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Transnational Professionals and their Cosmopolitan Universes

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Migration and mobility are as old as humankind. Movement was a facet of tribal life long before the invention of territories as politically marked geographic units of space (Pries 2001). Organization in units guaranteed the people of tribal nations political and economic security, but this territorial demarcation also represented and reproduced mental maps in the form of religious, ethnic, and cultural belonging. The culmination of these processes was reached with the full development of nation-states (Brubaker 1994). Since then, the movement of people has been conceptualized primarily as migration within or between nation-states. As such, mobility can be seen as a flow that can be regulated and restricted. This has tremendous consequences for the migrating individuals, for nation-states as the political actors primarily responsible for regulating these flows, and for the social sciences.

The recent voluminous literature on migration and diasporas has considerably enhanced our awareness and understanding of the phenomenon of movement between the container spaces of nation-states (Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Basch et al. 1994; Chan 1997; Cohen 1997; Vertovec/Cohen 1999; Faist 2000; Kennedy 2002; 2004; Favell 2003). The recognition that people are increasingly mobile is associated with the placing of boundaries and borderlands at the center of the analytic framework. However, the concern with boundaries and their transgression often reflects a broad concern with the cultural displacement of people. What Edward Said (1979), for instance, calls a "generalized condition of homelessness" is seen as characterizing contemporary life everywhere. This points to the deeply territorializing concepts of identity and culture, which dominate in the literature and see mobile people as uprooted and displaced (Malkki 1997).

The degree of power that these associations of territory, culture, and identity have become apparent when one changes country of residence. Migrants are frequently asked where they come from, what their reasons for leaving "their" country were, whether they plan to go back to their home country "one day", and whether they miss their "home". In fact, these polite and innocently meant questions, arising from people's curiosity, relate to deeply rooted assumptions about the territorial boundaries of culture and identity. Being a migrant, one may ask, what difference does living in another country make? How much do these couple of hundred kilometers matter? Would such a distance matter if the move had been between two towns within one country? And if not, does movement in geographical space actually matter, or is it rather the change between two political systems that makes the difference? Is social space more important than geographical space? What is the difference between geographical and social space? And if there is no difference in moving between the countries, is the concept of nation-states as containers just fiction? If a citizen of the European Union can cross a bordering member state at any time, is this border at all relevant? And if not, what difference does being on one side or the other make? If nation-states are becoming increasingly irrelevant, and if they lose their functionality, where, if at all, do the boundaries between "us" and "them" exist?

Behind such questions and discussions hide particular imaginations of space. When we conceive space as a surface, we can travel across it. If we consider space as divided into units, we can make an effort to reconnect it. When we imagine that space has the same qualities everywhere, we can also imagine that people are the same everywhere. When we think of space as consisting of many places, we can think of people as attached to places and moving freely in space. The opposite is also true: our practices have an impact on how we conceive of space.

These questions are central to the topic of this present work. My interest in mobility and spatial relations is twofold: first, it has its source in my own experience of migration, international marriage, and family, of being embedded in two countries, and in international social networks. Second, my interest also arose from reading the substantial literature on transnational mobility and globalization. The literature review reveals that the everyday questions that migrants must confront are also extremely relevant in the professional debate, and that the vast majority of the conceptualizations

based on "spatial determinism" are ambivalent from the point of view of a migrant, and should also be so from the point of view of a researcher.