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Diasporic Identities, Media, and the Public Space. Introductory Remarks

The concept of *diaspora* is enriched at present with a variety of readings in the context of globalization, transnational mobility and expansion of new communication technologies. Recent literature points to multiple meanings associated with “diaspora” and critically discusses the tendency to consider the concept and the phenomenon of “diaspora” to be interchangeable. An approach from the perspective of *diasporic identities* might therefore seem to run the risk of adding to the theoretical muddle around the notion.

How operational is, then, the concept of “diasporic identity”, taking into account, on the one hand, the continuous diversification of manifest forms of belonging that migrants and extra-territorial groups build in various transnational situations and, on the other, the increasing instability of these identity ties as regards their routines and public visibility? The new technologies and the Internet, along with the global culture of mobility, contribute to the construction of *emergent identities* (“the new diasporas”), shaping the forms of individual and public positioning that allow migrants to assume “a diasporic voice”, a way of being and acting. The “connected migrant” (Diminescu, 2007; 2010) experiences being “between” and “in” multiple socio-cultural spaces, at global and local scales, which intersect and communicate with one another in the same way that they are distinct from one another. Groups with an identity already configured through long affiliation with well-established causes coexist with other groups and individuals that engage publicly and are thus structured through the dynamics of specific, punctual events and circumstances.

Starting from these premises, we propose a thematic issue on the construction of diasporic identities in public situations and in contexts defined by different boundary-making (Culic, 2012). The studies included here highlight *visibility patterns* of migrants in the media discourse(s) in the country of origin and the host country – various ways of representing migrants and transnational communities, hence, of constructing “‘mediated’ identities and spaces” (Leeuw & Rydin, 2007). Several studies explore the socio-cultural and cognitive mechanisms by means of which diasporic communities are constituted around everyday practices and forms of reflexivity, projects of interpretation and public action, or the logic of symbolic resistance to certain categories and labels attached to migrants.

This issue is structured along several questions. First, it is concerned with the extent to which the media (along with other types of public discourse) channel the public’s ways of referring to the migrants’ *diasporic experience*, the migrants’ own positionings towards their

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ongoing experiences, and the types of reflexive engagement within *coexisting scales* of cultural and territorial distance.

Another question is whether the representation of migrants from the *diasporic experience* perspective – as part of a media discourse centred on daily experience and the individuals' public engagements – fulfils the function of mediating between diverse identities and social worlds, giving a stage to specific public problems or, on the contrary, the press are satisfied with reproducing a repertoire of "cases" and "situations". From this perspective, it is highly valuable to look into the mediation practices the media employ to make the transition from "narrations" or "cases" to public issues and to a "civic sensibility" (Chouliaraki, 2008).

In what manner does *the coexistence* of forms of belonging and public action influence the construction of diasporic identities? As Sheller and Urry state, the culture of mobility, including transnational mobility, stands out by "concomitant patterns of concentration that create zones of connectivity, centrality, and empowerment in some cases, and of disconnection, social exclusion, and inaudibility in other cases" (2006, p. 210).

What is the relationship between certain community particularities and "the diasporic project" as a form of public engagement? The analysis of the ways in which migrants make use of community significances in situations of public engagement and, consequently, create "diasporic spaces" or "diasporic arenas", can contribute to foregrounding *the coexistence* of various identity layers ("stable", "fluid" or "multidimensional" – Georgiou, 2006) as well as to *reconfiguring* them.

On the other hand, how could we explain *emergent* projects, which redefine certain claims, practices and their corresponding rhetoric already instituted in a field of action? The analysis of the diaspora "as a category of practice" (Brubaker, 2005) presupposes, among others, the correlation of the "diasporic project" with a type of social situation, structured symbolically and normatively so as to allow the examination of both *identification processes* and the *symbolic dimension* thereof. It is then of relevance how migrants build images of themselves and others, redefine and dislocate "identities" and mediated meanings. The authors propose complementary theoretical analyses and interrogations of the diaspora and transnational experiences, focusing on their multiple interpretations and public uses.

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