

Spatializing Class. Sociological Reflections on Migration, Translocality, and the Relativity of Social Spaces

Marius Lazăr

Abstract: This is an attempt to discuss the interplay between social stratification and transnational space through the theory of social boundaries. The transnational space is regarded not only through its geographical attributes but also as a meaning device that bears the signs of the economic, social, and cultural differences of the actors. The author proposes a model for studying social mobility across different migrant spaces, explaining how upward, lateral, or downward mobility occurs. Moreover, the transnational mobility model reveals how the disparities between national and social spaces are based not only on economic but also on social boundaries and value systems that reveal power relationships among the main actors at a regional and global scale.

Marius Lazăr is a professor of sociology at "Babeş-Bolyai" University of Cluj Napoca, Romania, with a PhD in Sociology of Culture. His main fields of interest are Social Theory, Minorities and Ethnic Relations, Elites, and Sociology of Literature.

He is the author of: *Ice-block Theory* [Teoria Blocului de gheață], Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de știință, 2023; « *Lipovan* » *Russians in Romania. History, Identity, Community* (Rușii lipoveni din România. Istorie identitate comunitate). Cluj Napoca: Editura Institutului pentru Studierea Problemelor minorităților Naționale, 2020 (co-edited with Iulia Elena Hossu); *Paradoxes of Modernization. Elements for a Sociology of Romanian Cultural Elites* [Paradoxuri ale modernizării. Elemente pentru o sociologie a elitelor culturale românești]. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Limes, 2002.

For one who remembers the experience of migrating from the countries of Eastern Europe to those of the West before 1989, the moment of separation from the country of origin almost certainly comes to mind as a moment of rupture. The East and the West being separated – politically, economically, and ideologically – by an “Iron Curtain,” the departure was to be final, following a series of thoughtful decisions, which implies the acceptance of the separation of the departing person from the rest of the family, from the professional environment, from the entire social tissue of the home country of the future emigrant. The rupture occurs at the level of all social relations – an exit in space and equally in time because it involves the (presumably) definitive separation from loved ones and the previous lifestyle. Often, the immigrant will encounter the stigma of a personal devaluation orchestrated by the home political regime, where he will be labeled as a “fugitive,” “renegade” or “traitor.” And this whole set of infamous qualifiers will affect not only the “defector” as an individual, but the groups he belongs to (professional, family, friends), to which he had previously been fully connected.

Of course, the Berlin Wall symbolized all these tensions, perhaps the most dramatic of which revealed how the fracturing of the international political space led to the destruction of elementary human relations. That is why its dismantling in October 1989 marked the beginning of a reset of social connections by transforming inter-national migrations into transnational migrations.

Numerous scholars, like Thomas Faist (2000), Ludwig Pries (2001), Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller (2003), Steven Vertovek (2007), etc., have drawn quite clearly the profile of this type of migration, where the spaces are no longer discontinuous. The places of departure and those of destination are no longer highly remote or impenetrable in space and time, as they were before. So, leaving aside the political transformations, other factors make the current migration conditions unprecedented. These are related to the interplay between the technological conditions of postmodernity¹ (Harvey, 1989) and the globalized capitalist economy, which creates new trends for spatial relocations and easier resettlements across borders, determined by the recomposition of the labor force markets. Rapid technological transformations lead to an increase in the speed of transport and communication, creating a world that, at its limit, tends to substitute succession for simultaneity and bring spaces closer

¹ David Harvey, *The Conditions of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989.

to overlapping.² Furthermore, transnationality affects not only the physical but also the social and mental space. This means that subjects can simultaneously be *here* and *beyond*; moreover, they can control this type of simultaneity as autonomous individuals to a greater extent than, for example, states equipped to cope with the control of their territorial limits and their sovereignty.

Contemporary migrants are thus free to execute a permanent back-and-forth between the physical areas of origin and destination, while building their belonging to these spaces simultaneously through the networks they maintain, setting up in a parallel manner in the world they come from and the world they aspire to or temporarily inhabit. Moreover, in this logic, the few previously defined spatial landmarks – such as the meaning of “being at home” (“home” can also be “here” and “beyond”) or, in the case of repeated and multiple trips, the meaning of the “point of departure and “point of destination” tend to disappear entirely. Equally, if displacements may have as a consequence, within the transnational theoretical frame, the simultaneous location in several spaces, the mobility itself is questionable or interpretable in terms of “relative “immobility (Faist, 2009).

Beyond these theoretical paradoxes, let us recognize that transnationality – as a form of “translocation”³ – gives the individual an unprecedented power over the state/states, exasperated today by the spatial advantage of migrants, who may be more difficult to hamper than before by mobility. The (quasi) simultaneity of spatial control leads to overlapped spaces and social fields. The worlds meet, even if they keep their differences, without merging. And the spatial differences within the transnationals make room for an interesting playing area for the sociologist. Simultaneously connected social fields are, in fact, an engine for restructuring the social order of a new type, which is worth reflecting on.

Let us take some examples of trajectories, for instance, which, although rare in frequency, reveal structures insufficiently explored in the context of transnational migration. I appeal to a paper by Remus Anghel where, following the economic investment strategies of Borșa migrants oriented to Italy (Borșa is a small town in the Northern part of Romania), the author finds some interesting cases of subjects who, by following rational strategies of economic investment, after a longer period of stay in Italy, intend to place their money earned

² Harvey (in op. cit.) even speaks of “the annihilation of space through time.”

³ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

in investments or businesses in Romania, without detaching from the activities provided in Italy.

In Borsa, a few migrants started to open small businesses and invest their money in other parts of Romania (buying apartments or land in areas where they will be profitable). Others play at the Stock Exchange while keeping their business relations or jobs in Italy. These types of investments are made by migrants with long-term migration experience, who have managed to accumulate more capital or who borrow from banks to make their investments. They sometimes have apartments bought in Italy and investments in Romania.⁴

The phenomenon observed by Anghel draws attention through the theoretical consequences of associating transnational migration as a shift in physical space – with the positioning within a space of social hierarchies (social space). This is the effect created by the double positioning of this type of migrant in the social stratification systems of the country of origin and the country of destination: a worker in Italy or Spain, and at the same time, an employer or annuitant in Romania (more precisely, the owner of income obtained from rents on the apartments bought with money accrued as an Italian employee) – the transnational migrant discovers an important resource precisely in his double articulation at the level of the spaces between which he moves. As Glick Schiller and Peggy Levitt show, this type of subjects “embedded in multilayered, multi-sited transnational social fields” lead to a “reformulation of the concept of society,”⁵ including the premises that define family, citizenship, and statehood as social institutions.⁶ “Migrant behavior is the product of these simultaneous multiple statuses of race, class and gender.”⁷

The relationship between space, class, and social mobility can thus be rethought from the trans-localization perspectives as well as from that of the “new scholarship on space, particularly the effort to spatialize/rescale social processes” that Sassen talks about.⁸ The international circulation of labor – respectively the mobility of migrants at the global level – produces new processes of spatial reorganization with effects at the level of the social structure. They become noticeable not only through the consequences of social transformations on space

⁴ Remus Gabriel Anghel, “Migration and Its Problems. The Transnational Perspective as a New Way of Analyzing Ethnicity and Social Change in Romania,” in Workshop Studies. Research on National Minorities in Romania. Cluj Napoca, ISPMN, 2008, p. 10.

⁵ Nina Glick Schiller, and Peggy Levitt, “Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society.” In: Portes, Alejandro and De Wind, Josh (eds.), *Rethinking Migration. New Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007, p. 182.

⁶ Nina Glick Schiller, and Peggy Levitt, op. Cit. p. 187.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 194.

⁸ Saskia Sassen, “Cracked casings. Notes towards an analytics for studying transnational processes.” In: Pries Ludger (edited by), *New transnational social spaces: international migration and transnational companies in the early twenty-first century*. London: Routledge, 2001, pp. 187–207.

that create socialized spaces (classified/racialized/gentrified, etc.) – but also by the effects generated by changes in the relations between territories, social relations, and the class structure (class spatialization under the impact of geographical displacements).

A first level of analysis can thus target the strategies of the actors themselves (“agency” level and “micro”-type analyses). Vertovec⁹ talks about the bifocality of migrants defined in terms of a double frame of comparative reference for the migrant (the one at home and the one at the destination), a framework understood mainly in perceptual terms. The problem in Vertovec’s approach is that the double reference is not only cognitive but one also that takes into account objective, embedded social practices and social structures. Bi-focality, as a reference generated by bi-spatiality, is only a component of new action strategies aimed at repositioning in an objective space the social relations that place the migrant “in-between two worlds” that differ by social logics from different positioning and class hierarchy and, at the same time, daily practices and contrasting value systems. Vertovec’s idea must thus be completed by emphasizing the structural effect of spatialization, which affects the whole class repositioning, and not only the effect in the re-signification of spaces due to migratory mobility.

The levels at which these actors’ strategies operate are different. For example, in the first stages, – especially when he is associated with the status of a clandestine migrant or “sans papiers” worker – the newcomer can be placed in a position of social indeterminacy that he can manipulate in his interest. Migration is often experienced as liminality (in Turner’s sense), a transitional situation in which social definition and personal identity are abolished. The migrant can appear, not only to the other, but even to himself, as a “non-person,” taking the destination as a transition space only, or referring to his new place of living and work as strictly utilitarian. To the same extent that his presence in the destination space is instrumentalized and associated with a phenomenon of forced downgrading – the migrant can look at the space that hosts him temporarily in an instrumental way as a simple “opportunity” for obtaining a benefit and not as a historically or culturally high valued connoted space. The migrant’s receiving space is thus subjectively “downgraded.” The migrant appears to himself as a “non-person” in a “non-

⁹ Steven Vertovec, “Migrant Transnationalism and Modes of Transformation.” In: Portes, Alejandro and De Wind, Josh (eds.), *Rethinking Migration. New Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007.

lieu,”¹⁰ correspondent to some kind of “le degré zéro” of social definition with a transitory character that he transfers to the identity of the space¹¹.

But liminality is usually perceived as a transitory stage, although necessary, in the acquisition of another status or the acquisition of a substantial advantage. Downgrading (downward mobility) appears as the price paid by the migrant for an advantageous subsequent repositioning – just as in the case of domestic workers described by Oso Casas,¹² who feel that the payment for the expected success (personal or family) is “the suffering.”

Appealing to Bourdieu’s social field theory, Glick Schiller and Peggy Levitt, in the cited work,¹³ make an important distinction between “ways of being” and “ways of belonging” specific to migrants, i.e. between practices that express effective participation in social structures incorporated within the social field, with which they do not effectively identify, and practices that indicate the conscious connection to a group or a social structure on the part of the actors. Transnational migrants combine these two types of social insertion, which reveal several ways of self-inclusion or self-exclusion concerning their space of origin or destination.

The double positioning in the social structures that the transnational behavior of the migrant overlaps can then be asymmetric: the “ways of being” and “ways of belonging” are distinctly configured within the country of origin and the country of belonging. This may explain the apparent incompatibilities between the modalities of social insertion of immigrants or their contradictory attitudes. Here one can invoke the example of immigrant women from African, Asian, or Latin American countries, who are in situations of redefining gender status and who suddenly see themselves “racialized,” with consequences leading up to discrimination

¹⁰ Marc Auge, *Non-lieux. Introduction a une anthropologie de la surmodernite*. Paris : Seuil, 1992

¹¹ A hotel owner from Paris told me recently that for French employers, immigrants are just “numbers,” not people with precise identities. They are very necessary for the economy, because the new arrivals cover some jobs that are no longer accepted by the locals. However, their value is reduced to their value on the market and they are well received only as executors, being excluded from the positions of conception or command reserved for the French. The locals thus refer to a hierarchy of desirable positions in which there are clear class distinctions and differences between manual or routine work and intellectual or conception work – homologous, at the level of the contemporary middle classes, to the distinction between work and leisure mentioned by Veblen in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. “The French are, for example, architects; they draw and then give work to the others, who actually perform the work,” my interlocutor explained to me, letting it be understood that the relationship between local and migrant is at the same time one of class and power, in which the social identity of the new arrival will be completely subordinated to the functional requirements of the society which the latter wants to enter.

¹² Laura Oso Casas Laura, “Social mobility strategies of domestic immigrants in Spain”. In: *Tiers-Monde*. 2002, tome 43 n°170. “Femmes en domesticité. Les domestiques du Sud, au Nord et au Sud” (sous under the direction of Blandine Destremau and Bruno Lautier), pp. 287–305.

¹³ Nina Glick Schiller, and Peggy Levitt, “Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society.” In: Portes, Alejandro and De Wind, Josh (eds.), *Rethinking Migration. New Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007, p. 182

upon arrival in America or Europe; their case reveals how they often reproduce a conservative attitude towards the civil rights struggle in these countries.

Poor migrants of color in the United States for example, often strive to differentiate themselves from African Americans rather than join efforts to advance minority group civil rights. They may reinforce or even reinvent gender distinctions and hierarchies that are more rigid and traditional than those in their ancestral homes.[...] They accept low-status jobs in their new home, tolerate employment discrimination, and resist political projects or labor protests that would redress these wrongs. Ironically, this heightened gendered stratification often occurs in households where immigrant women have entered the workforce and men have begun to share the responsibility for childrearing and housekeeping, thereby redefining other aspects of gender dynamics in more egalitarian terms.¹⁴

However, a second level of analysis may disclose the structural aspects revealed by the double positioning generated by trans-localism. In this regard, the parallel examination of movements in the geographical and social space,¹⁵ more precisely the estimation of the effects of transnational migration on the recomposition of the social structure, as well as the displacement of individuals in the space of the class positions, represents the nodal point of the analysis.

A minimal definition of the relation between space and class will be necessary. The first component is related to the conceptual-abstract level that uses spatial analogy to define translations within the social order. Pitirim Sorokin's classical theory of social mobility models the changes in status using the spatial metaphor of territory movement – thus establishing a new field of scientific analysis by calling for an abstract and measurable spatialization of social change. Let us also note that, by appealing to the spatial model, Sorokin is also the pioneer of the representation of human relations in terms of social space, which was then resumed by other theorists, including Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1984).

A fundamental distinction between a quantitatively modeled abstract space and the concrete, “qualitative” space, defined as a space of social practices, is, on the other hand, that operated by Lefebvre.¹⁶ Lefebvre talks about space as the result of a “social production” on three levels: one of the material “spatial practices” (the transformation of the environment), one of the “representations of space” (as perceptions of the objective environment), and one of

¹⁴ Mary. C. Waters, *Black identities. West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation; Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 194.

¹⁵ As defined by Bourdieu, in: Pierre Bourdieu, “Espace social et genèse des «classes».” In: *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*. Vol. 52-53, juin 1984. “Le travail politique,” pp. 3–14; see also: “Classification, déclassement, reclassification.” In: *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*. Vol. 24, novembre 1978. “Le déclassement,” pp. 2–22.

¹⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace*. Paris: Anthropos, 2000 (first edition, 1974).

the “space of representation” (the space created by subjective experiences and spatial imagination). To these Harvey associates four ways of relating to space: accessibility or distance; appropriation and use of space; domination and control over space; and production of space. The result is a grid of twelve appropriate categories of human practice.¹⁷

For us, however, the relationship between the physical space (the geographical territory or the area of residence of the subjects) and the social space is highly significant. As an effect of the social appropriation of space, a certain physical territory can go through stages of structuring and re-signification. This may start from its mere presence as a natural environment for human actions (as a space of practices or support for human action, as Lefebvre says). But space appropriation transforms the environment into a territory or a land supplier of resources, the practices of appropriation (individual or collective acceptance and mastery) being accompanied by practices of space domination and control. At another stage, their subjective signaling and their loading of meanings transform certain elements of the territorialized space in a *place* with cultural connotation – or a *home* where the emotional or symbolic component of space appropriation provides the semantic frame of reference to an already humanized and socialized space. But it is equally true that the road can also be taken the other way around for residential conflicts, for example, which reveal the real stakes of space micro-politics: homes or places become territories and battlefields; they call for defense devices and spatial control.

All these transformations are the effect of the power dynamics in a society. If physical space – as environment, territory, built space for workplace and leisure – is a “social product”, it implies that it is also a materialization of social relations; it incorporates objectified forms of the social dynamics, which “inscribe” themselves, in successive layers, on the spatial fabric of their presence. As de Certeau said, space becomes a “palimpsest”¹⁸ where the complex relations between the politics of production and the domination of space, on the one hand, and inter-human relations, on the other, are reciprocally translated as horizontal spatial divisions (genre: center–periphery or residential neighborhoods of villas – neighborhoods of blocks) or become reflections of vertical social segmentations.¹⁹

The objectification of social relations also projects, at the level of physical space, class hierarchies. So how is space inequality built? Places belonging to the most powerful are

¹⁷ Harvey, op. cit, pp. 220–221.

¹⁸ Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien. 1. Arts de faire*. Paris, Gallimard, 1990, p. 295.

¹⁹ Henri Lefebvre: “Dans l'espace du pouvoir, le pouvoir n'apparaît pas comme tel; il se dissimule sous «l'organisation de l'espace». Il élide, il élude, il évacue. Quoi? Tout ce qui s'oppose. Par la violence inhérente et cette violence latente ne suffit pas, par la violence ouverte.” (Lefebvre, op. cit. p. 370).

improved qualitatively and at the same time marked socially. The adornment of central spaces with sumptuous public squares, statues, monuments, etc., is a significant part of this process. The association, in the early period of urbanization, between class and residence gives way to understanding the place of urbanists in the administration of public space. However, there is also a spatial valorization effect: the space is qualitatively divided, and “the upper” class is massaged in the space rated as “superior.” Space, therefore, in turn, is classialized.

This means that, on the one hand, space is structured according to the economic hierarchies of circulation and consumption production – consumption being subsumed to the spaces for *loisir*²⁰ (Lefebvre, 2000) or residence. If space repeats, at the level of territorial organization and attached social meanings, hierarchies, and relations between the components of the social structure, and spatially reproduces the inequality, the hierarchical classialized space then becomes itself a component of social hierarchy: your social value depends on your place of residence – within the city you live in, but also in the country of belonging. Technically, it should be included among the indicators of social stratification – hence the problem of “spatial inequality” as a source of discrepancies between countries and societies.

We can therefore speak of a political economy of space and the logic of its expansion related to socio-economic conditions and the temporal accumulations of these transformations, sedimented in successive layers at the level of societies and their divisions. Works such as those of Immanuel Wallerstein, Eric Wolf, or David Harvey conclusively highlight the relationship between the historical expansion of capital from the centers to the peripheries and the formation of colonial spaces, with their economies and societies dependent on metropolises. The economic and social inequalities inherent in these divisions will thus produce and reproduce inequalities in spatial relationships.

At the end of this brief overview, we could conclude that the production of spatial gaps associated with social inequalities and dependency relations is the resort that feeds the phenomenon of international migrations. If so far we have observed how the physical space “takes the shape” of the social space, then through transnational migration, the social space itself begins to “take the shape” of the physical space.

The migration of workers to the West and the “relocation” of companies to the “Rest” are the two complementary sides of the same spatial discrepancy. The unequal economic structure of capitalism is fueled by spatial gaps which, as Rosa Luxemburg showed, contribute

²⁰ Henri Lefebvre, op. cit.

to a good extent to the process of capital accumulation. It generates the premises for the interpenetration of the western spaces with the emerging ones of the migrants, who partially reproduce the indigenous space at their destination and adapt or transform the one found ready-made in the host country. These emerging economic spaces then build social spaces and specific cultural spaces of migratory destination areas (“little China”) with a hybrid character.

International migration is therefore to a large extent an effect of the transformations in the social structure of the host country, which “leaves room” for filling the “gaps” in the structure of social positions with newcomers that cannot be provided by its own society. As a consequence, the emergence of a “captive” labor market permeable to migrants makes possible the penetration of the space of the “economic center” by the spatial elements of the “periphery.” The social order is that which then demands the spatial reorganization of social relations, a reorganization which is based on previously defined spatial hierarchizations.

Social mobility studies should have been able to capture these realities, but unfortunately, the information we hold is only tangential. Of course, the relationship between social and territorial mobility, defined in terms of overlapping displacements in a space defined both as physical and social, has been approached already in the sociological literature (Blum, De La Gorce and Thelot, 1985²¹; Recchi, 2015²², Lash and Urry, 1994²³), most often considering the relationship between local and national or the homology between the areas of residence and the positions in the class structure.

Social upward mobility, for example, is often associated with a shift towards higher valorized residential areas, a trend that usually accompanies the improvement of the economic situation of the subjects. Similarly, local differences (center–periphery type) can be associated with differentiated social structures: on the field, we will come across an overrepresentation of the middle class in the capital, compared to peripheral areas (provincial or rural), where the lower classes are those with higher weights. Territorial differences thus become social differences, and the implicit hierarchies that occur between the subjects – at objective and subjective levels – will end up at the same time affecting the hierarchy of spaces.

²¹ Alain Blum, Gile de la Gorce and Claude Thélot, “Mobilité sociale et migration géographique.” In: *Population*, 40th year, n°3, 1985 pp. 397-434.

²² Ettore Recchi, *Mobile Europe. The Theory and Practice of Free Movement in the EU*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2015.

²³ Scott Lash, and John Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space*. Sage Publications, Inc., 1994.

However, we do not have enough studies that refer to the upward or downward mobility effects of migration in a transnational context, even if Braun and Recchi's research²⁴ captures the status changes of mobile internationals from the founding countries of the EU, concluding that, for the most part, in this group, class repositioning reproduces, at the level of the host country, the social structure of the countries from which these migrants come, the motivation for the change of residence being related to the aspiration to an improved lifestyle. Similarly, in a recent study on senior German citizens relocating to Turkey after retiring, Margit Fauser exposes the "privileged" position of these German migrants compared to the Turkish "guest workers" who emigrated to Germany:

These migrations – he states – differ not only in direction but more importantly reverse the power relationship between the immigration country and the emigration country. As a consequence, this type of migration also differs in terms of the set and level of resources accessible to migrants so that their relocation normally proves advantageous. Simultaneously, the purpose of the migration is reversed. Turkish immigrants who came to Germany to find work, and sometimes refuge, usually hoped to return to Turkey when they reached old age. The Germans who have relocated to Alanya and other coastal areas in Turkey have spent their entire working lives in Germany and, upon reaching the age of retirement, decided to search for a healthier, more satisfying lifestyle in a warmer climate.²⁵

However, Eastern European migrants cannot be circumscribed to this model which does not capture the double belonging of the subjects to the place of origin and the place of destination. Other accounts attentive to the consequences of migration for the double social positioning of the newcomers in the social structure of the host country record their paradoxical social mobility:

"A person can retrograde by migrating into the receiving space and, however, improve their status as a social space of origin,"²⁶ notes a researcher in the area of transnational migrants on the Dominican Republic–Spain route. Then again, the fine analyses in this study do not exceed the descriptive level of the behavior of the actors and therefore cannot detect the structural consequences of the double positioning.

A better approach for revealing the consequences of international migrants' spatial relocations in terms of upward or downward mobility would be Bourdieu's theory of different species of capital that define class positions in a social field. In his proposal, Bourdieu

²⁴ Braun, M. and Recchi, E. "Keine Grenzen, mehr Opportunitäten? Migration und soziale Mobilität innerhalb der EU," in P.A. Berger and A. Weiss (eds), *Transnationalisierung sozialer Ungleichheit, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden, 2008, 161–183.*

²⁵ Margit Fauser, *Mobile citizenship: spatial privilege and the transnational lifestyles of senior citizens*, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2020, p. 2.

²⁶ Laura Oso Casas, op. cit., p. 290

(Bourdieu, 1978, 1984) identifies the economic, social, cultural, and symbolic (prestige) as the most appropriate “forms” of capital in dealing with class positioning. Social positioning within the field is produced by the aggregated interaction of all these species of capital. Also, as social hierarchies are related to national systems of stratification, engaging in a new social field by moving to a different country may shift an individual’s position because of different valorizations of their accumulated social assets.

Shifting spaces by migration means keeping, increasing, or losing, at the destination, parts of those forms of capital that configured the social definition of a migrant in his homeland. Different valorizations of their accumulated economic resources in the place of origin would reposition the migrant, in the new environment, as “richer” or “poorer.” The economic upgrade or downgrade mirrors the economic inequalities between the place where the migrant has achieved his economic status and the place of his arrival.

International migration means significant changes also in the composition of social capital: family and friend relations shift, and supporting social networks at the destination transform unceasingly; national identifications are challenged in the new environment, and national loyalties may be dramatically redefined. Cultural capital, expressed as a level of education assessed by homeland diplomas or communication skills (mastering the language of the hosting country and, eventually, being familiar with other “foreign” idioms), may operate as an asset or an impediment.

Thus, international migration not only modifies the former volume and structure of personal capital (in Bourdieu’s terms) but incites the reconfiguration of what has been previously stored as a social asset and starts once more the accumulation of new forms of capital necessary in a new environment. Migration has individual and collective costs that explain why few people choose to relocate to another country.

Thus, the spatial gap is definable more in terms of socio-economic differentiation than physical geography. Releasing and receiving spaces create an in-between resource for the individual strategies of the actors, who use the interstices between social structures as a functional playing space for their use. Actors can develop rational winning strategies speculating precisely on the social differentiation that defines the reference spaces. This is largely the winning strategy of merchants or niche businesspersons (such as Roma entrepreneurs) belonging to a good extent to a society identified as modern by its high degree of mobility.

The spatial gap is first noticed by the migrant in terms of values and translated into terms of opportunities. At the level of strictly economic calculation, moving across the border becomes a component of the capital accumulation strategy and creates advantages for it from the differences between labor costs in the two reference spaces.

The structures of the two spaces are in fact structures generated by the power relations within societies, access to resources, modes of production, reproduction, consumption, distribution of resources, constraints, and specific norms – by local histories or positioning in global histories. Local spaces incorporate all these elements: they are objectified histories, objectified class relations, social relations, norms, and objectified values. All these elements are structural conditioning of the residents' initiative, which are eluded, at least in intention, by those who leave (emigrants) through their "escape."

However, apart from those consecrated forms of capital mentioned by Bourdieu as relevant for the configuration of the social field hierarchy, the context of migration compels us to consider race and nationality as distinct forms of social capital, relevant mostly by their symbolic embodiment of social boundaries.²⁷

Thus, territorial frontiers separate not only physical and social spaces but also unequally valued places. Race and nationality embody social modes of producing alterity as *valued* human differences, but these differences may conflict depending on the perspective. Economic and social valuations may work quite contradictory, as Immanuel Ness already put it: "migrant laborers in rich countries of the Global North and South cope with a paradox of being both essential workers and social pariahs who are expendable and replaceable when socio-economic demand for their labor expands."²⁸

As for the migrant perspective, to the extent that they are distinguished from refugees or ostracized, they remain mostly individuals who are no longer willing to reproduce in their

²⁷ As Faist and collaborators put it, following scholars such as Frederik Barth and Michèle Lamont: "The practices of symbolic boundary making are important objects of analysis here because they allow accounting for the creation of boundaries that justify the inclusion and exclusion of migrants in society – for example, on the basis of ethnic origins or migration status. Most specifically, Lamont and Molnár (2002, p. 3) defined symbolic boundaries as the differences that people themselves draw in order to categorise and situate themselves and other people, things, and practices within social hierarchies." (Thomas Faist, Joanna J. Fröhlich, Inka Stock and Ingrid Tucci, "Introduction: Migration and Unequal Positions in a Transnational Perspective," *Social Inclusion* (ISSN: 2183–2803) 2021, Volume 9, Issue 1, Pages 85–90 DOI: 10.17645/si.v9i1.4031). See also: Inka Stock and Joanna Jadwiga Fröhlich, "Migrants' Social Positioning Strategies in Transnational Social Spaces," *Social Inclusion* (ISSN: 2183–2803) 2021, Volume 9, Issue 1, Pages 91–103 DOI: 10.17645/si.v9i1.3584.

²⁸ Immanuel Ness, *Migration as Economic Imperialism. How International Labour Mobility Undermines Economic Development in Poor Countries*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2023.

personal history the pre-defined destiny and positioning of their place of origin – and aspire to upward social mobility. Emigration is, after all, a handy resource, an alternative to the local ways of social ascent – or even the only alternative, in borderline cases. The migrant is, on the one hand, through the assimilated culture of origin, the bearer of these power relations from the society of origin – their representative, in a semiotic sense – they are the *actors-sign* of the spatial differences. The space he can take with him is a marked, symbolized space. He *represents* – so “standing in place” of the East, the Maghreb, the Latin American or African space – Romania, Tunisia, the Dominican Republic, etc. and is relatedly the object of the cultural projections of the residents at the place of destination. On the other hand, in their capacity as “evaders,” they embody at the same time a double break – the break from the society of origin and the distancing from what it imposes – and the break in the spatial order. By their migratory status, they are different, both from the co-nationals they leave behind and from the locals among whom they try to find a purpose at their destination.

Migration thus transforms the relations between the locals and the newcomers into spatialized class relations, in the sense that, by building sui generis categorizations, it brings into contact and makes visible previously unnoticed social differences. Migration repositions the place of destination in a hierarchy of locations (of competing spaces) and values both the host and supplying country in a trans-local/transnational spatial order. What additionally brings, through migration, spatialization at the level of social stratification is the positioning in the global hierarchy: the spatialization of class is itself an effect of globalization (if not exactly an essential note in its definition) – and the tension it induces is related to the revelation of inequalities at the international level. We may conclude that class inequalities reproduce the structure of spatial inequalities.

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