (Sayad 1985). Today, the Internet facilitates the co-presence of mobile actors in multiple locations and allows the emergence of a new transnational habitus. It also enhances new, connected ways of mobilisation and cohesion at a distance, although there are still many (unskilled) migrants who cannot benefit yet, on a large scale, from the digital revolution.

This paper addresses these social transformations on both an epistemological and an empirical level. A short overview of the transnational approach will highlight some of the complex dimensions of the transnational debate. Emphasis will be placed on a critique of methodological nationalism and the ability of social sciences to deconstruct the territorial equation between state, nation and society. I then argue that connecting the transnational approach to a more general epistemological debate could generate further useful insights. More specifically, I will suggest that revisiting the national–transnational nexus by adopting an 'inclusive cosmopolitan' stance (Beck 2006) would lead to a better understanding of the dialogically ubiquitous condition of the modern migrant. This analysis is articulated around the banal cosmopolitanisation of social life and the emergence of a new transnational social habitus.

Based on a qualitative sociological study of ICT use by Romanian migrants conducted between 2002 and 2007, this paper shows that, in a migratory context, the Internet becomes a tool for social innovation, reshaping concepts such as national borders, space, time and mobility. ICTs produce new networked lifestyles, facilitate socialisation beyond borders, and enhance migrants' capacity to harness otherness, make decisions and act across borders in real time, generating new transnational habitus in the long run.

To conclude, this study explores the social significance of this phenomenon, and reveals the ambivalence of computer-mediated transnational practices as analysed through a cosmopolitan lens: on the one hand, ICTs allow migrants to form multiple belongings, to capture cosmopolitan values, to develop deterritorialised identities and

biographies and to act at a distance in real time; on the other hand, while accelerating integration and incorporation paths in host societies, ICTs also enable migrants to defend particularistic values and to claim a particular belonging while living as global citizens.

Revisiting Transnationalism in the Digital Age: Epistemological Considerations

Over the past 20 years, transnationalism has become a major paradigm in migration studies (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992; Portes *et al.* 1999; Vertovec 2009). This approach reflects a 'growing disjunction between territory, subjectivity and collective social movement' (Appadurai 1996: 189) and captures various economic, cultural and political practices and dynamics that cut across national borders, thus generating new social morphologies such as transnational communities, networks and social spaces.

The heuristic value of the transnational paradigm resides precisely in its ability to encapsulate the disconnection between state, national, cultural and geographical borders. Furthermore, by deconstructing the territorial equation between state, nation and society, transnational scholarship puts forward serious arguments for changing the lens through which social scientists perceive and analyse the world (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002).

As a constructivist approach, transnationalism is the starting point of an auto-analytical reflection which aims to understand

> [b]oth the social scientists observing the social world as well as the effects that this has on this world and how, at the same time, the forces of the social world shape the outlook of the social scientists (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002: 302).

Although transnational processes existed long before the twentieth century (Portes *et al.* 1999; Schnapper 2001; Vertovec 1999), the advent of the digital revolution ushered in an entirely new qualitative phase (Beck 2006; Castells 1998; Nedelcu 2009a; Vertovec 2009). ICTs enabled new forms of migrant transnationalism characterised not only by the growing intensity of transnational exchanges and activities, but also by a ubiquitous system of communication that allows migrants to connect with multiple, geographically distant and culturally distinct worlds to which they identify and participate on a daily basis (Nedelcu 2010; Vertovec 2009). These new technological capabilities are transforming the significance of the territorial rooting of migrants' social life. Many migrants move easily within transnational social spaces and frame new social configurations by creating new social and political geographies. Online migrants thus embody many complexities resulting from the cosmopolitanisation processes of interconnected social worlds: multiple, overlapping spaces of belonging; multipolar systems of references, loyalties and identifications; increasingly complex citizenship regimes; interconnected lifestyles; and the ability to act at a distance in real time (Beck 2006; Georgiou 2010; Nedelcu 2009a, 2010).

Toward a Cosmopolitan Reading of Migrant Transnationalism

This evolving social reality raises the question of whether the tools of social sciences are appropriate for the study and understanding of new migratory dynamics, in particular in light of the technological revolution.

Highly aware of these transformations, many scholars are more likely to develop a 'global perspective' on migratory processes (Badie *et al.* 2008; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). Based on broader theoretical reflections which have spread rapidly in the past few years, some go even further and argue for a 'cosmopolitan turn' (Beck 2006) in migration studies (Nedelcu 2009a, 2010). This entails connecting transnational studies to an epistemological debate that attempts to develop a new grammar for social sciences. This debate centres around social processes variously described by prominent scholars as 'cultural turn' (Chivallon 2006), 'glocalisation' (Robertson 1994; Roudometof 2005), 'denationalisation' (Sassen 2003), 'internal globalisation' (Beck 2002) and 'mobility turn' (Urry 2008). Each of the above concepts points to a different dimension of this new stage of modernity. Their focus is on 'hybridity' and creolisation (Hannerz 1996), multiple belongings and allegiances, 'liquid' life and identity (Bauman 2006), the deterritorialisation of practices, ways of being 'in-between', etc. Examining the way in which globalisation transforms both individual lives and identities, and public institutions, recent scholarship converges to identify a paradigm shift that requires going beyond a binary framework of analysis. Whether explicitly or implicitly, it points out the limits of 'methodological nationalism',[1] i.e. the analytical lens used by social sciences, which assumes that the nation-state is the implicit 'container' of social structures, processes and dynamics (Beck 2006; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002).

By disclosing the limitations of 'social science precepts' that are essentially 'territorial' and 'sedentary' (Hannam *et al.* 2006), these debates have set up a new research agenda which aims to deconstruct the equation society = nation = state and to show that static territorial (i.e. national) boundaries are becoming obsolete frameworks for reflection when it comes to social structures, in a context of increasing mobility, pluralisation of allegiances, and transnational and cosmopolitan affiliations (Beck 2006, 2008; Benhabib 2004; Georgiou 2010; Urry 2000).

I therefore propose to revisit the national–transnational nexus by following Ulrich Beck (2006) in his attempt to elaborate a general social theory based on a 'cosmopolitan vision' and the 'both here and there' condition of the modern mobile actor. Beck suggests that social science scholars should integrate transnational awareness in their conceptual and methodological toolkit. This new 'cosmopolitan grammar' would provide us with a different approach to the seemingly contradictory co-existence of local and particularistic movements with global and universalistic trends. 'Methodological cosmopolitanism' would then replace the national perspective's 'either–or' disjunctive stance with a 'both–and' approach (Beck 2002, 2006). In his attempt to set up a new epistemology for the social sciences, Beck emphasises the importance of three main features of the cosmopolitan condition:

- The *'dialogical imagination'*, i.e. social actors' capacity for perceiving 'other's otherness' (Hannerz 1996)—that is, the contradictions and complementarities that exist between different cultures—and for incorporating them in a creative manner (Beck 2006). The development of this capacity is connected with a process of banal cosmopolitanisation resulting in a 'passage from place-monogamous to place-polygamous ways of living' (Beck 2000: 74–5). One should take into account not only the ability of social actors to act at a distance, but also the increasing globalisation of biographies and life trajectories which relate 'not just to any kind of multiple location, but only to that *multilocation* which involves crossing the borders of separate worlds (nations, religions, cultures, skin colors, continents etc.) and whose oppositions must or may lodge in a single life' (Beck 2000: 75).
- The *'additive inclusion'* principle, which reflects a subtle process of interpenetration of cultures and conveys the 'politically ambivalent, reflexive' (Beck 2006) and 'vernacular' (Werbner 2006) characteristics of the (post)modern condition, thus allowing the association of contradictory concepts, as well as the co-existence of very local and particularistic claims with transcending elitist universalist practices, deployed translocally as well as transnationally. Thus,

> [the] cosmopolitan model is about being equal and being different at the same time. This is the 'cosmopolitan grammar'. It's not about saying, there is no longer any distinction between us and them (Rantanen 2005: 258).

  This logic transcends national/international, outside/inside dichotomies with a cumulative framework whereby one can be simultaneously in and out within a multipolar system of references; i.e. social actors can be simultaneously included and excluded, occupy different social positions in the societies of different countries, and be engaged in both local and global movements (Beck 2002, 2006).
- The *'local-cosmopolitan continuum'*, which corresponds to an analytical tool that positions actors within social space according to their degree of attachment and identification to a locality and a local culture, state or region; and the resulting degree of economic, cultural and institutional protectionism (Roudometof 2005).

In line with this approach, Beck defends the idea that social science must be re-established as a transnational science of the reality of denationalisation, transnatio-nalisation and 're-ethnification' in a global age—and this on the levels of concepts, theories and methodologies as well as organisationally. This entails a re-examination of the fundamental concepts of 'modern society'. Household, family, class, social inequality, democracy, power, state, commerce, public, community, justice, law, history, and politics must be released from the fetters of methodological nationalism, reconceptualised and empirically established within the framework of a cosmopolitan social and political science (2003: 458).

Adopting this new epistemological perspective in social sciences would enable us to understand the transformation of societies through a 'globalisation from within'

(Beck 2003), which reflects the process of cosmopolitanisation of nation-state societies (Beck 2006)—and therefore to rethink the territorial dimensions of social life in terms of a continuum, by recognising the growing interdependencies between national and global manifestations of social processes, independently of their local anchorage. This theoretical turn implies not only the development of a new transnational awareness within empirical research, but also a reappraisal of sociological theory so as to explain how internal globalisation is transforming key concepts in sociology.

The cosmopolitan perspective hence opens promising paths for the study of international migration in the digital age. It seems to be an appealing alternative to both 'ethnocentric nationalism' and 'particularistic multiculturalism' (Vertovec 2001), and allows for a new reading of the transnational actions and allegiances of migrant and non-migrant populations who enlarge their horizon of aspirations beyond home and host countries (Burrell and Anderson 2008). It helps to better understand how glocalisation (Robertson 1994) impacts on people's social and geographic mobility and for a better grasp of the multiform and multi-scale interdependencies between globalisation and migration processes, beyond insider/outsider, mobile/sedentary, national/transnational dichotomies. Besides making the deep transformations of migrants' social life produced by ICT, mobilities and globalisation more comprehensible, the 'cosmopolitan vision' gives these transformations meaning in relation with a new emerging 'geometry of power' (Massey 1993).

Furthermore, cosmopolitan sociology is better able to capture the new social differentiation generated by the time–space compression proper to reflexive (post)modernity (Beck 2006; Harvey 1989) and to interpret a new structuring of social space through what Giddens (1984) calls 'space–time distanciation', i.e. a reorganisation of time and space within social life that takes into account the presence and action of the 'absent other'—i.e. one who is 'locationally distant from any given situation of face-to-face interaction' (Giddens 1990: 18).

This implies looking at how informational proximity within a permanent regime of digital ubiquity transforms the very significance of geographical distance, identity and social ties for both migrant and non-migrant populations, which in turn leads us to consider the transnational practices of migrants in relation to the broader process of socialisation of new generations, whereby social representations, social networks and the imaginary go beyond local and national contexts.

Transnational Social Fields and Habitus: A Cosmopolitan Reading of Migrants' Connected Lifestyles in the Digital Age

The transnational approach points to a significant change occurring in social life: indeed, a number of everyday contexts have acquired a transnational dimension, not only for migrants but also for non-migrant populations, with the latter experiencing transnational phenomena without the concurring spatial mobility. This surge in lifestyles shaped by mobility, instant communication and remote social relations has

affected the world of both migrants and non-migrants. Such an assumption is at the core of scholarship aimed at reformulating the concept of society based on the emergence of multi-located *transnational social fields*. Levitt and Glick Schiller (2003) refer to these fields as social forms that span borders and connect intertwined territorial scales and social spaces with overlapping power hierarchies.

ICTs play an important role within these processes as they tend to diversify ways of being together and ways of belonging at a distance; i.e. on the one hand, social transnational ties and practices and, on the other, the memories, nostalgia and shared imaginary which push migrants to connect with other people because of their ethnic background or common interests, a shared openness to the world or commitment to specific cultures. The concept of a transnational social field is therefore of particular heuristic value due to its capacity to investigate a historically new form of social differentiation in the digital age. It provides a multifocal analytical framework for identities, social positions and the power relations that exist between various social actors with different degrees of openness to other cultures and different cultural and territorial commitment to specific places, traditions and institutions. This concept also imparts meaning to migrants' conservative or transformative behaviours in relation to the transformation of social roles and status (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2003; Vertovec 2009).

Weaving the social fabric is thus becoming a complex, deterritorialised process, and socialisation as the learning of cultural norms and the building of a lived world (Dubar 2000) is gradually released from its territorial anchoring. As I further argue, transnational families are the exemplary social matrix generating new patterns of socialisation, due to the fact that intergenerational exchanges, the transmission of values and the inculcation of social habitus increasingly tend to take place within deterritorialised contexts (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2003; Nedelcu 2009b; Vuorela 2002; see also Bacigalupe and Cámara, this issue). The Internet, and in particular its *visio* functionalities such as Skype, MSN etc., widely contribute to this process, providing social actors with effective tools with which to intervene and adapt to the ongoing cosmopolitanisation of everyday life (Beck 2008).

Hence social habitus is increasingly shaped by the transnational dimension of social life. As a system of 'durable and transposable' dispositions (Bourdieu 1979) that generate practices and representations, social habitus conveys the way in which an individual's social background and early social experiences imprint on his or her 'way of being' in the world through an—often unconscious—process of internalisation of exteriority. Pierre Bourdieu (1979) has pointed out, however, that habitus 'is not destiny', but rather the product of socialisation; thus it tends to reproduce past behaviour within a familiar context but gives way to innovation when faced with novel situations.

This innovative transformation is what interests us most here, namely the way in which transnational lifestyles imprint socialisation processes. I argue that transnational habitus is a useful concept for the analysis of transnational experiences in the digital age, as well as for the interpretation of mechanisms through which migrants

manage multiplicity and develop transnational and cosmopolitan skills—whether emotional, analytical, creative, communication or functional (Vertovec 2009). Another of Bourdieu's concepts, often seen as peripheral (Costey 2005), could prove of heuristic interest: the *illusio*. The *illusio* is the mechanism through which habitus operates, i.e. 'an enchanted relationship with a game resulting from an ontological bond between the mental structures and the objective structures of social space' (Bourdieu 1996: 151, my translation). This reconciliation between habitus and social field, between a subjective and an objective meaning, 'allows those with practical mastery of a given environment to anticipate correctly the developments of the social game' (Costey 2005: 14, my translation).

The following section looks more specifically at transnational ICT-mediated practices connecting Romanian migrants and non-migrants on a regular/permanent basis as a generator of transnational habitus. The study of Internet use by Romanian transnational families and networks will be the starting point to our understanding of how a transnational everyday reality emerges, based on ubiquity, simultaneity and immediacy of interaction over borders. This, in turn, will enable us to explain the emergence of a transnational shared knowledge embedded in everyday practices, which often appears unconsciously since 'the *illusio* does not pertain to explicit principles, nor is it a theory that can be clearly formulated and argued; it belongs to the realm of action, routine, things we do' (Bourdieu 1997: 122, my translation). I highlight the way in which Romanian migrants, and in particular highly skilled ones, form their own habitus based on their experience of mobility and a mixture of local, national and cosmopolitan cultural references, and how rooting occurs within an 'on the move ' lifestyle.

'Feeling at Home Worldwide': Transnational Habitus Formation and ICT-Mediated Social Ties

Families living transnationally, second-generation children speaking two or more languages from an early age, transnationally educated mobile professionals who acquire eclectic social and cultural skills, and non-migrants learning a sense of otherness at 'home' are shaping the ontological symbols of a cosmopolitanisation process through which people become aware of the relativity of their social position and culture within a larger global social space (Beck 2008).

Studying the migration of highly skilled Romanian professionals to Toronto revealed how complex a role the Internet plays in the setting of new migratory patterns. Using the results of previous research as a starting point (Nedelcu 2002, 2009a, 2009b), I now look at deterritorialised lifestyles and communication modes as generators of transnational habitus, based on the assumption that they embody the premises of 'actually existing cosmopolitanism', i.e. cosmopolitanism as 'an

"ordinary" aspect of contemporary modern life' (Amit 2007: 9) which results from a larger process of 'globalisation from within' (Beck 2003).

Methodological Considerations

This study of the transnational ICT-mediated practices of Romanian migrants started from the 'netnographic' observation (Nedelcu 2009a) of the migratory strategies that IT and computing professionals have developed online since the mid-1990s.[2] Until 2007, Canada represented a target destination for this particular category of Romanian specialists, due to the numerous restrictions they encountered on European labour markets as well as the incentives provided by Canadian migratory policy. In fact, in 2002, Romania occupied the seventh position in the origin countries providing Canada with immigrants (after China, India, the Philippines, Pakistan, the United States and South Korea), and was the first European sending country. Between 4,000 and 5,000 people arrived each year and more than half entered Canada as highly skilled main applicants, mostly computing and IT professionals, engineers or S&T (Science and Technology) specialists.

There was little connection between the Romanian refugees who arrived in Canada before 1989 and the new wave of young professionals who started to migrate *en masse* after the collapse of communism. As Romanian migratory networks were almost non-existent, a pioneer migrant website—www.thebans.com—became the corner-stone of a new migratory pattern in the mid-1990s (Nedelcu 2002, 2009a). Although nowadays collaborative Internet platforms have become commonplace, at the time using the Internet to reproduce a '*savoir-circuler*' (Tarrius 1993) was perceived as socially innovative (Nedelcu 2002).

An approach focused on ICT use as a migratory tool and resource showed that computing professionals played a key role in developing new migratory and diasporic dynamics, acting as a community catalyst. Furthermore, a first six-month period of online ethnography revealed that online practices are highly intertwined with offline life and effectively impact on migrants' lifestyles. As researching online social environments needs increased awareness about critical challenges and the internal consistency of research methodology (Markham 1998; Markham and Baym 2009), a second phase of research then centred on the overlapping of ICT and transnational practices in the everyday life of Romanian migrants. I then used a multi-sited approach (Marcus 1998) and combined different qualitative methods: in particular the netnography (i.e. online observation) of websites and discussion *fora* as well as the content analysis of webographic data, mixed with semi-structured and comprehensive interviews and participant observation in the Romanian community in Toronto. More than 60 interviews were conducted with migrant professionals and their families, including second-generation children and migrants' parents. While few key actors of the online *fora* were initially

interviewed, the recruiting strategy employed snowball techniques and resulted in a rather eclectic group of participants, with various degrees of Internet use and transnational or cosmopolitan outlooks.

Adapting at a Distance and Harnessing Otherness

For most skilled Romanian migrants arriving in Toronto in the early 2000s, their migration process had already started a few months or years earlier. As Kathrin Kissau (this issue) also argues, 'The Internet has become an asset for collecting information about the immigration country'. Websites, migration discussion *fora* and the intensive exchange of emails with colleagues already living in Canada contributed to the transnational socialisation of future migrants. The narrative below describes the path that many migrants followed at that time:

> On the day I arrived in Toronto, I knew exactly what steps I had to take in the following weeks. I'd even worked out a day by day schedule to deal with administrative matters more efficiently. While I was still at home, I tried to get in touch with people in Canada. First I found a discussion group for Romanians in Vancouver. They directed me towards www.thebans.com, the website for Romanians coming to Canada. On this website, I found guidelines for newcomers and a section dealing with practicalities: preparing for departure, what to bring in your luggage, what to do during the first week, etc. Before my departure, I spent almost two months on this website's fora. It was an amazing way of getting acquainted with the Canadian way of life and it helped me to have a more open mind (IT professional, male, 26).

Hence, the future migrant becomes acquainted with his or her future host society long before actually moving there. The migrant's representation of the world and of others begins to adjust through a growing awareness of cultural differences and specificities; the Internet plays a crucial role in the process of reshaping values beyond borders and local cultural frameworks.

> We learned about cultural diversity from the discussion fora; it was good to be in touch with the reality of Canadian life before leaving Bucharest. This prepared us for our future life in Toronto. In Romania, the idea that people from countries that you can't even locate on a map could come to work and live among you was unthinkable. For decades, Romania was isolated and we lived in a very closed society, culturally speaking. Canada is exactly the opposite. When I told a colleague I wasn't Canadian, he replied: 'You are not Canadian yet because you've only arrived a year ago, but you will be in two or three years' time. If you live here, you're Canadian!' (Engineer, female, 28).

Online migrants are actively participating in the (re)configuration of their own identity, negotiating its boundaries and learning to live with a multiple sense of self. Regular use of ICTs helps them to adapt to new social codes, constantly redefine their 'mosaic' identity (Melucci 1989) and enlarge their 'social horizon' (Burrell and

Anderson 2008). Moreover, discussion fora provide a secure environment for gradual social learning.

> I remember closely following the controversies generated by the massive presence of Indian, Pakistani and Chinese immigrants in Canada on the 'TheBans' fora. For a few days, I kept thinking about how we would feel living among these people. The online discussions were disturbing, as they questioned our representations of Canada as a society with a high standard of living. It was difficult to imagine that quality of life and cultural diversity go hand in hand! But it was good to realise at that time, before leaving Romania, that I was completely wrong [...] in hindsight I can now say that the debate was undoubtedly racist! Furthermore, it completely ignored the fact that these 'exotic' migrants' were also educated people, mostly IT professionals, just like us (IT programmer, female, 32).

In more general terms, Romanian professionals have learned to be both 'from here and there', the same and different, and to understand that mixing with other cultures does not weaken their own identity but, on the contrary, helps them to find their place within a world of global interdependencies, providing them with the ability to better negotiate their interests in relation to different local and national contexts.

At the upper end of this process one notices the emergence of a type of 'global player' who identifies less with a culture or a specific group and more with a new cosmopolitan way of being, combined with a constant effort to adapt to a dynamic and fragmented reality.[3] Thus the life trajectory of migrant professionals is built within a culture of mobility, both professional and geographic. ICTs have helped to transform migrant professionals' perception of time–space constraints and engendered mobile lifestyles, as illustrated by the following narrative:

> For us, the world is becoming smaller and smaller. We move wherever we feel at ease. And we feel at home anywhere in the world [...] Nowadays, one can be located anywhere in the world and still be wherever one's presence is required. For instance, our Canadian customers never knew that we were on leave in China for six months. Our company continued to function normally although we were away. We replied to work-related emails from a hotel in China, from the beach in Brazil or, as we have done this morning, from our friends' home in Basel. Only a handful of close collaborators in Toronto know exactly where we are and they contact us when it's absolutely necessary. The work we do doesn't require our physical presence, at least not every day (IT professional, male 37).

Computing professionals seem to set themselves up as the vanguards of a new cosmopolitan lifestyle, as they possess a particular set of skills that precociously fostered them to develop transnational mindsets and attitudes. Experiences of transnationalism and everyday routines of digital communication intersect in the lives of IT migrant professionals and accelerate the formation of a transnational habitus. Skilled migrants in particular are able to shape the meaning of their own mobility and to build their own world in a dialogic[4] relation within the social spaces and societies they encompass. Consequently, the online migrant is in control of the

mechanisms that disembed his or her social relations from local contexts of interaction and transform space–time perceptions of social ties. The Internet appears as an intermediary transnational social space, a kind of liminal site(s) characterised by a significant degree of creativity. This zone of multiple borders is a frontier of modernity, where new ways of addressing the problems of contemporary social relations are sought (Karim 2003: 16).

At the other end of the process, within the society of the home country, there is a shift in attitudes, values and representations. A kind of cohabitation at a distance sets in and feeds into existing ways of imagining otherness, as suggested by the father, in Bucharest, of a Romanian migrant in Toronto:

> I was receiving news from my son almost daily via email and became very interested in his everyday life, what he likes and dislikes about his new city, Toronto. He told me about his first days there and about his experiences; he sent me links to websites explaining practical matters and describing the Canadian way of life. I finally understood that being Canadian means learning to live together, to accept the differences, values and inputs of each individual. This really changed my perception of things; today I'm no longer surprised to see Chinese or Turkish people coming to my country . . . or rather, it doesn't annoy me anymore (Architect, male, 66).

A grandmother in her 60s who has divided her time between the two countries since her retirement two years ago and is responsible for taking care of her grandson, explains the upheaval in her values and beliefs provoked by her new lifestyle:

> When I arrived in Toronto for the first time, I had contradictory feelings. Before my arrival, I was in daily contact with my daughter and I felt familiar with her everyday environment. She and her husband sent me photos and videos; I knew their apartment, their neighbours and their neighbourhood. We spoke via MSN two or three times a week, so I kept track of their life on an ongoing, regular basis. However, when I took the subway in Toronto for the first time I felt as though I was at a United Nations meeting . . . I really had a shock. I couldn't have imagined what a 'multicultural society' meant. [. . .] I learned a lot from my grandson. He was born in Toronto and was brought up with an international outlook. He is 13 years old and is not entirely Romanian, nor is he wholly Canadian either... He spends his time on the Internet observing what is happening in the world [...] last year he told us that he will go and live in Asia in a few years' time. He said to me: 'I already know Europe and America. In future, China will lead the world'. . . Fifteen years ago I would never have dreamt of travelling outside communist Romania . . . But now I can understand my daughter better . . . They have lived in Berlin, Dublin and now Toronto... their values and ideals are different from those of our generation, they have so many more options in their life; they are less attached to a single place, even if they are still proud of their Romanian background (retired female, 63).

These examples suggest that ICTs are able to transform the values and beliefs of elderly people through a belated process of education to otherness. It results in a renewed vision of the world fuelled by the new practices and representations observed in migrant households during the grandparents' stay in Canada, or by intensive

mediated communication among geographically dispersed transnational families (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002; Nedelcu 2009b). These 'social remittances' (Levitt 1998) have complex consequences. They allow non-migrants not only to learn about Canada or Canadians, but also to open up to cultural difference and absorb a different mode of communication about and with the Other.

Socialisation Without Borders: The Development of a Transnational Habitus

In the digital age of communication, family ties have not really weakened. The Internet, mobile telephony and the new generations of smart phones combine written, oral and visual forms of expression that closely replicate face-to-face communication. E-mail, chat and online video calls through interfaces such as MSN or Skype are just some of the technological possibilities providing new forms of simultaneous co-presence. Those who are physically absent are, in fact, increasingly present in everyday situations, and a continuity of social ties develops in spite of geographical distance.

> My day always starts with an email to my parents. They tell me about their daily routine and, even before they came to visit, they already knew a lot about the details of our life in Toronto. [. . .] Once a week we talk on Skype. The webcam gives another—more tangible—dimension to our relationship [...] I'm part of their daily life as much as they are of ours. In fact, you could say we've never parted (Engineer, male, 29).

These ongoing exchanges allow families to maintain constant contact at a lower cost and improve the quality of distant bonds, which instigates new modes of living together for a geographically dispersed family. The father who, thousands of kilometres from Bucharest, monitors his children by webcam from his apartment in Toronto, is a prime example of the new possibilities brought about by the Internet:

> This evening I have to baby-sit. When my wife is home alone (in Bucharest) and she has to go downstairs, for example to prepare dinner, she focuses the webcam on the babies. I keep an eye on them and if one of them starts to cry, I let her know by SMS (IT engineer, male, 43).

This kind of situation points to the development of a sense of closeness irrespective of face-to-face interaction and local proximity. As a consequence, socialisation processes are acquiring a new dimension as ICT use is rapidly growing and diversifying among the young generations. The transnational family becomes an environment in which new social norms and values centred on mobility, dispersion and long-distance exchanges can be learnt. These practices are part and parcel of everyday communication. The following example illustrates with more precision the way in which a routine that imperceptibly effects a profound mutation of habitus is formed, i.e. how the 'grammar generating practice' (Bourdieu 1972) changes:

> My daughter is very close to her grandmother. When my mother-in-law goes back to Romania, we have a clever way for them to keep in touch and spend time

together at a distance. Every morning they both connect their webcam and chat for about two hours. My mother-in-law gives Alicia (the 13-year-old daughter) advice and supervises her homework. [...] She tells her about Romanian traditions and encourages her to talk Romanian. But it works both ways; my daughter tells her grandmother what she has learnt from her best friend, a Vietnamese girl. They often discuss cultural diversity and its wealth (Computer scientist, male, 35).

These new forms of 'connected presence' (Licoppe 2004; Wilding 2006) are innovative vectors of transnational socialisation. In this way, intergenerational transmission acquires an extra-territorial dimension. It can be surmised that second-generation migrants are developing a deep-seated transnational habitus—witness a comment by a 47-year-old computer scientist concerning his son:

My son is growing up with a very cosmopolitan mindset. He knows perfectly well where he comes from, his grandparents are doing a great job in this respect; Canadian school teaches him the values of cultural diversity; he speaks Romanian, English, German and Spanish and he keeps in regular contact by email and Skype with the friends he made when we lived in Germany, Spain and Switzerland...He is 18 years old now and able to assess the opportunities he could have as a Romanian or Canadian and compare with his German and Swiss friends...He is also quite determined to settle down elsewhere, maybe back in Europe.

Leveraging the technological possibilities of instant communication, skilled migrants unconsciously adopt ways of thinking and of doing that reflect dual, transnational or even cosmopolitan orientations. In other words, on an ontological level, the transformation of the objective conditions and constraints of communication at a distance creates new *savoir-faire*, which generates mechanisms allowing migrants (and non-migrants) to develop new emotional and functional skills that orient transnational decision-making and action.

Conclusion

The actual phase of modernity, combined with the acceleration of the technological revolution, reinforces migrants' capacity to develop transnational activities and multiply their experiences of otherness. The transformation of migrants' everyday life in the digital age has a 'mirror function' (Allal *et al.* 1977), pointing to a new facet of migratory dynamics. Online migrants represent a quintessence of *homo mobilis* and *homo numericus* embodying the social mutations generated by the two most important features of contemporary social worlds: mobility and technology (Nedelcu 2009a). The case of Romanian professionals shows that many skilled migrants (and their families) live through different heterogeneous matrix-spaces of socialisation, and learn to draw their strength from a new culture of difference and otherness. This phenomenon could trigger the inception of a shared cosmopolitan sensitivity (Beck 2006), i.e. the emergence of an awareness that one belongs to a globalised world of networks and complex interdependencies.

However, in spite of the large democratisation of access to digital communication devices and the Internet, many migrants still face difficulties in engaging in everyday communication patterns with their 'home' countries due to political issues, legal status or lack of computer literacy. Others manifest no particular interest in preserving close ties with their home country, nor in cosmopolitan sensitiveness. This reality implies more nuanced situations that make difficult the assumption that cosmopolitanism is becoming an emblematic lifestyle of the modern migrant.

Although many questions remain to be answered empirically, this research shows that adopting a cosmopolitan analytical frame to study migration processes in the digital age is heuristically productive. This approach allows us to go beyond transnational theories; it places much emphasis on the dialogic dimension of the migrants' transnational ways of being and belonging, and on the various orientations within a local-cosmopolitan continuum in which local and global trends are strongly intertwined and overstep home- and host-countries' horizons.

This study has given prominence to the transnational dimension of socialisation processes, and thus to the emergence of a transnational *illusio*. It has shown how online migrants develop a transnational habitus combining heterogeneous cultural references inherited from their physical and virtual journeys. It has also highlighted the ongoing blurring of boundaries between migrant and non-migrant populations. Social life is gradually becoming a deterritorialised process for both mobile and sedentary populations. These results suggest that Bourdieu's theory of habitus, although essentially a theory of social reproduction, has to be revisited in the light of a significant transformation of its territorial dimension. Indeed, the transnationalisation of habitus reflects a transnationalisation of social structure. It reveals a subtle process whereby society and social functioning are disembedded from their 'national container' (Beck 2006). Thus, ICT and migration is a key field for further investigation of profound social transformations.

Notes

[1]   According to Wimmer and Glick Schiller: 'Methodological nationalism is the naturalization of the global regime of nation-states by the social sciences. Scholars who share this intellectual orientation assume that national borders are the natural unit of study, equate society with the nation-state, and conflate national interests with the purposes of social science. Methodological nationalism reflects and reinforces the identification that many scholars maintain with their own nation-states' (2003: 576).

[2]   This research was conducted between 2001 and 2007 and studied the impact of ICTs on the migratory and community patterns, transnational dynamics and political, economic and social participation at a distance of skilled Romanian migrants in Toronto. It stressed that the analysis of migratory phenomena in the digital era requires a 'transnational awareness' of the research toolkit. For more details see Nedelcu (2009a).

[3]   Daniele Conversi (this issue) argues, however, that digital technologies instead contribute to cultural essentialism, reinforcing long-distance nationalism and the radicalisation of global ethnic networks.

[4]   I use the notion of dialogic/dialogicity as a multidimensional prism for understanding social complexity. According to Edgar Morin (1990), dialogicity is based on the intertwining—within a same system—of different, opposed logics. However, it doesn't erase all of the differences specific to each entity, but allows antagonisms without reducing them to a rationalised dialectic, and helps one to understand that difference is consistent with unity.

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