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Negotiation of Identity in Transnational Contexts. The Case of Romanian Temporary Workers in Italy

Abstract

This paper¹ looks at migrants' negotiation of identity in transnational contexts. Intra-EU migration has brought about changes in the nature and significance of citizenship, social relations and symbolic ties in communities. The transnational interconnectivity between homeland communities and the diaspora poses a challenge to discourses of national belonging. Under current deterritorialized experiences and technological advances, the simultaneous incorporation of migrants within and across national entities sees the advent of plural representations of identity and national societies. In our analysis of interviews carried with Romanians working in Italy we started from the assumption that temporary workforce migration is a specific type of transnational context, which generates new cultural practices and requires migrants to define ways of belonging towards the host and home countries and to negotiate identitarian attributes. Our hypothesis is that in this transnational context the migrants do not employ attributes of essentialist identity in routine discourses about themselves, but rather strategically mobilize these attributes in order to justify the dynamics of belonging to home or host countries.

Keywords: transnational social spaces; methodological transnationalism; Romanian migrants; identity; belonging.

Introduction

The diaspora, as a particular form of collective life in a transnational context, is the locus of many discourses on the significance of the homeland, identity, citizenship and ethical deliberation on good governance and society, in general. The existence of migrants forces the national state to permanently revise its hegemonic constructions of national identity. There is much negotiation of social meaning in diasporic communities, mainly because migrants have to navigate multiple allegiances towards different political systems, societies and claims on their identity.

Among the paradoxes of the diaspora is the permanent quest for the homeland, while actively engaging in the construction of transnational social fields. "Home" is unattainable, be-

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cause migrants' present lives have been allowed by this distancing. The spatial constraints "act as dialectical determinants of a moral imagination" (Quayson & Daswani, 2013, p. 18). The alienation and feeling of loss that ensue can sometimes encourage active, deterritorialized nationalism and convergence of political commitments, despite the variety of attachments to the idea of nation or, for that matter, the discontinuity and heterogeneity of diasporic experience.

The dynamics of this negotiable version of belonging depends on the relationship with both the home and host country and on the ties with the community back home or with other members of the diaspora. Recent research shows that in Romania "the topic of new migration is strategically used in the public space, determining the adoption of positions, agendas and forms of institutionalisation" (Beciu, 2013, p. 41). "The instrumentalization of the migration problem and its actors through essentialist mechanisms of inclusion" (Beciu & Lazar, 2015, p. 39) is in fact one of the staples of media discourse on labour migration in the EU.

In this context, we will investigate the dynamics of identity negotiation in a particular group, temporary workers in Italy. In our analysis of interviews carried with Romanians working in Italy we started from the assumption that temporary workforce migration is a specific type of transnational context, which generates new cultural practices and requires migrants to define ways of belonging towards the host and home countries and to negotiate identitarian attributes.

Literature review

Intra-EU migration has brought about changes in the nature and significance of citizenship, social relations and symbolic ties in communities. Early studies on migration focused on migrants' social dynamics in host countries, with analysts developing various conceptual frameworks to explain migrants' new status as either incorporation, assimilation, hybridization or multiculturalism (Alexander, 2006; Kivisto, 2005). Free circulation among EU borders, together with easy access to communication means and transportation systems, created new forms of overlapping identities, which challenged essentialist visions on bounded ethnic identities and national allegiances, highlighting the reality of transnational social spaces.

This new reality required a new theoretical framework which could account for the new social relations and new society emerging from cross-border encounters. The embedded assumptions of methodological nationalism were that nation-states are the relevant unit of analysis for social practices (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002), which was true in the 19th and 20th century, when social sciences became established as a field of study (Levitt & Khagram, 2008). "Methodological nationalism is the naturalization of the nation-state by the social sciences" (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2008, p. 104), because what is essentially a political/geographic limitation (the boundaries of the nation-state) is taken as the natural unit of analysis. In this respect, "diasporas are emblems of transnationalism because they embody the question of borders, which is at the heart of any adequate definition of the Others of the nation-state" (Tölölyan, 2008, p. 233). Conceptual categories such as race, ethnicity, nation are hegemonic constructions reflective of relations of culture and power and structurally pertaining to nation-building processes; migrants challenge these hegemonic categories, which need to accommodate migrants' identity and practices: "transmigrants of all classes live a complex existence that forces them to confront, draw upon, and rework different hegemonic construc-

tions of identity developed in their home or new nation-state(s)” (Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton Blanc, 2008, p. 269).

These assumptions were challenged by methodological transnationalism (Khagram & Levitt, 2008), which addresses unhomogeneous, global political communities and multiple social relations in their complexity. The transnational optic (Faist, 1998; Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002) looks beyond the nation-state, the traditional place of inquiry, toward the actual dynamic of social life, to see “when and how immigrants have managed to remain connected to and involved in their homelands” (Kivisto & Faist, 2010, p. 159). Early studies on transnationalism found that transmigrants not only move freely across borders, but connect host and home countries through “multi-stranded social relations” (Basch et al., 2008, p. 263). These cross-border relationships are the rule, rather than the exception; “migrants are often embedded in multi-layered, multi-sited transnational social fields” (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2008, p. 284).

Opening up the analytical perspective to a global scale has forced methodological transnationalism to renounce attempts to establish the primacy of one global context over another, or even over national ties (Nieswand, 2011, p. 36). It has also acknowledged the reality of fluid identities – in contrast with both assimilation and cultural pluralism, which share a rather essentialist view of identity, in that they see it as immutable.

The transnational interconnectivity between homeland communities and the diaspora poses a challenge to discourses of national belonging. Previous analytical frameworks saw members of the diaspora bound together by territorial restrictions and a shared memory of the homeland. Under current deterritorialized experiences and technological advances, the simultaneous incorporation of migrants within and across national entities sees the advent of plural representations of identity and national societies. This simultaneous incorporation of migrants in global/local/national entities at different times can be activated by various factors and events and this heterogeneity (and unpredictability) of identity requires some innovation in the methodological tools.

The transnational optic moves the analytical focus from the cultural consequences of transnationalism (Appadurai, 1996; Hannerz, 1996) to migrants’ social relations. “Advocates for a transnational perspective argue that we ought not confine our subject matter to the boundaries of nation states, but instead consider the impacts of immigration on transnational social spaces that penetrate into two or more nation-states” (Kivisto & Faist, 2010, p. 8). The transnational lens reveals social processes and institutions that could not be visible under “the nation-state container theory of society” (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2008, pp. 284-286).

A transnational perspective on migration encourages several types of analyses (Levitt & Khagram, 2008, p. 11): analyzing one transnational form or process across space or time, various transnational activities (such as migration networks), interactions among forms of transnationalism, comparisons between transnational and bounded phenomena and the way they interact or compete with each other, as well as the circulation of ideas, symbols and material culture through networked social fields.

In a special issue of *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Portes et al. (1999) delimited the unit of analysis of transnationalism: the individuals and their support networks (Portes, Guarnizo & Landolt, 2008, p. 277), in contrast with earlier studies on migration, which focused on either migrant community dynamics or governmental actions to integrate migrants. They also warned of the danger of assimilating all cross-border activities to transnationalism: to qualify, they need to have reached critical mass through high intensity of exchanges and complexity and

to be stable in time. Only migrants with higher levels of social capital can develop enduring transnational ties. Portes et al. also question the transmission of transnational ties to second generation migrants and conclude by treating transnationalism as one possible outcome of the new context of migration. In this respect, assimilation and transnationalism can be simultaneous, for instance (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004).

Faist (2000) broadens the scope of the new conceptual framework by placing it in a tradition of thought. Transnationalism overlaps with the world systems theory (following the relations of power between the center and periphery) and globalization studies (focusing on the effects of deterritorialization). Early transnationalist studies used the term “social fields” in the tradition of Bourdieu and the Manchester School. Levitt and Glick Schiller define the social field as “a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized and transformed” (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2008, p. 286). Social fields contain institutions, organisations and experiences “that generate categories of identity that are ascribed to or chosen by individuals or groups” (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2008, p. 287). People in transnational social fields are exposed to various layers of power that force a positioning towards identity.

Faist coins a new term, “transnational social space”, which involves the circulation of ideas, symbols and material culture in the context of migration, and the social life, values and meanings that are born from a transnational context. Unlike Portes et al., in his analyses Faist includes transnational communities that share an ethnic collective identity, developing in a space that unites two or more nation states. Among transnational social spaces he includes kinship groups as well, to account for various remittances, and transnational circuits, around which various economic ties are structured. Consequently, the analyst can follow the migrant’s involvement with various civic and governmental institutions in both host and home countries. Other relevant transnational practices are transnational entrepreneurship and political/social activism.

Some analyses, however, find that there is “continuing centrality of nation-states in regulating and policing migration and perceptions of migrant populations” (Werbner, 2013, p. 120); moreover, “the dismissal of the nation-state by transnational theorists as an instance of methodological nationalism is ironically denied by migrants themselves” (Werbner, 2013, p. 109). Migrants frame their experience with nation-states in terms of visa regulations, work permits, rights and benefits, status and citizenship. In this circumstance, it is valid to ask whether migrant experiences are illustrative of rupture, rather than simultaneity, and of simultaneous attachment to two or more countries, rather than cosmopolitan engagement with a transnational social field. For instance, social remittances in the home country could then be taken as an instance of cosmopolitanization, rather than progress of migrants’ social capital. The analyst should then focus on rupture and transnational networking with a holistic understanding of migrants’ sociality: “the social universe of transnationalism is neither binary nor fixed at the moment of migration; on the contrary, it is expansive and incorporative, enabling new moral relationships in and across space as transnational migrants root themselves ontologically and experientially in their places of settlement – but without abandoning home” (Werbner, 2013, p. 120).

In this respect, Beck and Levy warned against cosmopolitanism as the analytical idiom opposed to methodological nationalism, because it is a normative concept, rather than an analytical tool, and can at best replace an essentialized notion of nationalism with a universal version of belonging (Beck & Levy, 2013). While social scientists agree on the constructed

nature of nationalism, they have not developed an equally constructivist perspective on the future of nations, under the current context of transnational migration and global experiences. Cosmopolitization (the proliferation of cosmopolitan affiliations) will be an essential process in nation-building, rather than an exclusionary force (Beck & Levy, 2013, p. 4), and cosmopolitan nations will be forged through an awareness of risks in the world society.

Methodology

In our analysis we started from the assumption that temporary workforce migration is a specific type of transnational context, which generates new cultural practices and requires migrants to define ways of belonging towards the host and home countries and to negotiate identitarian attributes. We wanted to see if the migrant defines himself in terms of essentialist national identity. When does he build solidarity with the people back home and when does he appeal to reflexive distancing? Is belonging defined in terms of responsibility towards the home country or towards other economic migrants? *Our hypothesis is that in this transnational context the migrants do not employ attributes of essentialist identity in routine discourses about themselves, but rather strategically mobilize these attributes in order to justify the dynamics of belonging to home or host countries.* In other words, the appeal to Romanianness (values and meanings, eternal symbols, cultural practices) is discursively employed when the migrants seek to increase or decrease distance from the home or the host country.

Furthermore, we expect a lack of reference to essentialist identitarian attributes in descriptions of transnational contexts. Temporary economic migration will be referred to in pragmatic, punctual terms, as economic or career opportunities, and mobility will be seen as a resource in a cosmopolitan understanding of the European economic context. In this respect, “adaptability”, for instance, which presupposes border-bound traits of character, will not be invoked by economic migrants who do not necessarily seek to integrate in the host country. They re-contextualize belonging partly because they see Europe as a continuous, fluid, cosmopolitan space, partly because of technological advances, that allow them to reconnect with the home community and lead simultaneous lives.

Another point of interest in our analysis was to follow how migrants position themselves towards the hegemonic construction of identity, either by the host or home country. The fluid identity of the diaspora allows multiple allegiances and political engagements (Drzewiecka explores the use of constitutive rhetoric to explain how “discourses of diaspora are deployed in specific circumstances in strategic enactment of cultural identities”, put to use in political action, for instance – Drzewiecka, 2002, p. 2). In this respect, it was of interest to us to see how migrants act political solidarities with the home communities and what significance they attach to the meaning of citizenship. What is their relationship with political institutions and actors? How do they create agentivity: as cosmopolitan actors, as nationals?

In order to confirm our hypothesis, we looked at 19 interviews with Romanians working in Italy, conducted in the period June, 12 – July, 9, 2014 (part of the complex investigations carried out in the research project *Diaspora in the Romanian Media and Political Sphere. From Event to the Social Construction of Public Issues*, led by Camelia Beciu). Most migrants that were interviewed come from poor areas in Romania (Piatra Neamț, Iași, Bacău); some are young, recent migrants; others are middle-aged people from the first wave of mi-

gration before Romania joined the EU. Some have managed to bring their families with them, but many have left children and spouses back home and maintain their relationships via Skype.

Methodologically, our research is guided by critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003; Chouliaraki, 2006; Wodak, 2010), focusing on the complex interrelations between discourse and society. Discourse is defined as a form of action carrying social relevance and reflecting structures of power, hierarchies, interactions, and social roles and identities. Discourse has an ideological function, which both structures and is structured by power relations among various groups.

In our analysis, we were interested in the way migrants define themselves against other diasporans and representations by the media and politicians in both host and home countries. Throughout the interviews, we followed the discursive representations of: *values* (and instances of exemplary lives/experiences); *myths and representations* about migration; *legitimization categories*; *transnational circuits and practices*; *the representation of 'home'*; *problematization of awareness of simultaneity/incorporation/rupture*; *political solidarities* and the significance attributed to *citizenship*. In order to understand how migrants perform and negotiate their status, we wanted to see what generates categories of identity. We followed representations of social identity and social imagery (*the paradigmatic other*, *status inconsistency*, and *types of social relations*).

Findings

Most migrants insist on the temporary character of economic migration: *I am convinced we will all return home* (NP19)/*I do not have a definite program. I may be going back, one never knows. But I will not stay here for good. Definitely not.*/Interviewer (I): *Have you thought about working in another country as well?*/CM: *Oh, no! I have had enough! I will do what I have to do and then return home ... If I had been young and had a house and a young family there, I would not have returned for the world. But I am of a certain age, I cannot fail to return* (CM8). It seems that for them the wish to return justifies the morality of their decision to leave; furthermore, this temporary character turns the experience of migration into an exceptional disruption, rather than a permanence in the lives of migrants.

The interviewees' insistence on using self-representations as temporary economic migrants can be interpreted as a strategy for negotiating belonging to home or host countries: unlike the decision to leave Romania (based on an economic imperative), the decision to return includes sentimental/identitarian reasons as well: *I only want to live my old age in Romania* (AR17)/[*to return home*] *is in any Romanian's mind, he never gives up hope for good ... I think it is longing, I cannot explain, it comes from within. Missing home, where you find yourself, where you feel accomplished, where you lived your childhood* (DSV5). However, appeal to nostalgia and essentialist attributes (*it is your country, your land, you need to return* – C11) is made more frequently when interviewees talk about a hypothetical return in the distant future, seldom when they talk about their integration strategies or present status as temporary migrants.

As a tendency, the interviewees define themselves as people who took advantage of a favorable context, mediated for them by friends or relatives: *When I arrived I already had a work place, my sister had arranged it for me* (IA1)/*Generally, when they leave home, Romanians have acquaintances abroad. I recommend that you have at least one very close friend*

when you leave home (DSV5). In only one instance, of a young high-school graduate, we could identify the idea of migration as adventure that brings about unfamiliar, exhilarating experiences.

Romanians working in Italy, say the interviewees, are hard-working and moral, where morality is both an “invitation” from a work-related context, and a “gift” from the migrant to the community: *I worked for a serious family ... I am satisfied with the work I have done for them, I was honest, the family are content with me, I cannot say a single bad word about this Italian family, they are a serious family, I have minded my own business, I am serious and content about my wages ... Because as long as you do honest work for a serious, decent family, you are happy as well ... here the employer works just as you and respects you, because you are a person yourself, not some kind of ...* (RS7).

The interviewees define themselves almost exclusively through work ethics: *I do not have much time to watch TV. Because I work. Until recently I worked from morning till dawn. When I arrive home at night I take care of the children. And sometimes during the day I have free time, but I am busy with the children, I have to take them to school. And then bring them back from school, get their meals ready. Every day. The same story ... Ask my husband. I have stayed the same person. I may have changed very slightly, but I speak the same, I behave the same, I do not do something different from what I did before. Just like any mother. ... a normal woman back home. She cooks, she goes to work, she looks after the children* (L9). Honest, hard work is for migrants a legitimizing category. While in Romania work is never properly paid and efforts go unacknowledged, in Italy hard work facilitates integration in work-related contexts. *Working hard, being honest and proud about your work* are both the result of a journey into work ethics (leading to self-esteem) and a proof that the sacrifice of leaving the home country was not in vain. The constant use of these pragmatic considerations shows that for our interviewees the experience of migration is an ethical category with moral significance.

There is a pronounced tendency among migrants to project the image of an exemplary life. The fact that they assume an inferior professional status is presented, for instance, as an illustration of courage and pragmatism: *In the end I accepted a job below my professional qualification, quite different from what I had done for 20 years back home ... my work experience has not served me much here* (LJ4).

There are migrants who evoke status inconsistency: *There is a bit of malice, I do not know how to call it, but ... as I said before, everybody believes we are gypsies, that we are poorly trained, we know absolutely nothing, whatever you do, however easy it might be, they ask you: “are you capable to do this?”. Their only strong point is that they were born in Italy, a rich, developed country, and that’s about it. Yet they are so much more below us. But this is it. We were the ones who came over; they did not call us. It does not matter that you have a better idea, it does not matter, if he is the boss, this is what we do, because this is the good thing to do. I have learned that you are not allowed to contradict them* (T6). Status is performed and negotiated in a work paradigm. Relationships with the people in the host countries are built and maintained, more often than not, through work. It is symptomatic, for instance, that migrants rarely have Italian friends; in their free time, they spend time with family or close acquaintances, performing togetherness through highly ritualized practices (meeting at church for religious celebrations, going out for barbecues, meeting in shops selling traditional food). Proximity with the community of Italians in work-related, rather than informal contexts, does not encourage solidarity or inclusion (*I have had an Italian friend for*

seven years. *I have left some tools with him, he helps me repair them. But he will be forever the Italian and I, forever the Romanian – IR14*). On the other hand, the perception of status inconsistency proves some critical competence and distancing. Engagement with the community of Italian nationals cannot be developed in this context; status is an element of negotiation, rather than solidarity.

Competing identities

The dialectical proximity with other migrants is relevant as well for the dynamics of belonging. What symbolic categories and boundaries does the migrant use in order to define his relationship with members of the diaspora? Certain contexts activate belonging to either the diaspora or the community of nationals back home. Interviewees do not see themselves as diasporans automatically, nor do they include others in this category unless there is some proof of worthiness. There are certain values, behaviours and statuses that allow migrants to belong to the diaspora. There is a clear gap between the migrants from the first wave and recent migrants. Migration is often represented in interviews as a moral act (a symbolic redemption of social injustice back home), and trespassing the rules somehow disintegrates the meanings of the moral journey. On the other hand, the “pioneers”, who had to deal with the hardships resulting from their status as non-EU citizens, define themselves as higher ranking migrants who project a relationship of power with later migrants, because they had to fight and they were the ones who created the favorable context that allowed later migrants to come to Italy: *I had to resist for more than three months, because our long-stay visa expired again and again. I tried to meet the legal term (DSV5). I had the possibility to arrive here without facing the problems Romanians had before, because they needed visas, they were standing in infernally long queues in front of consulates and so on (AR17)*.

There are various degrees in the evolution of the diaspora, there is a symbolic hierarchy between old and new, integrated and not integrated, worthy or worthless migrants. For our interviewees, self-diasporization is a conscientious process, a result of lessons learnt and a reward for self-worth proven in time: *The first people to arrive were somehow selected. For instance, I arrived here in 2000. Later on, when the borders opened, all sorts of people came, especially less acceptable and less civilised people came, who did not deserve it, who did not integrate that well, who did not come to work and to live a civilized life, they came in view of taking advantage of the civilization here, which is totally different from ours” (AC2)/When I came in the 90s, here were people who wanted a different life from what we had in Romania, we had Ceaușescu’s ideas, we wanted to get rid of this communist idealism, see? But now come Romanians who really need to be here, the needy who cannot manage back home (AR17)*. Migrants seem to work with very functional and exact “maps of migration”: they know what to expect if they choose England versus Italy, they know who can qualify (in terms of professional worth but also social status) for higher-ranking countries: *I had half a thought to go to the UK, but I gave up, because it is hard to start from scratch, to leave a second identity for the third, because I have already left the first at home (DSV5)/I would like to work in another country, in the UK, where you make better money, but for the moment I am good here (C11)/It would be best to work in Germany (G18)*.

Belonging to the imagined community is built through reference to organic identity. Asked to explain why she believes migrants wish to return home, an interviewee answered: *Because the place you were born in and your country are always in your soul. Here you feel forever*

the foreigner (IA1). Another says: *I believe that we, the Romanians, have the wish to return home where we were born, under the sky we grew up* (AC2). However, double allegiances appear especially in migrants with overall positive experience. We called this competing/relational identity. *I: If you were to introduce yourself today, what would you say? How would you characterise yourself?/I think I am quite integrated, I am in love with this country, I have my own country close to my heart, but I would like to stay here* (AC2).

The diasporans' moral imagination

Migrants are characters in a drama (Kivisto & Faist, 2010, p. 1) that has an underlying moral, whether it concerns a search for a better society or a better self. Migrants' reasons to emigrate are as diverse as their progress in host societies; many, however, frame their enterprise as a moral quest, an ethical journey (Werbner, 2013, p. 116). "If the moral imagination is also an important component of both diaspora and transnationalism it is because it helps produce a narrative of possibilities, hopes, and social roles of appropriate conduct as well as modes for action that are made meaningful by allowing individuals to take on the active narrative positions of migrant, victim, hero, survivor, community builder, transnational actor, and so on" (Quayson & Daswani, 2013, p. 18).

There is a strong tendency among our interviewees to describe their experience of migration as a drama with events, unexpected turns in plots and an abundance of characters. The experience of living and working abroad is frequently described as an evolution of the self: *I do not know if a country can change you as a person ... I have preserved my character, I should say ... But I suppose that we have all changed. This is a different medium, a different environment, a different society ... we have probably opened our eyes wider and adapted following one or another. I suppose it was a change for the better* (G10)/*It makes you more mature than you need to be. I am better prepared for anything, be it good or bad* (DSV5)/*I know who I can be friends with ... It makes you harsher ... You mind your own business ... What can I say, you have to be careful. It forces you to grow up* (CM8).

In the case of mothers who left their children at home, migration is described in terms of trauma. What is essentially a blamable act finds justification in economic arguments: *It is hard, it is difficult, you suffer a lot, hoping from one year to the other that you will return ... a child needs affection, to feel his parents are nearby, we know that what we do is wrong, but [we do it] in order to offer something better for them, something more than we had* (AC2)/*I could say that all these things are sacrifices for your family. It is not that easy to stay away from your husband and children, to call them: dearest, what shall I bring you? And they would never say: I want this or that, they would always answer: come home, it is you I need, not sweets or money. Family misses you very much, parents need to be close to their children ... it is my opinion that in a family children need to be raised by both a mother and a father* (CP15).

The symbolic construction of citizenship

There is pervasive awareness among migrants of their simultaneous, contrapuntal lives (Said, 2000), which is routinized in their discourses about the spaces they inhabit. It is not just their representation of space (here and there) and time (before and after the Great Journey) that carries shared social meaning, but the cultural chronotopes as well: the host country as the land of progress versus the home country as the land of political, social, economic

stagnation. Migrants become political actors because they are subjects of power in the host country – this forces positioning; on the other hand, establishing the relationship with the other is essentially a question of defining and recognising power as well.

What is firstly a step dictated by economic necessity becomes a political commentary on bad governance back home. This positioning in migration discourse can mobilize “diasporas” in the home country as well (Parsons Dick, 2013, pp. 413-415), who critically evaluate their present debased lives against various ideal identities. However, migrants’ critical discourse on the state of affairs would not, alone, create such diasporic identities in the home country, if, on the one hand, migrants did not live contrapuntal existences, and, on the other, non-migrants did not engage actively with migrant discourses.

Economic migrants do not define Romanianness in terms of citizenship, partly because of their vision of a cosmopolitan, fluid Europe, partly because of the distance they take towards what they see as bad governance at home. Symbolic Romania is more prevalent in migrants’ discourse on national feelings than the Romania of rights and social contract. The relationship with members of the diaspora is rarely enclavised and the resurgence of symbolic practices is motivated culturally, rather than politically.

In our analysis we also wanted to see how this relativised belonging to the home country ties in with a moral engagement with it. If the migrant permanently negotiates his relationship with home, does he feel a moral duty and responsibility towards it? Is the engagement with the home country constructed instrumentally (in terms of financial remittances, for instance) or is it acknowledged as an instance of responsibility and solidarity with the community of nationals? Remittances could be a way of building identity through the symbolic capital transferred back home. Do migrants see their interventions in the home society as a change in mentalities or a performance of citizenship and political engagement? Which is then the relationship between transnationalism and citizenship?

The temporary economic migrant defines belonging to the home or host country in terms of status (achieved through economic success), which does not encourage solidarity, but critical engagement with the political status-quo back home. In this respect, the migrant will negotiate reentry in the home community in terms of status preservation. The migrant uses the status gained as a financially successful national abroad in order to negotiate belonging and, eventually, citizenship. For our interviewees, civic engagement is a form of political criticism: *we talk about politics because I suppose our politicians are the ones who made us leave the country. They are the ones who simply chased us out of the country. We were employed when we left, but they still made us all leave the country, little by little. Why, I cannot say. I suppose our country has more to lose than to gain with us leaving* (G10).

Migrants repeatedly refer to the experience of living and working abroad as a cosmopolitan education, which could benefit the people back home: *If Romanians abroad, who studied here and have a university education, would one day return home, they would change politics. Their integration in political parties, their participation in local elections, this can be done, and if they go back to Romania, they could do something with their European mentality* (DSV5). Many talk about their agentivity in Romania in terms of cultural revolution: *I think [migrants] have changed things already. All Romanians returned home changed. I hope that the fact that we lived abroad will change things for the better* (G10). Yet few migrants see themselves as agents of change, and they prefer to transfer responsibility to a vague “us”: *we would like to do more for our country and work for it, instead of living among strangers, because it is not easy, but we cannot do anything from here or from Romania, because we*

have no power to change things (IA1). The lack of political activism could be explained in terms of distance, but could also be a result of weak ties among diasporans (Apart from work behaviour, passion and strong will, they will not be able to change anything. Because they cannot do all this by simply going back. Because there are no workplaces, fields to develop, you cannot do anything. As long as you are abroad, you are surrounded by another mentality, you work differently, conscientiously, responsibly ... I do not say that you cannot work like that at home, but if there is nothing for you to do in the country, your mentality from abroad will not be of help, because you will have to do a lot, quickly and well (T6). Diasporans meet as friends who keep up with news from Romania, share a meal and celebrate, not as active political actors debating the shortcomings of the political system back home. Another explanation comes from the isolated voice of a community leader (a priest) warning that migrants are intruders who do not have the competence or the status to produce change in Romania: This is a problem. It depends on the relationship built between Romanians here and Romanians in Romania ... They [the migrants] are not in a position to teach. If there is someone there to say: yes, we are open to change, it might be. But there needs to be a culture HUB for this openness. One shouldn't go there and teach" (IR 16).

When the right to vote is discussed, migrants appeal to civic essentialism. The right to vote is a privilege coming from intrinsic Romanianness, that the migrant carries within himself. *Because we live here, but one day we will return. We will go back home because everything started there. We will return, however late (CP15).* In this respect, citizenship seems to be the result of essential identity, rather than of a social contract (*As a Romanian, wherever I may be on Earth, I have my right to choose who should rule my country. I do not have 16 citizenships, to vote. I am a Romanian, I have one single citizenship, I want to vote, I have this right – C11).*

Despite appealing to essential attributes in their performance of citizenship, many interviewees accept instrumentalization of the diaspora as is performed by the media back home. *I do not believe that this [withdrawing the right to vote] is the right thing, because we are Romanians and we will stay Romanians, we are the ones who send money to Romania, we are the ones building houses in Romania, we are the ones caring for our parents back in Romania, for our siblings and nephews, this is money coming from Italy, we have all the right in the world to vote, but it does not seem right for them to oblige me to vote (IA1).* Going along with this instrumentalization may be another instance of negotiation of re-entry into the home country, via remittances.

Conclusions

Temporary workforce migration is a rich site for the analyst investigating the dynamics of identity. The dual nature of the labour migrant, living a “real” life in the host country and a “connected” life in the home country, illustrates the permanent negotiation of the meaning of identity and citizenship in contemporary Europe. Taking temporary workforce migration as a particular instance of transnational context, we followed the strategic mobilization of identitarian attributes in discourses about belonging to the home or host country.

Our analysis of interviews with migrants in Italy has shown that Romanians who went to work abroad define their situation as a temporary state of affairs, based on pragmatic reasons such as the quest for a better life. Mobility is a right gained by European citizens with the opening of the labor market. In the words of one of our subjects, “we are a people of adapt-

able individuals” (AR17). Temporality of this enterprise is eagerly stressed by all participants in the interview. Migrants negotiate staying abroad and returning home based on economic imperatives and advantages. While the reality of their present status is motivated economically, the starting and the final point of their journey are defined in terms of moral significance. The decision to leave is often a moral act, an underlying criticism of the poor state of affairs in Romania and equally a quest for a better self. Life abroad is a lesson learned about work ethics and a discovery of the migrant’s own strength, courage, determination and flexibility. The journey back to the home country is forever postponed for the vague moment when everything (politics, economy, *the healing* of the nation) will fall back into place in Romania; it is pushed back to a moment of definitive choices and old age and motivated by the intrinsic call of the mother land to its sons. Re-entry into Romanian society is, however, again negotiated in pragmatic terms: a vague diasporan “we” could change Romania for the better by teaching the lessons on work and normality that migrants learnt abroad. Their agentivity can be partly explained by the fact that they are subjects of power in both the home and the host country. Paradoxically, migrants accept instrumentalization by the media back home as a negotiation strategy for the moment of return. The dynamics of this negotiable version of belonging depends on the relationship with the home and host country and on the ties with the community of diasporans. Entrance into this category is based on self-worth; however, our interviewees employ and accept hegemonic definitions of identity by both the home and host country.

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