

<https://doi.org/10.2478/jesm-2022-0027>

Mobile lives, open cultures, and cross-media ecosystem.

What securities for migrants?

Giacomo, BUONCOMPAGNI¹,

Abstract

The evolution of the web has created a borderless social space that facilitates communication between geographically dispersed immigrant communities across the globe. For migrants and asylum seekers trying to enter Europe, for example, not only traditional infrastructures (railways, ports...) are important, but also electronic-digital infrastructures such as smartphones, apps (simultaneous translation programs, messaging platforms), and social networks. The possession of a smartphone by a migrant cannot be considered a luxury gadget, as it is constantly narrated in a stereotyped way in the public discourse according to media entertainment logic, but the internet and mobile phones underline the need for everyone to be connected without space-time limits and to have access to all the media contents offered. So, what role do the media play in human mobility and the imagination of migrant subjects? How do they change and what value do the spaces of connection crossed physically and virtually take on? What security for migrants in the mobile communication society?

Keywords: migrants, digital media, security; web society; mobility; technology

¹ Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Florence Italy, giacomo.buoncompagni@unifi.it.

This journal provides immediate open access to its content under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) license. Authors who publish with this journal retain all copyrights and agree to the terms of the above-mentioned CC BY-NC 4.0 license.

Introduction

In a new cultural and communicative environment made up of exchanges, fragmented and alternative models, new interactive styles, which owe their originality to a 'new order' of media, culture, and socio-economics (Appadurai, 2005), it is possible to identify two opposing thrusts that are constantly in conflict: the tendency towards a single thought, which translates into typically assimilationist policies towards other cultures (global), and the tendency towards particularization (local) and the diversification of reactions to environmental stimuli, which accentuate cultural and identity differences, fuelling the clash between the center and the periphery, where the former tries to absorb and eliminate multicultural distances and the latter defends itself by strengthening the regionalization of cultural content.

This is the context in which the 'new migrant' takes shape, a de-territorialized subject who goes on to construct non-authentic ethnic identities, but who is now able to build multiform and contingent life projects, suitable for the interactions that characterize contemporaneity, and therefore useful for inhabiting the current world and adapting to it.

New immigrants create and reproduce multiform social relations, connecting societies of origin and settlement in a sort of "third space" (Bhabha, 1990) that offers them not only the opportunity to overcome geographical, political, and cultural barriers but also to develop multiple relations (family, economic, cultural) in a space that incorporates difference as a constitutive of identity (. Hall, 1992). Mediation between two worlds is thus activated, managed by the migrant himself, who on the one hand feels at home where his family is, but on the other hand continuously recreates a series of references within the host country through objects, practices, and technologies of memory.

1. Media and the geography of proximity

The consciousness of diaspora implies, on the part of the social actor, the recognition of belonging also to a place of origin different

Mobile lives, open cultures, and cross-media ecosystem. What securities for migrants?

Giacomo BUONCOMPAGNI

from the one residence, the survival of the diaspora is conditioned by its ability to conquer two types of autonomy: knowing how to maintain its superficiality towards the host society and how to distance itself from the society of origin to be able to choose its integration strategies, as well as its criteria of identification and socialization (. Saint Blancat, 1995). The process of migration, dependent on international interconnections and symbolic media contents, now sees a new protagonist, a new social subject, nomadic, cosmopolitan, able to redefine himself, crossing geographical and cultural barriers, supported by the power of electronic (and digital) media, able to imagine the future and imagine himself within offline and online environments.

The reach of media extends far beyond the national borders of a state: we are witnessing a massive production of transnational media content, distributed globally by the media industry, targeting different audiences, operating on a global (CNN International or BBC World) or regional (e.g. Euronews) basis. It is thanks to digital technology in particular that transnational communities have been able both to maintain internal community ties and to create new ones within the host nation, bringing together family-domestic spheres with national and international ones; in this sense, the new media are powerful 'distributors' of transnational content and offer us 'the magical possibility of being in two places at once and 'conquering' distance (Scannell, 1996). Television broadcasting, for example, allows listeners and viewers to be as 'close' to the media event from an experiential point of view as they are to what is happening in their physical environments.

What changes is "the geography of the experience of proximity":

"The media bring a plurality of places into the range of the senses [...] we are allowing them (the media) to break the boundary whereby a person, at any given time, can only be in one place" (Adams, 2009).

Scannell points out that there are of course differences between being physically present at an event and being involved or captured as a television viewer, but at the same time he notes that "public events now happen, simultaneously, in two different places: the event itself and the place where it is watched and heard. Broadcasting mediates between these two locations.

Mobile lives, open cultures, and cross-media ecosystem. What securities for migrants?

Giacomo BUONCOMPAGNI

Public events, in this way, take on a degree of phenomenological complexity that they did not possess before" (Scannell, 1996): the result is an emotional connection and a doubling of place.

Audiences and media content also play a fundamental role in promoting national unity on a symbolic level, by keeping families, cultures, and traditions linked; the local and global dimensions are configured as new places of aggregation and redefinition of belonging, having the characteristics of transnational and diasporic public spheres (. Riva, 2012).

Diaspora used to be typical of a single people, but today it is a plural phenomenon; populations are both local and global, no longer communities, but rather 'diasporic networks', and this allows cultures and minorities to survive, even in the media space. Compared to the first generation of immigrants, the following ones face a new problem with the use of different media and their role as reformers of cultural minorities within their host societies: the result is:

"A continuous in-and-out movement of identities and interests that are mobilized and expressed through an increasingly electronic space, but which still depend on the real movements of populations in space and time, and are influenced by these movements" (Silverstone, 2002).

2. "Place-less culture"

Thus, even though contemporaneity today seems to be configured between nationalisms, violence, and inequalities, with the new media it is possible to start discussing concepts, with a perhaps still utopian flavor, but rather interesting from a sociological point of view, such for example "power of imagination" and "right to hope" (Panosetti, 2018). Two forces, according to anthropologist Arijun Appadurai, that drive the desperate journeys of migrants, but also their legitimate aspiration to change their lives for the better, and the new technologies could be defined as environments capable of welcoming and cultivating any possible vision of the future as a cultural fact, something that can be thought, designed and built.

The socio-cultural and communicative changes described above, in particular the advent of electronic and then digital media, would seem to have favored the emergence of what Joshua Meyrowitz (. 1993) defines as a 'place-less culture', referring both to the social roles that people play and the issues related to social identity and hierarchy, and

Mobile lives, open cultures, and cross-media ecosystem. What securities for migrants?

Giacomo BUONCOMPAGNI

to those situations of interaction that are characterized by an unmediated physical presence.

The importance of place has to do with major technological changes that may even reinforce certain aspects of the relationship with the physical environment, the same environments and media scenarios could preferably be thought of as "continuous social spaces", spaces that are "lived or inhabited" (Miller, Slater, 2000) as part of everyday life or to "places of a certain kind", where the idea of culture exists and is reinforced, where there is life, exchange because the place has to do with above all "inhabiting" (Moore, 2017).

3. (Repeating) the media/migration experience

Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan clearly states that "place [...] is more than the location [...] of a person's position within society" (Tuan 1996) and is constituted when a location is experienced habitually when a "sphere of habit" or "a sphere of care" is formed [...] people are emotionally bound to their environment" (ibid.).

The place is a concrete, meaningful familiar location that we fill with value, a process of "learning" that has to do with the seemingly unimportant occupation of getting around with orienting oneself in the environments of everyday life, with "finding one's way":

"We are in an unfamiliar part of the city: unknown spaces open up before us. In time, we take possession of certain landmarks and the routes that connect them, until what was an unknown part of the city [...]. becomes a familiar place. The abstract space, devoid of meaning other than strangeness, becomes a place full of meaning [...] We know how to move [...] we orient ourselves". (Tuan, 1977).

This is how "the experience of the environment" is created, which will gradually lead to a feeling of attachment, in an affective sense, to the place, attributing "a sense" to it, through routine activities (or habitual performances) such as tuning into the radio and television programs on the program schedule, reading novels, taking photographs, listening to music: all practices that involve the use of media technologies within familiar environments. In this way, the medium also becomes a 'place': an environment charged with meaning and emotion, a lived, inhabited space, to which we can always return through the repeated use of the same medium.

Repetition and return, according to Tuan, lead us both to develop a lasting bond with that photograph, film, or music and at the same time

Mobile lives, open cultures, and cross-media ecosystem. What securities for migrants?

Giacomo BUONCOMPAGNI

to cultivate the habit of "dwelling imaginatively" within those particular images and sounds that we repeatedly visit (Tuan, 2004). Once a sphere of habit or a sphere of care is established, everyday space begins to be perceived as familiar, as do the media environments themselves.

4. Conclusion

It is useful at this point to refer to the sociological analysis proposed by John Urry, who identifies types of 'interdependent mobility' that produce social and organized life at a distance:

- physical displacements: people move by involving their bodies for issues related to migration, escape, or their work;
- physical displacement of objects: these involve moving things (souvenirs, foodstuffs, or mobile devices) that the tourist-migrant brings with him, and they define the experience and foster memories;
- imaginative travel: this is enabled by the uses of communication media that act on human sensory systems.
 - human sensory systems.
 - virtual travel: mobility that takes place through networked computers and has created over time virtual and imaginative proximity; imaginative travel
 - imaginative proximity.
 - the journey of mobile communication.

Urry makes two observations in this regard. The first concerns "cultures of fluid encounters", the possibility of communicating at a distance via mobile phones, the second "the preservation and recovery of affective elements" by navigating within mobile worlds (Urry, 2007). Through digital technologies, we can create and store new contents that allow us to expand our experiences or relive those we have lived, deposit moods and states of mind. Migrants move within a public and interconnected space that is redefined by the new technologies that represent their socio-economic condition and give meaning to their mobility, creating new conditions for forms of identity experimentation. The technological process helps us to attribute meaning to the place and ourselves and can (re)create cultures, mobility (physical - virtual - imaginative), and mass communications capable of hindering or even favoring the end of non-

Mobile lives, open cultures, and cross-media ecosystem. What securities for migrants?

Giacomo BUONCOMPAGNI

places, transforming those anonymous spaces into meaningful and attractive places in their everyday online-offline dimension.

References

- Adams, P. (2009). *Geographies of Media and Communication*, Wiley-Blackwell, Malden, USA
- Arijun A. (2005). *Sicuri da morire: la violenza nell'epoca della globalizzazione*. Meltemi, Roma.
- Homi K. B. (1990). *Nation and Narration*. Routledge: Londra, UK.
- IOM, World Migration Report, IOM, Geneva, 2018.
- Joshua M. (1993). *Oltre il senso del luogo*. Baskerville: Bologna.
- Khanna,P. (2016). *Connectography: mapping the future of global civilization*. Random House: New York.
- Miller,D., Slater, D. (2000). *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach*, Berg Publishing, Oxford, UK.
- Panossetti, D., Appadurai, A. (2018). *Diritto all'immaginazione*, Doppiozero: 13 gennaio
- Riva, C. (2012). *Spazi di comunicazione e identità immigrata*. Franco Angeli: Milano
- Rocca, G., Frezza, G. (2020). *Media, Migrants and Human Rights. in the Evolution of the European Scenario of Refugees' and Asylum Seekers' Instances*. Peter Lang: Bern
- Saint-Blancat, C. (1995). *L'islam della diaspora*. Ed. Lavoro, Roma.
- Scannel, P.(1996). *Radio, Television and Modern Life: A Phenomenological Approach*. Blackwell, Oxford, UK.
- Sepstrup, P. (1989). Research into International Tv flows, in *European Journal of Communication* 4,4, 1989.
- Shaun M. (2017). *Media, luoghi e mobilità*. Franco Angeli: Milano
- Silverstone,R. (2002). *Perché studiare i media?* il Mulino. Bologna.
- Stuart H. (1992). New Ethnicities, in Donald J., Rattansi J., Tattansi A., *Race, Culture and Difference*. Sage: Londra. .
- Tuan, Y. F. (1996). Space, and Place: Humanistic Perspective of Experience, in Agnew J. Livingstone D.N., Rogers A. (eds.), *Human Geography: An Essential Anthology*. Blackwell, Malden (MA), USA,

Mobile lives, open cultures, and cross-media ecosystem. What securities for migrants?

Giacomo BUONCOMPAGNI

Tuan, Y., F. (1977). *Space, and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Tuan, Y., F. (2004). *Place, Art, and Self*. University of Virginia Press, Santa Fe (NM), USA.

Urry, J. (2007). *Mobilities*. Polity Press: Cambridge, UK.