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Different Histories, Different Narratives: ICT Uses As “*Habitus*”?

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Abstract

History forms narratives, narratives form media uses? The present paper formulates a theoretical proposal, that of considering the uses of information and communication technologies (ICT), particularly social media, as “*habitus*”, inspired by Pierre Bourdieu’s Field Theory. My thesis draws on research conducted on the professional network LinkedIn. It examines the way two discussion groups, held by Greek and French migrants respectively, use this platform. The comparative approach raises the question of *habitus* as *praxis* related to situated and ideologically charged socio-historical representations of migration. The online discursive practices of each group suggest the existence of an *illusio* common to their members regarding the relevance and the objective of the discussions. Different forms (*eidōs*) of *illusio* seem to operate as different symbolic capitals that shape the groups. Following Pierre Bourdieu’s theory, my ultimate assumption is that these divergences are related to the positions that Greece and France hold within the international migration field.

Keywords: habitus, social media, migrants on line, Greek diaspora, French diaspora, migration field, narratives, history, field theory

Introduction

History forms narratives, narratives form media uses? The present paper formulates a theoretical proposal, that of considering the uses of information and communication technologies (ICT), particularly social media, as “*habitus*”, inspired by Pierre Bourdieu’s Field Theory. I employ the term “*habitus*” referring to a set of unconscious practices conditioned by the social, cultural and political context that permeates their users (obviously also determined by the strategic prescriptions and the technological characteristics of the media). It is through the users’ “*illusio*”, “dispositions” and “symbolic capital” that this context can be identified. Pierre Bourdieu’s Field theory is in the centre of my theoretical framework.

My thesis draws on a research conducted on the professional network LinkedIn. It examines the way two discussion groups, held by Greek and French migrants respectively, use this platform. The comparative approach raises the question of *habitus* as *praxis* related to situated and ideologically charged socio-historical representations of migration. The online discursive practices of each group suggest the existence of an *illusio* common to their members regarding the relevance and the objective of the discussions. Different forms (*eidos*) of *illusio* seem to operate as different symbolic capitals that shape the groups’ narratives.¹ Following Pierre Bourdieu’s theory, my ultimate assumption is that these divergences are related to the positions that Greece and France hold within the international migration field.

The Theoretical Framework

Introducing the Collective Dimension of the ICT Uses

To understand the significance – but also the originality – of this proposal for ICT studies, it is important to retrace the main approaches that have shaped the analysis of ICT uses until today. This research domain emerged at the intersection of the Theory of Diffusion and Cultural Studies, following the Uses and Gratifications approach (Maigret, 2003, pp. 260–264). More specifically, I will focus on three important traditions that have fueled research directions in this area during the period 1980–1995 (Jauréguiberry & Proulx, 2011, pp. 32–84). The first landmark drew on Everett M. Rogers’ (1962) work on the diffusion of technical innovations and considered uses as activities of consumption. The second was related to the development of the Engineering Sciences, which in the 1940s analysed the design of technical devices and the relationship they establish with humans in terms of ergonomics and use. Within this approach, several scholars (e.g. Akrich, 1987; Bardini & Proulx, 1999; Jouët, 1993; Thevenot, 1991) insisted on the prescribing role of technical devices, in the Foucauldian sense of the term, and placed the concept of “affordance” (Bardini, 1996, 141–142) in the center of their research. Bruno Latour’s work on the sociology of science and technology, which advocates interobjectivity as an analysis frame (Latour, 1994), fell within this posture. A third contribution came from research on media reception, with frequent references to Michel de Certeau’s (1980) “arts of doing”.

Undeniably, these works have shed light on the complexity of the relationship between humans and machines, yet they have their weaknesses and limitations. Francis Jauréguiberry and Serge Proulx (2011) point out the tendency to overestimate the autonomy of users or to consider technologies as exogenous to society, having their own logic, often opposite to that

¹ We will not be delving here into the meaning of “narratives”. There is abundant literature on this topic and a recent, very thorough text to which we can refer by Baroni, 2016.

of individuals. More recent works in this area try to overcome these flaws. Nowadays, ICT uses are considered as “(more or less) brief forms of passages [that agents perform] between different logics of action and different regimes of engagement” (p. 101). In this vein, to understand the uses of communication technologies within contemporary societies, we must first apprehend their underlying logics of action: a logic of integration and recognition in a system of reticular and technological affiliations; a utilitarian logic of gain and power in a system of competition; a detachment and empowerment logic in a system of individualization and subjectivity (Jauréguiberry & Proulx, 2011, p. 106).

However, as Jauréguiberry and Proulx (2011, pp. 96–97) point out, the research often fails to highlight that ICT uses are also rooted in a set of structures: discursive formations, cultural matrices and systems of social relations of power. The latter forge individual routines and generate patterns of use. In this sense, the uses are embedded in an already established history of social and communication practices. Andrew Feenberg (2004, p. 55) notes, for example, that the use of technical devices entails a social significance that opens to cultural and political horizons. Christine Servais (2009, p. 11) argues that the relation between individuals and technologies is adjacent to the articulation between the singular and the collective dimension of mediation, which should also be analyzed. Finally, Jauréguiberry and Proulx (2011, p. 82) remind us that it seems “impossible to imagine a process of appropriation which would be exclusively individual. The integration of technical objects in our daily practices necessarily presumes a set of common experiences among users”.² Jauréguiberry and Proulx highlight that, since the early 2000s, the formation of online “communities” is one of the most significant dynamics in the field of ICT uses (pp. 69–70). When it comes to social networks, Nikos Smyrnaio (2011) notes that:

The sociological and cultural particularities of the public as consumers decisively influence their choice of social networks. The different uses of these networks develop out of these particularities and are therefore also varied. To further demonstrate these behavioural differences, it is interesting to compare social network use across different countries. In Asian countries such as Japan, China and Korea, the main service offered by social networks is online gaming, which is merely complemented by certain aspects of sociality; in India, it’s the matrimonial aspect of social networks that ensures their success, especially amongst diaspora Indians. In Brazil, users tend to have a vast network of friends, with an average number of 360 contacts, whereas in France the latter is much more modest with only 95 contacts. Finally, even the amount of time spent connected to online social networks differs across geographical regions. For example, in Europe, connection time varies considerably from country to country with the average time at around six and a half hours a month in Italy, which is almost three hours more than in Germany.

Obviously, the figures given above refer to average trends. Nevertheless, they show that beyond the individual characteristics, the collective factor cannot be ignored; hence the need to introduce here an approach based on the concept of *habitus*.

The Heuristic Value of the Concept of *Habitus*

The heuristic value of Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* lies in the fact that it helps consider online activity beyond its individual dimension. Bourdieu defines the *habitus* as “incorporated history”, “reactivation of the meaning objectified by the institutions”,

² All translations of French texts were conducted by the author.

“standardization of the experience”, “common code”, or ultimately “subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, common patterns of perception, conception and action, which are the condition of any objectification and any perception” (Bourdieu, 1980a, pp. 94–101). This approach puts emphasis on the *habitus* as a set of relatively homogeneous practices and shared meanings within a group. It does not advocate the acceptance of an absolute determinism which leaves no margin for individual creativity; these margins prove, however, limited, often predictable by the *habitus* itself. “Like any art of inventing, the latter can produce an infinite number of practices, relatively predictable (like their corresponding situations), but limited in their diversity” (Bourdieu, 1980a, p. 93).

The idea of the existence of a transcendent referent “above” individual human practices was strongly criticized by Bruno Latour (1994) in his actor-network theory. The author argues that any action is local and always “flatly” arranged, woven into objects, through the mediation they provide:

The fact that an interaction has the contradictory form of a local frame and a muddled network, does not mean, however, that we should leave the solid ground of interactions to move to ‘some next level’, that of society. Both levels exist, yet their connection cannot be demonstrated. (p. 41).

Bruno Latour’s theory on interobjectivation stresses the key role of the materiality of the objects in our relationship with technology. Nevertheless, the defense of a socio-historically situated subject helps not only to humanize this relation but also to maintain its richness and depth. As Olivier Voirol (2013, p. 178) points out, “regardless of how humans are related to non-humans, it is always humans that encounter non-humans to which they endow a sense and a value of use or exchange”. The heuristic value of *habitus* becomes significant here.

The concept of *habitus* was developed by Pierre Bourdieu in the late 1960s to analyze the field of artistic activity, creative genius and revolutionary innovation. It was further explained in *Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique [Outline of a theory of practice]* (1972) and formalized in *Le sens pratique [Practical reason. On the theory of action]* (1980), where it was mainly associated with social class. Explaining different *habitus* as conditioned by “a particular class of the conditions of existence”, Pierre Bourdieu defines them as

systems of durable and transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is to say, as principles generating and organizing practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aim of purposes or intentional mastery of the operations necessary to achieve them, objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of an orchestra chief. (Bourdieu, 1980a, pp. 88–89)

Habitus, as “internalization of externality”, is the “grammar” available to individuals to adapt and cope with social life. This grammar is learned, often unconsciously, and is therefore not innate, but its uses may be malleable and allow varying degrees of improvisation. Because of the structuring power of every acquisition (lived and/or learned: history, norms, behaviors, patterns of perception, etc.), *habitus* limits the scope of an idealist subjectivism which focuses on the creative action of the subject. Being a set of possibilities available to individuals within the limitations inherent to the conditions of its production, it also puts into perspective

the power of an absolute structuralism that sees only mechanical causal relationships between the structure and the subject. In *Méditations pascaliennes [Pascalian meditations]* (1997), Pierre Bourdieu refines and clarifies his thoughts:

One of the major functions of the concept of habitus is to prevent two additional errors intrinsic to the scholastic view: on the one hand, the claim that action is the mechanical effect of the constraints imposed by external causes; on the other hand, the teleology, especially within the theory of rational action, that agents act freely, consciously and, as some say, in a utilitarian perspective, ‘with full understanding’, the action being the product of a calculation of chances and profits. (p. 200)

In other words:

Dispositions do not automatically result in specific actions: they are revealed and are accomplished only in appropriate circumstances and in relation to a situation. They may therefore remain in a state of potentiality, just like warlike courage in absence of war. (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 215)

In this frame, considering ICT uses as *habitus* entails raising the larger question of the contribution of Field Theory to the study of communication phenomena.

Field Theory to Study Communication?

Habitus renders human discourse and behavior meaningful, through their inscription in broader socio-historical frameworks, whose logics and functioning influence, in subtle and often unnoticed ways, spontaneous individual practices. *Habitus* carries the trace of the ideologies by which it was forged. The latter are to be found in the various fields of social organization (school, state, church, politics, etc.) and in their articulation.

Developed by Pierre Bourdieu in parallel to that of *habitus*, the concept of field focuses on the position occupied by a social agent, individual or collective, within the system of relations which circumscribes an area of activity. Various *habitus* emerge depending on the different positions occupied by agents in a field. Initially applied in the domain of artistic creation, the field reveals a relevant concept for analyzing power relations and implicit laws that underlie the organization of human societies on professional, political, etc. level.

In this frame, communication processes can be analyzed not only as messages, codes, transfers or simple binary relations, but also in terms of the positions occupied by the production instances or the communicating agents within the social space. These positions reflect – but also engender – different stakes that are contextually situated: “Symbolic activity is socially conditioned” (Champagne & Christin 2004, p. 48). Indeed, the points of view of the social agents

depend, in terms of content and symbolic force, on the position that those who produce them occupy; it is only through a *situs analysis* that these points of view can be reconstructed as such, i.e. as partial views taken from a point (*situs*) within the social space”. (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 264)

Every field generates a *habitus*, based on a set of resources, the “capital” (economic, cultural and social) available to its protagonists. It is characterized by the existence of an *illusio*, i.e. a form of its members’ conviction in its relevance as a social space meaningful for them, both

challenging and engaging. *Habitus* becomes a form of capital, as it embodies unconscious learned patterns of perception and thought, and as “it contributes to varying degrees, to do, undo and redo space” (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 264).

The concepts of field, *illusio* and capital complement the heuristic value of *habitus*. They form a conceptual framework whose implementation in the field of communication technologies and new media can provide new insights. What I will try to show in this work is that the use of digital platforms can – and should – also be understood in terms of the various *habitus* that users develop online, and whose logic, beyond the question of their creative appropriations – as was advocated by Michel De Certeau (1980) and crystallized in his famous formula “arts of doing” – carries the traces of their socio-historical conditioning. These traces are identified in the users’ underlying *illusio* regarding the meaning of their online activity. My hypothesis is that the latter functions as a form of symbolic capital, which is related, among other things, to the articulation and the hierarchies of the international migration field within the international geopolitical sphere.

To empirically demonstrate this thesis, my study will adopt a comparative approach between LinkedIn discussion groups held by Greek and French migrants.³ More specifically, a *situs analysis* will show that when these expatriates come together online on a professional networking site, their practices are not the same. Their divergences can be apprehended based on the relation that each group has with migration. This relation proves to be historically and politically shaped and functions as a form of symbolic capital, which impacts the presumed objective of each group and the contents published.

A Case Study to Illustrate the Theoretical Proposal

Understudying LinkedIn Migrant Groups

One of the characteristics of social media is “homophily” (Siapera, 2012, p. 198). The term refers to the tendency of these platforms to bring together individuals who resemble each other in terms of tastes, beliefs, behaviors, etc. giving rise to virtual spaces called “communities” based on “weak social ties” (Granovetter, 1973). Members of these online gatherings do not necessarily know each other (Cardon, 2011), but achieve, through networking, a better flow of content (Mercklé, 2004, pp. 47–49). Obviously, this type of activity is not unique to social media sites; long before the arrival of the latter, several forums and other participatory platforms were grounds for the negotiation of collective identities (Byrne, 2008). According to Pierre Bourdieu, homophily reflects, in general, the agents’ efforts to maintain or reproduce a state of the social world or a field allowing the expression, the demonstration or the update of their dispositions:

The agent tries to update the potential inscribed in his body in the form of capacities and dispositions shaped by the external conditions. [. . .] This is one of the major principles [. . .] when it comes to daily choices of objects or people: guided by sympathies and antipathies, affections and aversions, likes and dislikes, people build an environment in which they feel ‘at home’ and where they can fulfill this absolute accomplishment of their desires called happiness”. (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 216)

³ Parts of this work have been published in Koukoutsaki-Monnier, 2015, but within a different theoretical scope, as to illustrate a theoretical model regarding the symbolic constructions of nationhood.

LinkedIn groups are presented as places of public visibility, networking and content monitoring. They result from the desire to anticipate the platform's uses and to increase the time spent on the site. In this sense, they promote the "informational capitalism" that lies at the core of the participatory web, insofar as it is the contributors-members of groups that produce content for these platforms and increase their economic value. At the same time, they carry with them the promise, but also the paradox, of the emancipation of users as "empowerment", "ability to act" and "power to act" (Proulx *et al.*, 2011). Eric Delcroix (2012, pp. 83–84) defines LinkedIn groups as spaces generally related to the professional realm (industry, entrepreneurship, professional association, skill or job), based on specific common interests, where professionals and experts publish content, ask for advice, offer or seek employment and "network" with others. Commonly seen as ancillary services of this kind of platform, whose main interest lie in the creation of individual profiles (Mésangeau & Poveda, 2013), LinkedIn groups are nevertheless considered by some experts as Web 2.0's heart in terms of online professional strategy (Delcroix, 2012, p. 82).

Like in other social media discussion forums, the contents published on LinkedIn groups are not homogeneous. The latter include publication of one's personal skills, "data curation" (sharing of journal articles, study results, career opportunities, etc.) and debates. Nevertheless, despite the hybrid nature of these spaces, argued exchanges occupy an important place. The display of the participants' names and status reinforces the deliberative aspect of the interactions. Discussants generally respect a kind of netiquette avoiding personal quarrels and insults, contrary to what often happens in anonymous forums (Amossy, 2011). In this sense, it is also possible to consider these collective spaces as public spheres in the traditional, Habermassian, sense of the term.

In the frame of the platform's objectives, at the intersection of a utilitarian and an integration logic (Jauréguiberry & Proulx, 2011, p. 114), LinkedIn migrant groups rarely espouse private goals (i.e. maintaining emotional ties with family and friends), for which other platforms exist (e.g. Facebook). They are supposed to pursue professional aims marked by the importance of the social capital and impregnated by the logic of personal branding. To paraphrase Bourdieu (1980b, p. 2), LinkedIn migrants are supposed to join LinkedIn discussion groups in quest of a set of actual or potential resources linked to the possession of a durable relationship network of more or less institutionalized acquaintanceships and acknowledgments.

Indeed, the importance of e-networking for migrant populations has been clearly demonstrated by Mihaela Nedelcu (2009). Drawing on the case of the mobility of Romanian professionals, this researcher pointed to the centrality of reticular processes in the accumulation of migratory resources. She showed that social network is in the basis of the economic, social, political or cultural mechanisms that guide migration trajectories, professional projects, exchanges and material and symbolic circulations between migration poles (Nedelcu, 2009, p. 167). LinkedIn migrant groups fit into this logic: groups according to the place of origin, according to the place of installation, according to the presumed identity of their members. Here follow some examples: *British expatriate networking group*, *British expats in the USA*, *Expats in Germany*, *Canadian German expatriates*, *German Irish expatriates*, etc. Just typing the abbreviation "expat"⁴ on the internal search engine reveals more than a thousand groups.

⁴ For this paper, I use the terms "expatriation" and "migration" with no semantic distinction. Ambiguities exist, however, as for their meaning and connotations (Koch, 2013).

Comparing LinkedIn Migrant Groups in Terms of their Underlying *Illusio*

The present paper draws its main thesis on the results of a comparative study between two LinkedIn migrant groups: in the first, migrants are of Greek origin, in the second, their origin is French. Both groups are “private”, i.e. not accessible to non-members. This is the reason for which I prefer, in order to respect the privacy of their members, neither to reveal their exact designations nor to provide quotes from their participants. Indeed, Guillaume Latzko-Toth and Serge Proulx (2013, p. 41) point out the problematic distinction between “public” and “private” sphere when it comes to online discussion forums. The authors highlight that discussants are not always aware of the degree to which they are publicly exposed when exchanging on the Internet and point out that a sudden visibility of such groups, even within a scholar work such a scientific article, amounts to “turn the spotlight on what was in the darkness” (Latzko-Toth & Proulx, 2013, p. 42).

About 200 “threads of discussion” for each group were extracted and registered in June 2013, covering the period of approximately a year. They were first examined in relation to the practices and profiles of the discussants (the roll-out of the discussions, the types and the intensity of the participants’ engagement, the gender and the geographic location of the latter), then in terms of the messages conveyed (speech acts and referents). A content analysis including a categorical semantic approach (L. Bardin, 1977) was a main part of the project. For the present paper, which aims at demonstrating the heuristic value of the Bourdieusian approach when it comes to ICT uses, I will only present results that are relevant to the article’s main point and refrain from thoroughly displaying the project, which goes beyond the comparison of these two groups as it is presented here.

The Greek group, established in 2007 by a Greek expatriate, aims at “bringing together Greek communities around the world and exchanging business opportunities”. The discussions are not visible to non-members, and admission is granted on request. Three administrators (two of them located in Greece, the third abroad) are reported. On the 4th of February 2013, the group had 4,993 members. Most discussants display a location in Greece (see Figure 1).

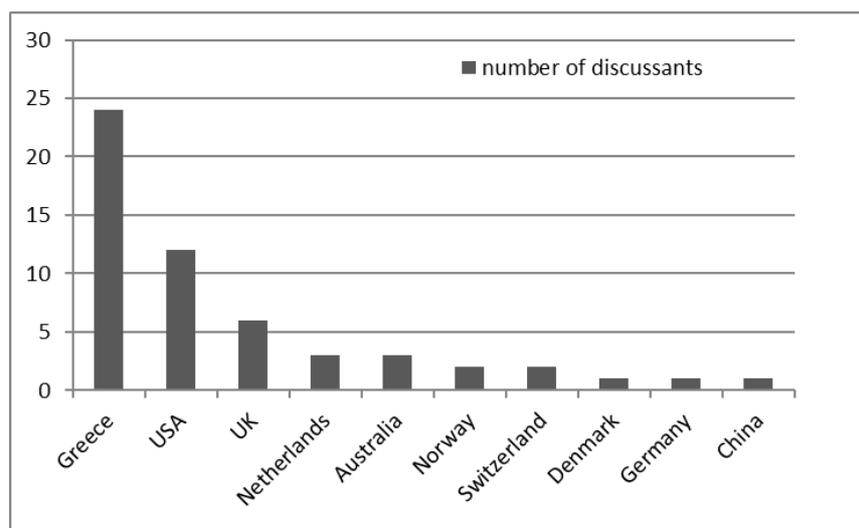


Figure 1: The geographic localization of those who initiate discussions within the Greek group.

The French group announces itself as a non-profit network, created in 2010, which aims at addressing French expatriates to provide “community services and media” and “facilitate the

expatriation”. On the 4th of February 2013, it had 1,089 members. Almost have of the participants display a location in France (see Figure 2).

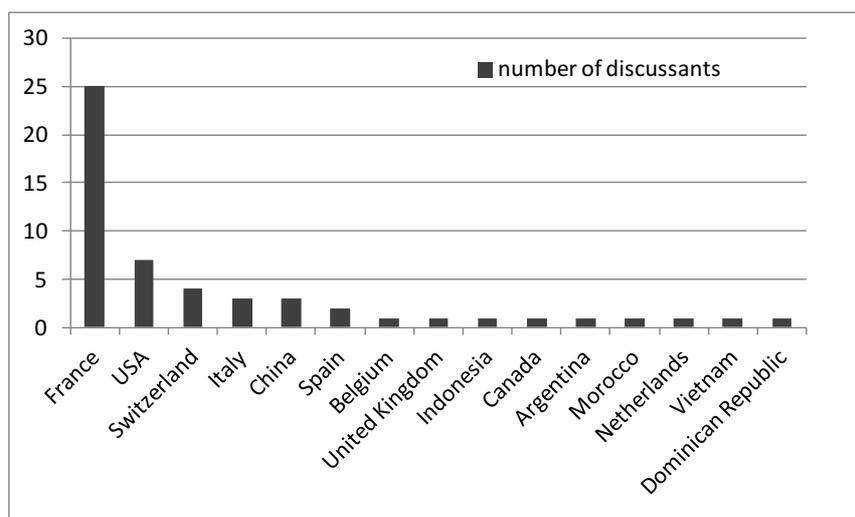


Figure 2: The geographic localization of those who initiate discussions within the French group.

Analysis of the Greek group reveals that Greece is the main referent in the discussions (Figure 3); and referring to Greece entails exchanging about the Greek crisis. The group becomes a field where participants share the latest news, display their knowledge in economic, historical, political, etc. issues, provide analyzes and forecasts, agree or argue (more or less) politely on what seems to have become the great “trauma” of contemporary Greeks. They seek to identify those responsible for the crisis, its victims, and its consequences for themselves and for others. They point to the irresponsible governance of the country during the recent decades, but also to the role of international organizations (EU, IMF, etc.) and the geopolitical stakes in which a small country like Greece is trapped. They return to the past and question the very meaning of “Greekness”, the legacy of ancient Greece, Byzantium, etc. They criticize the mentality of an inhuman materialism and individualism that seems to have transformed contemporary Greece into a cold society. Sometimes they compare themselves to other countries, questioning the inevitable hierarchies built and lived between different societal groups. They finally raise the issue of the role or even the duty of the Greek diaspora and explore the horizons of action available to them.

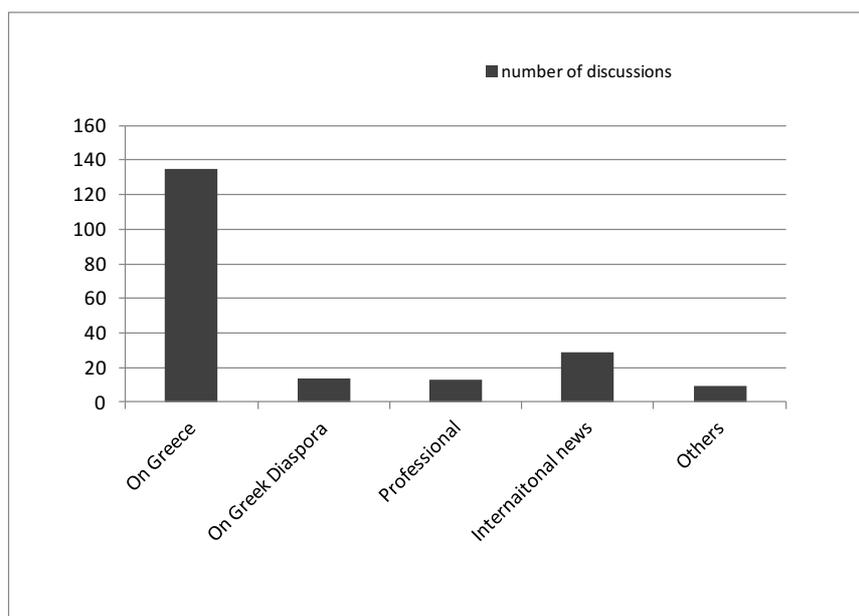


Figure 3: The referents of the discussions within the Greek group.

The main referent within the French group, the issue that unquestionably dominates the discussions, is that of expatriation (Figure 4), addressed both in its practical, functionalist aspects, as well as in terms of its identity repercussions –and discussed almost exclusively in French (only 10 posts are written in English). Some lexical fields are significant: “shock”, “risk”, “hardship”, “investment”, “cultural”, “tax”, “tax exile”, “mobility”, “experience”, “profit”, “added value”, “prepared”, “coming back”, “optimize”, etc. The use of the platform as a support to promote business is much more pronounced than in the Greek group; some participants explicitly appear as specialized consultants in expatriation.

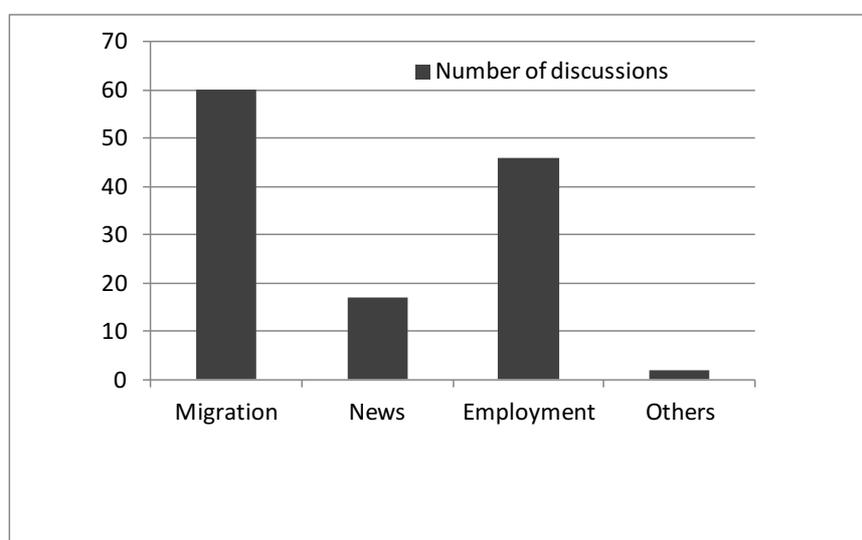


Figure 4: The referents of the discussions within the French group.

Concerns about self-image are not formulated in the same way between Greeks and French. For the former, the question is the image of the country, tarnished by the current crisis. For the latter, it is the direct contact with the Other, on the background of the French colonial past, which colors the discussions. The pride of the “nation” and the “origins” still transpire through the contents published, but France is not an issue to debate; it does not structure the narrative construction that underlies the discussants’ exchanges, as it is in the case of the

Greek group. It is the human being, the migrant, who is positioned at the center of the narrative; it is the experience of migration that builds the main story. For Greeks, the need is to assert membership; for French, it is about exploring an individual experience.

The fact that Greek and French migrants perceive differently the objective of an “ethnic” group on a professional social media may be linked – and it is this thesis that I defend *in fine* in this paper – to the *illusio* that unites them and renders their participation meaningful. The use of the platform is thus conditioned, beyond the technical, economic and social prescriptions of the device, by a certain belief about what constitutes the *relevant question* for the group, the stake of the exchange:

To begin to argue, one must be convinced that arguments worth the discussion, and must believe, in any case, in the merits of the exchange. The *illusio* is not an explicit principle, one of those theories that are raised to be defended, but an action, one of those routinized things we do, because they are always done like that [. . .] When asked about the reasons for their visceral involvement in the game, the participants have ultimately nothing to answer and the arguments that can be invoked in such cases are merely *post festum* rationalizations intended to justify, to oneself as well as to others, an unjustifiable investment. (Bourdieu 1997, p. 147)

My argument in this paper is that the representations and patterns of thought that determine how Greek and French migrants invest a professional social media should be associated to distinct *habitus*. Indeed, between France and Greece, the relation to expatriation is not the same: neither in the past nor today; neither as to the reasons for the departure, nor in terms of destination countries. This relation was forged through history and continues to be reproduced in everyday life. It entails the construction of a certain self-image, the image of one’s native country or country of origin, of one’s membership (“national”, cultural, etc.) and of the Other. Greeks and French join online migrant groups in a differentiated manner because they are impregnated with these socio-historically determined representations, which are associated to the position that their countries hold in the international migration field.

Promises and Pitfalls of the Analytical Framework

Did You Say “Disposition”?

Analyzing online practices in terms of “dispositions” forging *habitus* entails focusing on the *modus operandi* of the social “agents” (Pierre Bourdieu rejects the term “actors”, see Bourdieu, 2013, p. 81). It means examining the way they seem to have incorporated several *doxa* and to have developed a specific *ethos*. However, analyzing online migrant practices in terms of “dispositions” may sound as an *oxymoron*. Migrant populations are supposed, by definition, to incarnate the hybridity that characterizes contemporary societies: to what extent can the behavior of a Greek or a French migrant be attributed to his/her alleged “Greeknness” or “Frenchness”? We can reply to this question by arguing that adherence to an “ethnic” group, as a conscious and rational individual act implies a certain acceptance of the collective identity the group claims. According to social psychology (Jacquemain *et al.*, 2005–06), it is not because individuals can combine various belongings that the intensity of them is weaker. Furthermore, we should not forget that the constitution of the groups of our empirical study is far from being purely “transnational”. As shown before, in both cases examined, most of the discussions are initiated by individuals located in the country of origin (Greece and France, respectively). Far from generating non-territorial spaces, the platform favors a rather concentric organization of migrant populations. The role of the center reveals to be important

because it establishes the dynamics of each group and fixes its agenda. Of course, other discussants can significantly influence the flow and the content of the messages conveyed. However, their activities seem to be “isolated cases”.

Has the center the right to speak on behalf of migrants? Isn't there an ethical issue? Indeed, the center may not be legitimate to speak for them, but it can *address* itself to them. Those who initiate and carry the discussions function, in many ways, as “leaders” in the sense given to the term by the anthropologist Christian Geffray (1997). According to this author, the words of the leaders are not autonomous speeches but should be understood within the community they address:

The leader speaks and what he says, the object of his words, cannot be regarded as irrelevant to the public around him [. . .]. The leader [. . .] must be able to offer his voice and develop his speech, so that the members of the population that he addresses will recognize, in one way or another, the expression of a point of view they share”. (Geffray, 1997, p. 5)

In this frame, “disposition” is linked to *habitus*. It reflects what is significant for the discussants – though not necessarily for all members – of the group. Our last concern will be to demonstrate how, in this study, online migrants' *habitus* are associated to their countries' position within the international migration field.

Linking *Habitus* to the Field

The concept of migration field, inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's theory, has been developed in geography. According to Gildas Simon:

The migration field can be defined as a transnational space that unites – regardless of their distance – places of origin, of transit and of installation. It refers to a space structured by stable and regular human migrations as well as by other flows (material, ideational) induced by this movement. The usefulness of this analytical tool is that it applies to all geographic and cultural combinations, and that this social construction is characterized by its fluidity and its potential for spatial recompositions, while maintaining long term stability. This concept has the advantage of being located at the articulation of the concept of field, whose generative fertility was shown by Pierre Bourdieu, and the concept of migration space, understood as a social space produced by the actors of the geographical scope. (2008, p. 15)

Migration field is a “space under tension because it is invested as a carrier of migrant hopes, utopias and myths, imaginaries deeply rooted in collective mentalities, in the shifting borders between identity and otherness” (Simon, 2008, pp. 15–16). It carries the symbolic charge of the act of crossing political boundaries that remain more than ever a reality in a world inhabited by security concerns, as well as issues related to social mobility (Simon, 2008 p. 19). The social migration field, as a product of history subtended by the economic, political, etc. imbalances which determine the flow of people on a global scale, shapes, through the trace it leaves on the public institutional policies – including State and school – the way the members of a society understand their relation to themselves and to others. In this sense, it becomes symbolic capital, as “transfiguration of a balance of power into meaning” (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 347). Understanding the migration *habitus* developed in two different societies entails questioning the way each of them addresses, through its history and by its

institutions, the issue of migration. Inevitably, it involves investigating the role that these societies hold in the migration field.

In 2012, according to data provided by the French government, 1,611,054 French were officially registered at French consulates outside the country (which counts over 66 million habitants), including 42.2 percent of “bi-nationals”. Cédric Duchêne-Lacroix (2005) highlights the bias that the French system of consular registrations engenders, but also notes that, from a historical standpoint, French emigration proves “numerically small compared to many other European countries, which, owing to several demographic and economic crises, have fueled strong migration flows to America and within the continent” (Duchêne-Lacroix, 2005, 847). French emigration also proves to be limited compared to the waves of immigration that France, traditionally an “immigrant country in a continent of emigrants” (Blanc-Chaléard, 2001, p. 9), has encountered.

On the contrary, Greek diaspora, one of the oldest in the world, refers, according to 2009 data provided by the General Secretariat for Greeks Abroad, to five million people, which corresponds to almost 50 percent of the population of the current Greek State (around 11 million). It spreads all over the globe except for a large part of the Asian continent (east of the Middle East), with more than half of it in North America (Bruneau, 2004). These calculations are of course quite generous to the extent that they try to take account of the descendants of Greeks from mixed marriages. However, Greek diaspora has undeniably a long history. Over the years, the country’s several structural problems and its economic and political dependency on the “great powers” have fueled a rather idealistic rhetoric of migration. From the 1980s, with the improvement of the living conditions in Greece, the migratory movement declined considerably and the rhetoric of “extramural success” relatively faded. Nevertheless, the crisis in which the country has collapsed since 2010 seems to have revived both. Since 2011, some speak of “exodus” and “brain drain”, related to the problem of unemployment in Greece, which peaked in 2012 and continues (in 2012, unemployment averaged 55 percent in youth under 25 years and 21 percent for the general population [OCDE 2013]).

In this sense, in France, a country of immigration by definition and former colonial power, the relation to migration is not the same as in Greece, traditionally country of emigration, seen even by some as a “crypto-colony” of Western Europe and the United States (Herzfeld, 2013, p. 492). It would thus be illusory to ignore the imbalances of the migration field and the way they are reflected in the “common sense”, the narratives that share the members of a society, transformed into “culture”, “webs of significance” (Geertz, 1973), and symbolic capital. The latter forge the collective *habitus* in the form of “schemes of perception, thought and action” based on a certain definition of the world, or a way of looking at it by making it “exist as a relevant issue by reference to a particular way of questioning reality” (Bourdieu, 1980a, p. 89).

In this frame, a society’s relation to migration is to be apprehended in connection with the position it occupies in the migration field, which is subject to domination rules and games within the political and economic international sphere. To summarize, we can advance the thesis that the topography of the (international) migration field, both in its diachronic (historical) and synchronic form, affect the symbolic constitution of national fields (in terms of narratives of self-image, relation to others, etc.). The latter shape – to varying degrees of course, according to their historical temporality – the *habitus* of social agents, which in turn reproduce or restructure the immigration field.

Conclusion

Understanding ICT uses through the prism of *habitus* is the challenge that inspired this article. It led us to examine how Greek and French migrants invest in a professional online networking platform, because of their own relationship to migration. I tried to show that this relation is socio-historically determined, related to the positions occupied by Greece and France in the international migration field. These positions generate representations and narratives that operate as dispositions and symbolic capital for each group. Obviously, linking the micro-social to the macro-social level, that is, trying to explain behaviors through their social and historical inscriptions, may prove misleading, lead to shortcuts, reproduce stereotypes. However, the need for *historicizing* collective behaviors seems to be an essential prerequisite for their understanding. In this sense, Pierre Bourdieu's Field theory is of heuristic value as it helps to analyze communication processes bearing in mind the time and space in which they are realized.

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