

MIGRATION

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V. S. Starikov, A. A. Ivanova, M. L. Nee
**TRANSNATIONALISM ONLINE: EXPLORING MIGRATION PROCESSES
WITH LARGE DATA SETS**

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MIGRATION PROCESSES WITH
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ТРАНСНАЦИОНАЛИЗМ В РЕЖИМЕ
ONLINE: КАК ИССЛЕДОВАТЬ МИГРАЦИОННЫЕ
ПРОЦЕССЫ НА БОЛЬШИХ
МАССИВАХ ДАННЫХ?

Valentin S. STARIKOV¹ — *Cand. Sci. (Soc.)*,
Research Fellow
E-MAIL: v.starikov@spbu.ru
ORCID: 0000-0003-1434-4958

СТАРИКОВ Валентин Сергеевич — кандидат социологических наук, сотрудник лаборатории «Транснационализм и миграционные процессы: сравнительный и институциональный анализ», инженер-исследователь Факультета социологии, Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет, Санкт-Петербург, Россия.
E-MAIL: v.starikov@spbu.ru
ORCID: 0000-0003-1434-4958

¹ Saint Petersburg State University, Saint Petersburg, Russia

Anastasia. A. IVANOVA¹ — Master's Degree Student

E-MAIL: anaspis100@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0003-4296-8530

Maxim L. NEE¹ — Post-Graduate Student

E-MAIL: jintae@mail.ru

ORCID: 0000-0002-7285-0237

¹ Saint Petersburg State University, Saint Petersburg, Russia

Abstract. The exponential growth of online technologies in everyday life transforms the very contours of social phenomena, processes, and institutions well known to sociologists. We discuss these transformations in two interrelated areas: transnational migration and extremism. First, the paper proposes an approach to examine «transnationalism online» as a subset of transnational migration studies. Second, it presents a critical review of how contemporary scholars study extremist activities and discourse of those who are involved in migration with a special focus on online manifestations of extremism. In a concluding part of the paper we present theoretical and methodological comments on the paths in examining the «dark side» of transnationalism online.

Keywords: transnational migration, transnational practices, extremism, online space, Internet, virtual diasporas

ИВАНОВА Анастасия Андреевна — магистрант факультета социологии,

Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет, Санкт-Петербург, Россия.

E-MAIL: anaspis100@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0003-4296-8530

НИ Максим Леонидович — аспирант факультета социологии, Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет,

Санкт-Петербург, Россия.

E-MAIL: jintae@mail.ru

ORCID: 0000-0002-7285-0237

Аннотация. Стремительное проникновение онлайн-технологий в повседневную жизнь общества видоизменяет привычный облик социальных явлений, процессов и институтов. Авторы статьи рассматривают данные изменения в двух взаимосвязанных исследовательских областях: транснациональной миграции и экстремистской деятельности. Статья раскрывает возможные подходы к изучению «транснационализма онлайн» как особого поля внутри исследований транснациональной миграции и предлагает критический обзор современных исследований экстремистской активности и дискурса акторов, вовлеченных в миграцию. Особое внимание уделяется проявлениям экстремизма в онлайн-среде. В заключении авторы делают выводы о теоретических и методологических перспективах исследования «обратной стороны» транснационализма онлайн через анализ транснациональных практик мигрантов в интернете.

Ключевые слова: транснациональная миграция, транснациональные практики, экстремизм, онлайн пространство, интернет, виртуальные диаспоры

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This paper seeks to achieve two interrelated goals. First, it proposes an approach to examine ‘transnationalism online’ as a subset of transnational migration studies. The basic methodological framework of this paper is to observe ‘transnationalism online’ through the lens of sociology of everyday life as well as in relation to the concept of ‘transnational practices’. Second, the paper presents a critical review of how contemporary scholars study extremist activities and discourses of those who are involved in migration processes with a special focus on online manifestations of extremism. The argument is developed to answer the following questions:

1) What is transnationalism? What conceptual frameworks are the most promising for studying transnational migration in the era of online sociality?

2) How do virtual social spaces allow to observe and to measure transnationalism? How do the Internet and online space more generally constitute, maintain, and transform transnationalism?

3) How does ‘transnationalism online’ provide or prevent migrants’ involvement into extremist activities? What steps should be made to develop research on a ‘dark side’ of ‘transnationalism online’?

Transnational approach in migration studies

There are three basic approaches to the study of migration in the current scholarly production. First, a traditional approach implies analysis of migration as human movements across borders [Jasso, Rosenzweig, 1990; Castles, Miller, 2009]. This approach has dominated the literature in the second half of the 20th century. The second approach, a post-migration studies/dynamic/situation [Martiniello, 2013], is a relatively new trend that suggests analysis of what happens to people *after* they migrate. The third approach involves integration of research perspectives of the first and second approaches with the focus on specific phenomena of *transnationalism* — simultaneous inclusion of migrants in social networks of society of origin and the host society, the constant movement of migrants between different national spaces and everyday worlds, the financial participation of migrants in the country of origin’s economy and their economic activities in the host country. In their social, economic and political circumstances, the majority of migrants who cross borders of the sovereign states and acquire formal legal status of belonging (citizenship or some informal recognition of belonging), usually maintain durable and extensive links to their home countries, families, friends, and larger social circles. Moving across the jurisdictions of nation-states, they can belong to several social spaces at the same time; for instance the receiving country diaspora and the family in the country of origin.

Transnational migration [Faist, 2013, Vertovec, 1999] is a new phenomenon in migration, growing as a result of globalization and regionalization. On the one hand, transnational migration is characterized by migrants’ special social connections: they are simultaneously ‘here and there’, connected with the host community and

the place of departure. New social spaces are crystallized in a way that embraces several local places beyond national borders. Migrants' transnationalism exists in different forms: from diffusion, to sustained organizations and communities. On the other hand, transnational migration involves not only traditional host societies such as the USA, Scandinavia, Germany, but also Eurasian societies that experience new migration flows in the recent decades. The collapse of the USSR has initiated these flows and determined a new social and economic reality in Eurasia and in the entire world.

The idea of transnationalism has weathered many storms and changed its appearance over the years. The very notion of 'transnationalism' has entered into migration studies in the early 1990s and since then it has gained a significant following among professional sociologists who explored the problems of migration [Faist, 2013]. The stream of research on transnationalism emerged with the intent to re-conceptualize migration processes by shifting the emphasis of research efforts from the analysis of dichotomy of the "country of exodus" versus the "receiving country" towards a fully acknowledged transnational perspective (see [Glick-Shiller et al., 1992] for one of the early statements). Transnationalism can be broadly conceived as "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" [Basch et al., 1994: 8]. Current scholarship within this field of research widely acknowledges the fact that migration is a dynamic process that encompasses different national and global geographic and cultural ties, and political networks, as well as social structural opportunities open and/or closed for migrants at home and abroad. From this point of view, people moving across countries can be described as transmigrants [Glick-Shiller et al., 1995; Faist, 2000], and their multi-territorial behaviors as 'glocal' or 'translocal' [Giulianotti, Robertson, 2007; Portes, Rumbaut, 2001]. However, there is no evidence that transnational approaches form a coherent theory or a set of theories yet. They can be more adequately described as a perspective for studying cross-border phenomena [Faist, 2010].

A brief history of the concept "transnationalism" is reconstructed by L. Remennick [Remennick, 2002]. The notion of transnationalism was coined with the purpose of a description of the flows of capital and economic resources across and beyond national borders and later adopted for the studies of migration and citizenship. In the 1990s social scientists also debated the historical novelty of transnationalism as an empirical phenomenon. Now it is commonly accepted that contemporary transnationalism, enabled by recent historical developments of cheap means of transportation and communication, is qualitatively different in its scale and impact from transnational networks that existed earlier in history. During the debates some interesting distinctions have been made, for instance between transnationalism-from-above and transnationalism-from-below: the former referring to the activities of global corporations and international organizations, the latter to grassroots transnationalism — activities of small businesses and ordinary people, cultural and economic exchanges and interactions reaching beyond national borders. Further distinctions can also be made, one such example is the distinction between formal and informal aspects of transnationalism. Several puzzles should be solved in order to study transnational migration. While the majority of migration research is based

on methodological nationalism [Wimmer, Glick-Schiller, 2003], changes of migration flows requires changes in theoretical perspective and methodology, as well as in mechanisms of the state regulation. There is not much unification resulting from globalization and regionalization processes, rather the proliferation of everyday worlds [Robertson, 1992]. Therefore transnational migrants simultaneously enter two or more everyday worlds. It seems relevant to rethink the problems of social inclusion and exclusion of migrants, as existing approaches assume homogeneity of migrants' everyday life and/or its congruence with an everyday life of the host community.

Transnationalism can be analyzed within different theoretical frameworks and empirical models. The most basic decision is whether transnationalism should be regarded as a real social phenomenon, amenable to empirical measurement, or it should be considered only as a research perspective, a lens that allows researchers to overcome the limitations of their views on social reality. This social reality would be characterized by a territorial nation-state as the main structural element and the unit of analysis, and would take into account the important processes that take place 'over' and 'outside' the boundaries of these states. In social science literature transnationalism as a phenomenon is often operationalized from the standpoint of networks. In regards to this notion, we follow the first approach, in other words, we consider transnationalism an empirical phenomenon, however, we use elements of the second approach, accepting that nation-state is not a universal unit of analysis.

The rubric of transnationalism embraces quite different empirical phenomena. On the one hand, members of 'old' and 'new' diasporas have institutionalized membership in 'commonalities' and communities, unambiguously identifying themselves as participants of transnational social structures. On the other hand, transnationalism comprises less specific situations that are experienced by almost all migrants such as visiting the homeland for holidays, being in contact with relatives in the country of origin, sending money to them, watching the country of origin's TV programming and Internet production, speaking their mother tongue abroad, and so on. Not all scholars classify these activities as transnational; some see them as deriving from social structures only. We believe, however, that the main theoretical problem lies in the following question: how do macro- and micro- level phenomena and processes interrelate with each other? On the one hand, the macro perspective of transnational migration flows is rooted in the capitalist system of relations, global and regional inequality, and the division of labor in the 21st century. On the other hand, transnationalism is produced and reproduced in everyday life of local groups and communities, in everyday interactions of migrants and host societies. Thus, we face the need to study both social relations and (relatively) independent manifestations of everyday life.

How could everyday practices of transnational migrants be framed and studied as *sui generis* reality, simultaneously independent from and interdependent on institutional social order? This task requires additional analytical tools — namely, those derived from the sociology of everyday life [Goffman, 1983; Sztompka, 2008]. Everyday life is constituted by routine interactions in social contexts; thus, analytics of human interaction is clue to the comprehension of everyday life, including its ongoing

inequalities. Three principles are crucial for the comprehension of everyday interactions. We need to 1) analyze the emotional dynamics of interactions in a variety of contexts; 2) explore what kind of social Self is constituted in social interactions; 3) distinguish between “voluntary” and “forced” social interactions: the former is practiced with goodwill and for social interaction’s sake, while humans are impelled to participate in the latter by the way of production of his/her life which could be rather traumatic (including “lonely crowds” in urban areas). Therefore, sociology of everyday life looks into the issues of social Self and identity as well as the mechanisms of emerging and reproducing social bonds, communities, and networks.

At the same time, everyday life as a reality of interpersonal/social relations could be distinguished from the approaches based on the notion of “culture” (“culture of everyday life”). A similar idea was realized by A. Papakostas in the comparative study of trust and public sphere in Greece and Sweden [Papakostas, 2012]. He treats everyday worlds as specific combinations of social relations with blurred boundaries. As social relations determine those groups, individuals and organizations being recognized as credible or not credible, everyday worlds characterized by different interactional structures get isolated from each other, not because of some intrinsic properties, but due to a particular constellation of relations. For example, migrant workers interact with each other, with the authorities (the police, the Federal migration service), and with the residents of the host society in different ways.

The basic concept for studying transnationalism based on the sociology of everyday life perspective is *transnational practices*. This concept is widely used in scholarly literature, however almost all proposed definitions are quite vague. The typical example is: “transnational ... practices are the nuts and bolts and the glue that hold the system together” [Sklair, 1991: 75]. We adopt the definition of A. M. Stepanov that is a rare exception of this tendency of ambiguity. He argues that “transnational practices are typical (routine for this type of migrant), institutionalized forms of social activity that allow migrants to participate simultaneously in the social life of the country of origin and of the host society, due to being in transnational condition” [Stepanov, 2018: 47—48]. Transnational practices shape transnational phenomena and, at the same time, are shaped by the dynamics of the reproduction of transnationalism in institutionalizing everyday life. The author further makes a distinction between three levels: a) everyday life; b) transnationalism as a formal principle of everyday life; c) practices as institutionalized forms of everyday transnationalism [Stepanov, 2018: 48—49].

Thus, at least one of the possible — and promising — ways to conceptualize transnationalism lies in a theoretical shift from the nation-states and formal institutions to everyday life and transnational practices. This shift helps to solve two important tasks. The first one is to describe and to explain how transnational phenomena exist in everyday life without reducing them to social structures or individual actions. The second one is to inquire into the necessary conditions and elements of interdependence mechanisms between macro- and micro-levels: without knowledge of contingent everyday practices we are not able to estimate their influence on and sensitivity to structural changes in labor markets, migration policies, transportation and communication networks, ideological doctrines, etc.

One of the most crucial problems in applying this framework is that transnational practices can be hardly identified *per se* as they do not evolve as discrete types of actions. In this way, social scientists should recognize the challenges for their traditional methodological approaches [Ruppert, Law, Savage, 2013: 35—40]: by focusing on transactional actors (instead of isolated individual units), by visualization as a method not only of presentation, but of analysis of new data, by continuous time instead of temporality conceived as a series of separate states, and by the analysis of whole population instead of sampling procedures employed in mainstream inferential statistics (see also: [Mackenzie, McNally, 2013]). Taking into account both the new social phenomena and the methodological challenges for studying them, we propose the framework of “transnationalism online”.

‘Transnationalism Online’

The exponential growth of information and communication technologies (ICT) along with the Internet’s penetration into everyday life challenge the necessity of face-to-face co-presence as the most important condition in which transnational interactions can occur. Such an assumption underlies much of transnationalism research but is increasingly undermined by the development of online communicative channels, transnational digital networks, Internet-based transnational identities, communities, diasporas, and fraternities/sororities of compatriots. Contemporary ICT form and organize spaces that extend beyond territorial boundaries. This multifaceted impact of the ICT is often considered in terms of an emergence of new forms of sociality, like virtual diasporas and online-migrants [Axel, 2004; Brinkerhoff, 2009; Diminescu, 2008; Swaby, 2013]. The researchers assume that “the Online” can foster the processes of identity construction since it allows to mobilize, to express solidarity and identity publicly, to exchange material goods, and to participate in transnational political, economic, social, and cultural activities [Adamson, 2012]. In this respect, “the Online” as a *sui generis* reality not only helps to maintain the existing transnational ties but also to actively participate in their formation by involving additional actors, increasing complexity of the social relations, and causing changes in the formation of identities. Thus, a new phenomenon is emerging that we call *extended digital transnationalism*, or simply *‘transnationalism online’*.

Let us turn to a very simple ethnographic illustration. One of the most admirable and highly anticipated sporting events in the summer of 2018 was the FIFA World Cup (Mundial) in the Russian Federation. It has been observed by sociologists that the World Cup is not only a global event but also a quite formal transnational phenomenon. They underline that the vast majority of sports tourists could be considered by social scientists as transnational migrants [Souvik, 2017; Agergaard, 2018]. What has appeared as absolutely novel during the 2018 FIFA World Cup was a profoundly changed structure of “digital environment” [Robins, 2000]. Since the 2014 tournament in Brazil, Internet penetration has grown from 42.3% to 54.5%. Moreover, up to 73% of the total Internet consumption belongs to mobile gadgets. In 2017 an average user spent about 3 hours a day using application environments for everyday social activities. And while the prevailing digital trend of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil was social media, the tournament in Russia has been transformed

into “the World Cup of Mobile”¹, or as we define it in this paper, the World Cup of *Online-driven sociality*.

What is more important than the extensive growth is the emergence and the expansion of new forms of human-computer-human interactions based on artificial neural networks, machine learning, independent learning, deep learning, reinforcement learning, etc. One of the most striking examples is the current ubiquity of virtual assistants. During the 2018 FIFA World Cup the use of AI-based software agents that performed services for individuals was the easiest way of communication between people who spoke different languages. By using mobile devices, tourists had a chance to maintain rather sophisticated conversations using automatic translation services or emotion recognition software. In reality, some tourists in their everyday practices could temporarily fall under the category of transnational migrants belonging both to Russia and the country they came from. At the same time, their intersubjectivities emerged and were maintained by a remote place driven by the everyday practices of those who develop and manufacture software agents. In this fashion, the use of virtual assistants do not limit transnational stance but rather extends it in one way or another. This is how transnationalism online works. To generalize this empirical evidence at a more abstract level, transnationalism theory shows its effectiveness in the studies of international migration because of its ability to take into account uncertainty and ambivalence of the migrants’ social condition, being “here and there” at the same time, while transnationalism online takes into account the fact that social interaction is carried out not only “here and there” but rather “here, there, and somewhere else”; in other words, beyond both sending and receiving countries. In the ultimate way, transnational migrants need no physical presence and co-existence at all to feel themselves a part of any other community (real or virtual), and appeal to the “third party” of transnational migration processes. As we mentioned above, the crucial role here belongs to ICT. Applying Stepanov’s scheme, ICT can be regarded as a tool of re-institutionalization in everyday transnationalism.

What are the implications for studying transnational migration from this perspective? We can identify at least two points related to the existence of extended digital transnationalism as 1) the new form of social co-existence, and 2) an analytical problem. The first point influences the very way social research is organized. The Online is a space where transnational processes can be visualized and documented in their most visible form by means of contemporary methods such as social network analysis (SNA), which allows to literally “map” transnational digital networks. The study of networked links allows to reveal transnational processes as they occur online, and also to shed light on the question of how digital interactions re-define transnational migration. At a more abstract level, these methodological issues are discussed under the rubric of “social life of methods”. The research on social life of methods is devoted to the exploration of how the proliferation of digital data archives challenges and changes traditional positivist views on social research methodology. It is an attempt to provide methodological reflection on the fact that digital data is widely and publicly available, making it possible to study whole populations and large arrays of unstructured data, which are both produced and consumed by the actors

¹ Tan J. Why Russia 2018 is poised to be the World Cup of Mobile. *Digital Market Asia*. June 21, 2018. URL: <http://www.digitalmarket.asia/russia-2018-poised-world-cup-mobile> (accessed: 09.10.2018)

themselves (like in Instagram and similar social networks) [Wyatt et al., 2013; Beer, Burrows, 2013; Gillespie, 2013]. The intuition that guides this approach was expressed by A. Abbott: “the more behaviors are conducted in electronic form, the more often and more things can be measured” [Abbott, 2000: 298].

The second implication belongs to the sphere of formulating and answering new research questions. The development of ICT raises a number of new conceptual questions related to the role of the diasporas, groups, organizations, and social formations. For example, it is an open question whether feelings of ethnic belonging and identity can be realized through transnational “imagined communities” [Anderson, 1983]. As Anderson has shown, the development of mass literature and printed newspapers facilitated by commercialization of printing technology and the emergence of “print capitalism” played a significant role in the development of modern European nationalism by allowing people in distant localities to identify with their compatriots in a unified space and time. In developing this classical insight, it is reasonable to ask whether the nature of “imagined communities” has changed with the advent of the ICT and strengthening of transnational relationships in the age of the Internet and social networks. From the methodological point of view, these conditions raise the question of suitable approaches and methods for the study of digital diasporas and global transnational communities. What are the new forms of the “local”, “national”, and “transnational”, and how is one to take into account in research this multiplicity of interactions that extend beyond borders?

In scholarly accounts, as well as in popular literature, there is a consensus on the crucial role of new information technologies in creating links among migrants, members of civil society, and politicians [Newland, 2010]. As has been demonstrated in a number of papers, these connections have significant impacts on traditional social interactions and may even facilitate the emergence of separate communities of online migrants [Brinkerhoff, 2009; Diminescu, 2008, Swaby, 2013]. Today more and more studies are focused on interrelationships between new technologies and migration processes [Brinkerhoff, 2005, 2006; Diminescu, 2008, Everett, 2009]. These studies introduced new terms, such as “transnational online communities”, “virtual/digital diasporas”, “ethnic online public spheres” [Kissau, Hunger, 2010]. Other research projects aim at studying the construction of migrants’ collective identities and political involvement. It has been shown that diasporas often use social media to create a specific public sphere for support during integration or for filling in the “social void” that occurs when moving to another country [Diminescu, 2012; Ridings, Gefen, 2004]. In regards to this notion, scholars study the importance of online networks as a kind of a “safe space” for migrants’ social interactions where they are able to discuss their identities and, in particular, to express their identities’ hybrid nature [Brinkerhoff, 2009; Swaby, 2013].

Psychological aspects of migrants’ network activities are also quite popular as a research topic among migration scholars. The studies emphasize the role of the world wide web (WWW) as an accumulator of collective memory and also as a space for re-construction of the country of origin’s image and of the migrants’ own identities that is often accompanied by trauma, shame, denial, and displacement [Bernal, 2013; Estévez, 2009]. New information technologies change the experience of migration

by forming (online) nostalgia that provides a sense of belonging and proximity to the country of origin [Estévez, 2009]. Nostalgia is understood as a longing for home, which no longer exists or has never existed [Boym, 2001]. A good illustration of that is the study of the virtual war memorial Awate.com that demonstrates how immigrants act as transnational citizens who build their own history of war, death, and mourning [Bernal, 2013]. New ICT are also being studied in connection to cross-border political mobilization [Brinkerhoff, 2009], and with conflicts and civil wars [Brinkerhoff, 2006]. An example is the research on the Tibetan Buddhist youth's use of new media to build global networks and to construct the image of the Chinese government as an enemy [Drissel, 2008]. The same tools help to produce the structures of transnational communication between the Chinese diaspora and its mainland and to create a favorable image of the "new China" [Ding, 2007]. We should conclude, therefore, that the Internet promotes formation of online spaces that have significant effects on migrants' behavior in host societies.

One of the most recent and promising concepts consolidating the new roles of the Online in establishing and maintaining social ties is an e-diaspora, or e-community². E-diaspora could be identified as a migrant collective that organizes itself and is active online and whose interactions are 'enhanced' by digital exchange [Diminescu, 2012]. E-diaspora is also a dispersed collective, a heterogeneous entity whose existence rests on the elaboration of a common direction, a direction not defined once and for all, but which is constantly renegotiated as the collective evolves. It is self-defined as it grows or diminishes not by the inclusion or the exclusion of members, but through the voluntary process of individuals joining or leaving the collective — simply by establishing hyperlinks or removing them from websites.

To provide solid theoretical grounds for studying 'transnationalism online' we propose to apply the concept of transnational practices in the framework of sociology of everyday life, as it was characterized above. E-diasporas are difficult to grasp as they are unstable 'collectives' being constantly reconstructed by the addition of every new member. Various empirical studies on transnational online communities and virtual digital diasporas identify emergent tendencies and characterize users' multiple experiences. However, they are often unable to answer the following questions: what are temporal and material limitations of interacting online? Are people who interact online acquainted beyond the Internet? Under what conditions could online communication replace face-to-face contacts both in efficiency and emotional value? How do new online practices integrate into or replace existing transnational and non-transnational practices? How does online communication change the discourse and values of people in relation to their everyday worlds and the corresponding problems?

² Those who work within this framework prefer the term 'e-diaspora' to that of 'digital diaspora' because the latter "may lend to confusion given the increasingly frequent use of the notions of 'digital native' and 'digital immigrant', in a 'generational' sense [distinguishing those born before from those born during/after the digital era]" [Diminescu, 2012]. However, in our terminology we use the terms "extended digital transnationalism" instead of "extended e-driven transnationalism" and "transnationalism online" instead of "e-transnationalism". There are two reasons. First, the use of prefix 'e-' is even more confusing as 'e'-technologies could refer to absolutely different spheres (e-governance, e-democracy, e-education, e-finance, etc.). Second, by using the terms "online" and "digital" we want to emphasize that studying transnationalism online should not limit oneself/itself to the only use of WWW and the Internet. It is important to note that the object of transnationalism online is not the 'web-connected transnational migrant', but the "digitally connected and-so-extended transnational migrant".

How do the structures of everyday connections transform: do they become more fragmented, more uniform, more controversial? Answers to these questions demand comprehension of transnational migrants' everyday lives as constantly changing (and possibly conflicting) wholes that are empirically observable as sets of interconnected transnational practices. This perspective allows for a comparative analysis of the reasons why in some cases 'transnationalism online' is effective for collective mobilization, in other cases it is widespread but does not result in actions, and in yet another it is almost absent.

There is a great number of possible questions one can raise using the framework of extended digital transnationalism. In the following section, we will try to demonstrate conceptual and methodological promises of studying extremist activities through the lens of transnationalism online.

Extremism as a 'dark side' of transnationalism online

Transnationalism has a duality in terms of its actual effects: they can be both socially desirable and unwelcome at the same time. Like other social mechanisms, for instance, trust can be either a way to reduce transactional costs or a path to open up corruption opportunities [Papakostas, 2012], transnationalism has two sides: it can both support and prevent extremist activities and ideological radicalization of migrants. Earlier studies of transnationalism emphasized predominantly positive (socially approved) aspects of these connections, namely, financial remittances, cross-border exchanges of goods and services, skill and knowledge transfer, etc. However, transnationalism also has a "dark side" given its potential to foster socially undesirable links and connections among the potential extremists and terrorists, providing the social conditions for ideological contagion and radicalization across the social networks.

The case of Russia is of special interest here as the major migration flows and diaspora activities are related to countries which are often being considered as "recruitment bases" of international terrorism. Transnational migrants from Central Asia and Caucasus who are working in Russia belong to the most vulnerable social groups in the Russian society with highly uncertain socio-economic condition, thus being the "risk group" for ideological radicalization. According to the Federal Security Service of Russia, in 2014—2016 there has been an increasing migration flow from Central Asian countries as well as Azerbaijan to the current conflict zones in the Middle East and Africa (the data is corroborated by the evidence presented by the CIA). Accordingly, the problem of extremism of the inhabitants of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is widely discussed in Russian social science. The major focus of academic attention have been young people who are typically regarded as an insular group encapsulated in intragroup networks and excluded from a wider social space. The "exclusivity" of this imaginary group is explicitly or implicitly derived from socio-psychological characteristics of its members: suggestibility, amenability, lack of experience, etc. The sources of youth's extremist moods are found either in individual actors (concrete people or organizations) or in highly abstract entities. The vivid examples of this discourse are found in such article titles as "Extremism at the Internet", "The Role of Mass Media in Resistance to Extremism," and "Justifications of Terrorism in Mass Media".

However, examination of publications from the Russian Science Citation Index (eLIBRARY.ru) database could demonstrate that current discussion in Russian scholarly literature has reached a kind of 'saturation point'. The main topics and conclusions of the vast majority of articles from 2012 to 2017 are almost identical in both the problem formulation and in the chosen methods and research units. Several basic features could be distinguished. Extremism (or religious extremism) is mainly considered in studies that are focused on Russian citizens from the North Caucasus' regions with a Muslim majority. Moreover, Moscow and St. Petersburg are the most popular research sites because they attract large migratory flows of diverse ethnic and religious composition. Finally, extremist and terrorist ideas are typically presented as attributes of group identity reproduced by virtue of media, the Internet, or some abstract "extremist ideas" as a source of group identification.

We consider conceptual isomorphism of the scholarly publications in Russia an indicator of the theoretical and methodological deadlock in the field of migration research and, in particular, in studying migrants' extremism. This situation, in our view, results from three interrelated theoretical assumptions.

First, the "dissemination of [extremist] ideas" is conceived as localized in space. As a consequence, social scientists confine themselves in administrative boundaries of cities, regions, countries, and thus are ultimately bound to make conclusions based on the "specificity" of a particular place (e.g., "the city of Nizhny Novgorod as an environment for extremist discourses" or "destructive migration processes under the conditions of Dagestan's multi-confessional composition"). However, spatial dimension does not play a crucial role in many cases: online spaces help their users to become aware of their migrant status even when this status is not formally defined (in the Russian publicist literature the term "internal emigrant" has long been in existence). Yet it should not be assumed that geographic dimension has completely lost its significance: physical space gains its importance to the extent that it shapes boundaries of socio-cultural space and continues to exert influence on institutionalization of individual experience. Any individual hypothetically has access to all the information on the Internet; however, the boundaries of his/her cultural experience are largely determined by spatial constraints: geographically and historically conditioned language abilities, possibilities of regular interactions with other actors, technical limitations, etc.

Second, the researchers are disposed to conceptual reduction of various phenomena to the notion of "target audience" of extremism (e.g., "determinants of extremist activity among youth migrants") thus falling into the 'methodological groupism' (see criticism of methodological groupism by R. Brubaker in relation to the studies of ethnicity and nationalism [Brubaker, 2002]). A group (ethnic, religious, professional and so on) exists only in a specific social context. If the researcher initially seeks to study, for example, an ethnic group, the results of the analysis will inevitably show group ethnicity as something integral and different from other ethnicities and their groups. The rejection of groupism presupposes dissimilar perspective that takes into account broader social processes: group identifications are considered shifting with actors open and creative in the construction of boundaries. In his criticism of methodological groupism, Brubaker points out the necessity of addressing the resources of situational approaches such

as ethnomethodology [Brubaker, Loveman, Stamatov, 2004] and frame analysis [Brubaker, Cooper, 2000]. It should be admitted that several scholarly papers have considered radicalization of individuals not as members of immutable groups but as actors involved in the broader social processes [Starodubrovskaya 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Vasilyeva, Mayboroda, Yasaveev, 2017]. The hypotheses formulated in these papers are fruitful for understanding the migrants' network trajectories in Russia; however, they need to be tested and re-framed for application tailoring to various social contexts of extremist discourses and activities.

Third, Russian-language scholarly publications on extremism typically contain the methodological fallacy of violating the causality element of research. This fallacy results in replacing causal explanation with causal description [Rezaev, 2015], as well as in substitution of analytical procedures by pseudo-synthesis. Instead of analyzing specific mechanisms of the transformations of values of individual and organizational actors, scholars endow some arbitrary concepts with agency to produce formulations such as "mass media as the realization of verbal extremism". These formulations allow, at best, to fix certain relationship between extremist discourse and social structures and processes that determine it. Even if this relationship exists, however, the formulation is not only theoretically feeble, but also inefficient for practical recommendations for the prevention of extremist (or considered to be extremist) ideas' dissemination. As a consequence of this conceptual weakness, political decisions for the administrative regulation of discussions in the Internet emerge (e. g., in Kazakhstan and in Russia). These decisions are implemented by blocking specific websites, which has little effect for both technical and social reasons. We believe that this failure is caused by the fact that the subject of extremist discourse is not personified and not localized. It can take concrete organizational forms, yet in general it is "dissolved" in social actions and interactions; that is why any blocking of a website should exert pressure on the real source of the extremist discourse, otherwise it will be circumvented. Nevertheless, social actions and interactions eventually take institutionalized forms that could be identified and traced on the basis of publicly accessible online data.

In accordance with these assumptions, there are no research projects involving Russian-language scholars that systematically apply theoretical and methodological tools of social and data sciences for the analysis of transnational (online) spaces. There are however several studies of mobile phones and the Internet communication of labor migrants in Russia that demonstrate their active involvement in network interactions [Rezaev, Lisitsyn, Stepanov, 2014; Varshaver, Rocheva, Ivanova, 2017]. This lack seems to be a serious omission when we compare the condition in Russian social science with the developments of its European and North American counterparts.

As it was argued above, the framework of transnationalism online is especially relevant for the study of international terrorism, since it takes into account the fact that social interaction in the field of extremist activity is carried out not only "here and there" but rather "here, there and somewhere else", i. e. beyond both sending and receiving relevant groups, communities, and countries. Terrorist organizations actively use virtual spaces for coordinating their activities and recruiting new members and agents. In so doing, they do not only rely on secure means of communication (Tor, Telegram, Onion,

etc.), but also interact online in their everyday lives, perhaps, leaving behind digital “traces”. The latter might sometimes carry indirect indicators of extremism that can be found in public segments of the Internet by looking at seemingly “neutral” open public data.

In the recent decades more and more attention is being paid to the interactions of migrants not only out of scholarly concerns, but rather because of the increasing recognition of specific security risks inherent in these interactions. Respectively, a quite large number of studies in different disciplines have been devoted to the spread of extremism and terrorism through the Internet and social networks and to ideological radicalization in a virtual space. Thus, in 2017 a special issue of *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* was dedicated to these issues (Volume 40, 2017 — Issue 1: Terrorist Online Propaganda and Radicalization), as well as a special section of *Critical Studies on Terrorism* in 2015 (Vol. 5, No. 3, December 2012: Special Section: Terrorism and Contemporary Mediascapes). There are also important discussions of ‘cyberterrorism’ and responses to it [Carlile, Macdonald, 2014; Reducing Terrorist..., 2013; Council of Europe, 2008].

One of the leading figures in this area, M. Conway [2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2007] whose research is focusing on how new media are used to organize terrorist acts, has outlined six tasks as the crucial developments in the field [Conway, 2016]. They are:

- analysis of different types of digital extremism, not only jihadi-type,
- focus on comparison across online platforms, individuals, ideologies, proximity to conflicts, gender, extremist groups, languages,
- deepening of the analysis by combining digital data analysis with interviewing and online-ethnographies,
- upgrading of the studies by utilizing the opportunities of data analysis,
- strengthening interdisciplinarity,
- more focus on gender dimension of extremism.

The brief review of the research streams demonstrates that studying the problem of extremism through the lens of transnational approach is becoming more and more popular. At the same time, there still exist obvious drawbacks and certain problems in research practice. The majority of studies of migrants’ behavior on the Internet use qualitative/ethnographic methods and are focused on individual websites. The drawbacks of this methodological trend could be illustrated by the studies of Awate.com [Bernal, 2013], Somalinet.com, TibetBoard [Brinkerhoff, 2006, 2012], as well as a small number of MySpace pages and blogs [Drissel, 2008]. These studies cannot claim a large scope or a wide external validity of research. However, one of a few projects that fills this gap in research is the Atlas of Electronic Diasporas [Diminescu, 2012]. The researchers investigated 27 diaspora groups using online cartographic methods of forming corpora and studying geography and occupations in the diasporas [Ben-David, 2012; Kumar, 2012; Mazzuchelli, 2012]. This project demonstrates an innovative approach to the analysis of diasporas as hybrids of electronic and physical spaces. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that the number of websites studied for each of the 27 cases is rather small (300—500 units). Moreover, the authors intentionally include only those websites that are directly related to the migration process. Therefore, despite the fact that these (and many other) authors work on the connection between the transnational perspective, the threats of extremism, and the

new information technologies, the empirical studies do not cover the entire spatial complexity and intricacy of existing networks.

Conclusion

International social science has achieved noticeable success in studying online practices of actors involved in the migration process. At the same time, the complexity of the subject and the large body of diverse empirical findings provide grounds for the conclusion that we are still far from a satisfactory comprehension of 'dark sides' of transnationalism online, both in conceptual integrity and methodological tools.

The overall idea of this paper is to present theoretical and methodological framework of transnationalism online as potentially fruitful and promising analytical scheme. We also intend to stimulate a discussion and in some ways inspire social analysts to work on conceptualization of the new empirical and methodologically complex phenomena. Therefore we would like to formulate several proposals that could possibly be a starting point for such a discussion. These proposals are developed within the framework of sociology of everyday life as applied to the study of transnational (online) practices in order to promote the acquisition of new knowledge about the 'dark side' of transnational processes online.

1) Administrative boundaries are often redundant when formulating a research problem. The users (who are predominantly migrants, internal and external, of the first, second and third generations) are able to and do expand the space of social interactions through information and communication technologies. This space however is partly determined by physical space. That is why a transnational approach seems to be so productive in the analysis of migrants' extremist activities.

2) Scholars should avoid framing social actions and interactions in terms of preexisting social groups. In this respect it seems promising to apply the concept of "transnational practices". Practices are discrete empirically fixed types of activity that are constituent elements of migrants' everyday lives. The analysis of transnational practices helps to move from causal description to causal explanation in answering the question of why the same practices are effective/widespread in one case and ineffective/rare in other cases.

3) Practices (user's actions and interactions) are not the result of individual choice or structural conditions only. They are determined by migrants' transnational condition, institutionalized in the everyday life while partly shaping it in its own turn. Therefore, we believe that one of the most promising concepts and subjects for studying the 'dark side' of transnationalism is 'transnational (online) practices of network interactions'.

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