Diaspora in the Digital Era: Minorities and Media Representation

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This article argues that we need to understand media as spaces where minorities increasingly communicate interests, make claims and mobilize identities. With a focus on diasporic groups, the article looks at the multi-spatial character of communication and mobilization and its consequences for expression and communication of cultural and political belonging. Diasporic groups represent some of the most significant minorities across European nation-states. While living in – and in many cases being citizens of – European nation-states, they also sustain political and cultural connections across boundaries, largely through the media. This article argues that diasporic minority groups use the media in complex ways that feed back into their sense of cultural and political belonging. Only if we examine the diverse and complex ways in which minorities use the media to make sense of the world around them, can we begin to understand the wider significance of media and communications for minorities' cultural and political representation and belonging.

Keywords: diaspora; new media; minority audiences; minority representation; identity

Celebratory discourses about new media's liberating potential for minorities are now familiar and widespread: policy documents often suggest that in digital platforms, especially in social media, national and ethnic minorities can find spaces of expression away from the constraints of mass media. In a variation of this argument, "new" media are seen as liberating for minorities but at the same time as threatening to the nation's cohesion. Minorities either turn away or against the nation through their own distinct uses of digital platforms, this argument goes. The hopes and fears technological change attracts are not new and arguments such as the above fall within the utopian and dystopian analyses of the Information Society (Mansell, 2010): technologies can overwhelmingly change cultural and political life with consequences for identity and citizenship. Yet, how much validity or relevance to actual

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communication do these arguments have? They are no doubt powerful, especially as they can drive policy and political debates. However, are they useful in understanding the potential of mediated communication for free expression, communication and representation?

Indeed, if we are interested in minorities' recognition and representation, media and communications require further attention. They represent a crucial domain for research and policy: most of what we know about each other and the world close by and at a distance is mediated. Media and communications are spaces where identities are mobilized and to a significant extent shaped, they are tools for learning to be citizens and also reminders of the limitations and boundaries of citizenship and belonging (Stevenson, 2002; Couldry, 2012). Thus, the starting point of this article is that we need to pay close attention to the potential and restrictions in communication within and across boundaries. The consequent argument is that we need to move away from both the utopian and dystopian overtones of technological determinism. Instead, I argue, we need to ask three questions: How are media actually changing? What do minorities do with the media? And, what role do media play in advancing minorities' representation and expression within and across the culturally diverse European societies?

This article explores these three questions in aiming to contribute to understandings of the role of media and communications in advancing democracy and inclusiveness in Europe. Fairer and inclusive representation of minorities in the media – both the ones minorities produce and the ones widely available in society – is directly linked to minorities' sense of belonging and engagement with systems of citizenship (Stevenson, 2002). I focus on diasporic groups as these represent some of the most significant – numerically, culturally and politically – minorities in European nation-states and across the European continent. Diasporic populations are not contained within nation-states even though they live within them. Most often they sustain vibrant cultural and political connections locally and nationally, but also transnationally, not least through the media (Morley, 2000; Cohen, 2008). In developing my argument I draw primarily from empirical research with diasporic Arabs living in three European cities: London, Madrid and Nicosia.[1]

The discussion that follows draws from academic and policy debates as well as my own research. This research was grounded in European cities and was conducted and analyzed comparatively, taking into account different European

national contexts. The argument I propose is three-fold. First, we need to understand whether and what kind of opportunities for expression and representation digital media present to minorities and how those fit within the broader media environment. In addition, and in order to evaluate these opportunities, we need to study diasporic engagement with different media in everyday life, i.e. the context in which media are actually used. Finally, and in order to advance research and policy agendas for minority expression and representation in the digital media, we need to develop analytical perspectives that surpass fascination with "new" media. Instead, I argue, we need to focus on the different uses and appropriations of media and communication technologies both in their long-standing and their qualitatively new roles in advancing freedom of speech and minorities' representation in the media.

The discussion is organized into three main sections, each corresponding to one of the three elements of the main arguments introduced above. I conclude by briefly outlining the policy implications of this discussion. In this analysis, I adopt a broad definition of the media that includes old and new media, interpersonal, social and mass media. There are a number of reasons behind this choice. Most importantly, empirical evidence shows again and again that diverse forms of mediated communication and different technologies are constantly used next to each other. Also, technological convergence, which merges interpersonal, group and mass communication, especially in online environments, makes separation between different media even more problematic. Thus, in looking at questions of representation and expression, I find a more holistic approach to media cultures and environments more useful.

1. The context of changing boundaries and changing media

There is no doubt that media and communication technologies are becoming more diverse with different kinds of media platforms, and that very different content is available to share and consume on these platforms. Long gone is the time of the hegemony of the national press that supported national imagined communities (Anderson, 1983) or of national broadcasting that contained and reaffirmed national ideological frames (Scannell, 1996). The time of the dominance of what are now considered "old" media – especially press and television – is well past for most, if not all, European societies. Yet, and importantly, the dominance of press and television has not been replaced by an altogether new media system, as internet enthusiasts often

claim. As Murdock (1993) argues, the media are characterized by complex formations that operate at different levels instead of a singular overarching structure. Others, like Mattelart (2002), note that new media, not unlike old media, have not challenged socio-economic inequalities but have often reproduced them. Empirical evidence shows that old media persist while new media grow. For example, television remains the most popular medium across generations in the United Kingdom (Ofcom, 2010) and access to television on different platforms sustains its popularity across diverse audiences. While changes take place across the media industries, sometimes those complement the power of the dominant players in the media market (Garnham, 2011; Fuchs, 2011). At the same time, while new media might open up new spaces for communication and information exchange, they can often adopt "old" media systems of representations (Hassan, 2008; Fuchs, 2011). This is the case for example with many online news media, which reproduce news agendas and language familiar to audiences through print media.

While it is important to recognize the continuities in structures and content between the old and new media, it is also important to recognize the qualitative new elements of the contemporary media environment. Not least when mass, social and personal media platforms and content converge. This is for example the case of television programmes available on tablets and mobile phones. In addition, and as a consequence of convergence of media spaces, the divide between producers and users is blurred, giving rise to what some (Bruns, 2007) call "produsage" of media content. Digital media, Bruns (2007) argues, invite participation, communal evaluation of content and shared production and consumption of content. Alongside the qualitative changes in terms of production and consumption of media, the structures of media industries also change. New corporate models in the media lead to horizontal expansion of media and communication industries across sectors with consequences for the control of communication environments (Castells, 2009). Some transnational media corporations (TMCs) expand their power across boundaries and sectors and consequently control a significant section of communication activities that involve personal media, mass media and social media. Such expansion of large conglomerates' business activities give rise to concerns about the narrowing of spaces of diverse and free communication (Mattelard, 2002). Yet, on the other side of this uneven media environment, online communities, including diasporic and migrant ones, develop media spaces associated with minority languages, particularistic

cultural projects and, alternative to the mainstream, spaces for identity, expression and participation (Siapera, 2010).

The growing complexity of the contemporary media environment becomes more and more difficult to evaluate in its consequences for free expression and diverse communication. Policy and research trajectories that either focus on the dominance of states and corporations on digital media alone, or overemphasize the liberating effect of digital media, fail to see the internal contradictions and continuities between the two sides of the digital world. It is in this context that empirical studies that focus on users rather than technologies *per se* become useful. What do people actually do with the different media and communication technologies they have access to (when they do)?

The concept of diaspora can be very useful in answering these questions for a number of reasons. Diaspora enables us to study some of the ways in which media users connect to different public spheres (Siapera, 2010) and communities (Georgiou, 2006), while sustaining particularistic, diverse and multiple trajectories (Massey, 2005) within and across boundaries. Diaspora is a concept that captures human mobility and (re-)settlement not as opposite points, not as cause and effect, but rather as co-existing elements of a world connected through flows and networks. In the recent reincarnation of the concept of diaspora, mobility between places and the meanings of diasporic identity have been articulated as conditions emerging at the meeting of roots and routes (Gilroy, 1993). Such articulations have questioned assumptions about migration being a linear and single journey between origin (a place left behind) and destination (a new location of settlement). Physical and imagined connections between places have been discussed in their role for the construction of diasporic identities. Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* (1993) has been extremely influential, especially in its articulation of a matrix of geographical, cultural, and historical elements that inform diasporic identity. He has discussed the dialectic interdependence between geography (the territories around the Atlantic and their particular socio-cultural dynamics), politics of migration (the slave trade and Black migration between countries surrounding the Atlantic in seeking refuge, work and freedom), and the flows of mobility and imagination (diasporic links across territories of identification through particular cultural repertoires, a shared history and mediated interconnections).

In works such as those by Gilroy and Hall (1990), as well as in the numerous studies they inspired, the links between networks and flows that surpass geographical restrictions are reaffirmed as central to the process of identity construction. In such works, especially as developed in media and communications, the interconnections between locations (of lived present or past) and between places (physical and virtual) has been further developed, especially in relation to television consumption (cf. Georgiou, 2006; Gillespie, 1995; Aksoy and Robins, 2001) and digital networks (cf. Brinkerhoff 2009; Siapera 2010). The transnationalization of spaces of belonging associated with diaspora and diasporic communication does not only invite us to think of the complex and rich space of communication for minorities, but it also challenges understandings of the nation as a bounded and dominant entity that contains identities and communication systems. In light of these realities, we need to juxtapose the growing (physical and mediated) mobility of people across boundaries with the diversification of media and communications when addressing issues associated with minorities' free expression, representation and belonging. Such an approach inevitably sits uneasily with nation-centric analyses of minorities' rights, representation and free speech. Nation-centric approaches focus on the nation not as a key element of media ecologies, but as the singularly dominant and defining framework for the conduct and interpretation of mediated communication.

Yet, there is a key contradiction in the position of the nation in our times. On the one hand, culture and communication have become increasingly mediated and transnational, while on the other hand national boundaries have become increasingly reinforced through systems of surveillance and border policing. This condition creates a rupture between the politics of the nation and the human condition within nations and even more so for those human subjects who cross national boundaries, either through migration or through mediated interconnections. As Beck argues, mediated mobility has transformed 'the experiential spaces of the nation-state *from within*' (Beck, 2006: 101) (emphasis in original). But the physical contains and grounds the mediated. The mediated 'freedom of flows' is not by definition liberating but contested; it is grounded by the constraining powers of the physical and the national (Bauman, 1998). The nation-state aims to sustain its power and legitimacy based on ideologies of singularity – of singular loyalties, of the singularity of the national territorial ownership and boundedness. Diaspora challenges national ideologies, but it often finds itself trapped in them. The nation-state of origin requires loyalty and

commitment, so does the nation-state of settlement. In current times, the nation-state forms its own project of progress and harmony based on social, economic and, inevitably, cultural assimilation of its population. It is in this context that cultural difference – as often expressed in diasporic cultural ideologies and practices – becomes associated with minorities that are seen as incompatible with the national mainstream.

In a context of tension between diaspora and the nation, the latter still keeps its important role in the scheme of diasporic belonging. Even as a source of restrictions and ideological polarization (e.g. expressed in discourses of nationalism, demands for singular loyalty, legitimacy of national military power), it should be acknowledged as an element of the diasporic space of identity for at least two reasons. On the one hand, in democratic societies, national law (should) protect (diasporic) minorities from discrimination, racism and exclusion and thus (should) protect expression and representation of minorities in the cultural and political institutions of multicultural societies. On the other hand, restrictions, polarizations and exclusions initiated in the actual practices and ideologies of the nation play their part in the construction of identities. Identities are not shaped only through positive and creative processes of participation and communion, but also through experiences of exclusion, marginalization and exposure to regressive ideologies – as these are expressed in the mainstream ideologies of the country of settlement or of the country of origin, but also voiced from within diasporic communities.

2. Meaning-making and the media: the context of diasporic everyday life

Spaces for communication and belonging are thus always contested and unsettled. They are composed of intersections and tensions between ideologies and experiences. Both ideologies and experiences are increasingly communicated, shared and confronted through the media. As noted, media are discussed here in their totality and diversity: as these relate to established mass media, but also to new social and interpersonal systems of mediated communication, such as the internet and mobile phones. The emphasis in the continuities of spaces and technologies of communication also relates to the organization of everyday life (Silverstone, 1994). In western democracies, the value of separation of the public and the private is dominant in the organization of law and institutions. However, this separation – and its ideological basis – is incomplete and contradictory. The domestic and familial sphere

is assumed to function as a private, protected sphere separated from the public. Yet, and especially with the advance of media and communications, the boundaries between the private and the public space have become blurred. Media inform the practice of everyday life in numerous ways (Silverstone, 1994), not least in the ways individuals, families and communities learn about citizenship, associated rights and responsibilities. Media can be revealing of the position of minorities in a society – especially through their representation, or lack of, in the media – feeding back into familial and private articulations of the sense of self, of community, and of the nation, as will be shown below. At the same time, the diversification of the media means that minorities do not only see themselves on the receiving side of a singular mainstream media system, but they can increasingly become engaged with multiple systems, many of which are interactive.

When we look into communication and minorities in the context of everyday life, we are constantly reminded that we need to address both the longstanding and new challenges in terms of minorities' media representation – not only *in* the media but also behind the media at times of media convergence. In conducting empirical research with members of the Arabic diaspora[2] across three European capital cities, we had the opportunity to study some of those challenges and opportunities for representation and expression. What we realized early on in this study is that diasporic minorities find themselves in complex media environments, shaped at the convergence of the old and new media which co-exist and play different roles in their lives. The way participants spoke about their media use and about their sense of cultural and political belonging revealed a complex picture that was about convergence, about multi-spatial explorations and about various tactics diasporic subjects adopt in trying to make sense of their position as minorities in national contexts, but also as members of different communities in local, national and transnational contexts.

In illustrating the complexity of diasporic minority communication and the ways in which members of the Arabic diaspora engage with systems of communication in shaping their sense of belonging, I draw from data collected during 18 focus group interviews conducted in London, Madrid and Nicosia in 2009-10. Focus groups were also conducted by other project partners in Amsterdam, Berlin, Paris and Stockholm. The focus group discussions followed a cross-national survey that confirmed the high penetration of transnational television, alongside the rising

levels of diverse engagement with the internet among the Arabic diaspora. But the survey also confirmed that the vast majority of participants (93% across the transnational sample) used both Arabic and European media, and thus was far from withdrawn from the national and transnational European public spheres. The project focused on European capital cities as locations of intense and significant presence of Arabic communities. While we make no claims of representativeness we aimed to reflect in each city's sample the ethnic diversity within the Arabic communities living in the particular location. For example, in the case of London, participants came from all over the Arab world – from Sudan to the United Arab Emirates. In the case of Madrid, Moroccans predominated (Moroccans represent by far the largest group of Arabs living in Madrid and in Spain more generally), while in Nicosia the sample reflected the dominance of the Lebanese and Palestinian groups. Six focus groups were conducted in each city, forming two sets of single-gendered groups of three generations, aged 18-25, 26-45 and 46-65. Participants were selected on the basis of their self-identification as Arabic-speakers, a relatively neutral category that surpasses the tensions associated with identification on the basis of ethnicity, nationality or religion. The vast majority of participants were Muslim, alongside a small minority of Christians. Men and women were equally represented in the sample.

What is interesting is that, while participants were characterized by enormous diversity – origin, ethnicity, gender, generation, location, class, to name but a few – we recorded some significant trends in the ways participants engaged with the media. The most notable continuity related to the difficulty that participants had in separating cultural (identity) and political belonging (citizenship). What also emerged as a key finding was the richness of the media they used and the constant negotiations participants engaged in when using the media. In the context of everyday life, negotiations were primarily related to inter-generational and family relations, as will be shown in the next section. But when media use and media talk were seen in their totality, further negotiations became obvious: most notably those resulting from their exposure to different and sometimes conflicting ideological frames in the media. As will be shown below, media and communications become spaces in which both political and cultural identities are mobilized, but also spaces where the continuities between identity and citizenship are regularly reproduced and used as tactics to navigate the complex world these participants occupy.

3. The complexities of diasporic communication: more than an "old" / "new" media divide

As already argued, media and communications are grounded in everyday life and their meanings are constructed within it. Rather than focusing on technology alone, I propose that we examine the meanings of technologies in dialogue to the everyday lives of minorities. Increasingly, migrants and diasporas have access to different technologies, and linguistic and ideological zones through the media available at their home. I start this empirically grounded discussion on the complexities of the media from the familial context as this was confirmed during our study as one of the main contexts where media access and use is negotiated and made sense of.

3.1 *Family: a context of media consumption and negotiation*

For many members of migrant and diasporic groups, family and domestic life involve the regular use of different languages. The multilingualism characterizing many diasporic households means that transnational media's linguistic diversity is not out of place in Arabic homes. Transnational television especially is popular among participants and illustrates a powerful case of an old medium being adapted, reinvented and reinforced in its appeal in the digital era, linking generations as well as media experiences. The space around television becomes more than merely a space of consumption. It becomes a space of emotional proximity, regular exchanges and of ordinary interaction, in similar ways as it has been for decades (Morley, 2000; Silverstone, 1994). Only, in this case, the familial and the domestic are not rooted in a single place. As an Iraqi participant in London said in a focus group, different members of her transnational family who regularly watch soap operas on Arabic television support their shared viewing with regular exchanges on Facebook, Skype and over the telephone.

While technologies, such as satellite television and the internet, which allow constant and simultaneous sharing of information and experiences, might be new, the social forms they support are old (Silverstone, 1994). As television and other media support family relations, the space around transnational television can become, not just a tool to expand connections across space, but also an area of resistance to the changes and threats to community life and to family life and routines as a result of migration. Many participants' statements about their communal consumption are not

merely descriptive, but evaluative of the home and of the possibility to sustain familiarity within a transnational context.

> When we want to watch something [in my family] we don't argue about it because we have the same preferences. (Cyprus, Female group, ages 18-25)

For others, this is a contested space that reflects the internal divides of diasporic groups and families, often associated with the particularities of gendered and generational experience:

> Honestly, my grandmother holds the remote control and watches soaps. She does not give me a chance to do anything so I go to the internet to watch whatever I like. When she is not there, I choose whatever I want to watch on TV. (London, Female group, ages 18-25)

The space around media is always a space of struggle; access and patterns of use of the media, old and new, reveal power dynamics that have to do with the control of technologies, information, political and cultural values. These power struggles do not only include oppositions such as that between the state and the individual or between corporations and communities. Rather, those struggles penetrate all layers of minorities' everyday life. As a young woman in London said:

> My father, 24/7, English, Arabic, he decides everything. (London, Female group, 18-25)

Longstanding challenges to equal access, participation and inclusion in the media have not fully retreated within the contemporary media environment even in European major urban centres characterized by relatively high levels of access to media and communications. Ethnic, gender, age and class divides remain a challenge to inclusive and participatory communication. However, they partly meet new forms of resistance, especially with the diversification of access to digital technologies. This is especially the case with youth. Young people often said that they were subject to their parents' and grandparents' media choices when it came to collective communication spaces, but they made individual(-istic) and distinct choices when it came to their personal and peer-group spaces, i.e. in their own bedrooms and when they met friends.

3.2 *Between the "old" and the "new"*

The growing shift away from singular spaces of communication and controlled information is largely associated with the complexity and diversity of the media

environment that minorities increasingly occupy. A characteristic primarily associated with youth, complex and multi-layered media use is not singularly associated with the young generation. Largely it is a result of the transnational condition associated with diaspora and the interconnected spaces of belonging many members of diasporas occupy.

> I try to watch as many Arabic channels, plus Al Jazeera English and BBC, and also Algerian channels. I also watch French television. (Cyprus, Male group, ages 46-65)

Such mobility between media, ideological and linguistic environments, what we could call media nomadism, was repeatedly observed in our sample. It has become possible precisely because the media environment many participants occupy has become complex:

> When I want to look for news about Morocco I watch Al-Jazeera or go to Internet − forums, online papers, blogs, etc. The Moroccan TV does not give good-quality news about the country. (Madrid, Male group ages 18-25)

The media world of many participants resembled the world of transnational nomads, which is best described by Castells' (2009: 55) definition of self-mass communication:

> With the diffusion of the internet, a new form of interactive communication has emerged, characterized by the capacity of sending messages from many to many, in real time or chosen time, and with the possibility of using point-to-point communication, narrowcasting or broadcasting, depending on the purpose and characteristics of the intended communication practice. I call this historically new form of communication mass self-communication. It is mass communication because it can potentially reach a global audience, as in the posting of a video on YouTube, a blog with RSS links to a number of web sources, or a message to a massive e-mail list. At the same time, it is self-communication because the production of the message is self-generated, the definition of the potential receiver(s) is self-directed, and the retrieval of specific messages or content from the World Wide Web and electronic communication networks is self-selected. The three forms of communication (interpersonal, mass communication, and mass self-communication) coexist, interact, and complement each other rather than substituting for one another.

Mass self-communication is associated with a networked individualism, which has grown to become a culture within the contemporary media environment, argues Castells; it starts with the values and projects of the individual but builds a project of exchange with other individuals around more selective engagement with communities

(2009). Individualism is a strong element of the recorded attitudes of many participants towards media selection and use, especially well-educated participants; individualism feeds into and builds upon media consumption practices that filter and organize participants' worlds. Having moved away from a communitarian discourse, these primarily young and media literate participants are likely to use communication technologies rather than community organizations and structures to organize their socio-political micro-worlds, while selectively engaging with urban, national, or transnational communities. Associated with the structure and organization of the media, "individual choice" becomes both a way of making sense of the media and for understanding the world through a media lens.

It is the medium of the internet itself that, perhaps more than any other, makes this kind of media nomadism possible: always available[3] and enhancing individuals' sense of power to control the flow of information and the sources of information they turn to, it provides a common framework for identities that are not fully dependent on Cartesian geography and the boundedness of the nation-state. Importantly, and while other internal diasporic differences associated with class, age and generation fragment diasporic experience, the multi-modality and multi-nodality of online communication provides a shared platform for individuals in constructing their sense of self as individuals and as citizens. While the socio-cultural realities that shape an imagination away from the nation or a singular community cannot be fully reflected in mediated communication, the sense of being in control of information and communication associated with new media has a significant symbolic role in supporting imagination. New media environments allow participants to construct and share discourses of subjectivity around a deterritorialized and mediated sense of self.

While our research has shown that (reflexive) individualism is on the rise among those who sustain multiple mediated connections with people and places, individualism appears as powerful as the desire to sustain a sense of ontological security through community and belonging. Both the internet and transnational television in their rich, diverse, fragmented, multilingual and deterritorialized content play a role in supporting a sense of security and homeliness for many.

> You wanna feel like you're at home somehow[...] Like you just feel like […] more connected to home, you know what I mean, just something deep inside of you burns to hear Arabic. (London, Male group, 18-25)

The desire to sustain a sense of belonging that is stable within an interconnected and unstable world links to the merging of communalism and individualism Castells (2009) writes about. Some participants negotiate co-presence in and absence from communities through the media.

> My children when they are asked where they are from they know they are Sudanese even though they are born here. I started recently to tell them about these things and the tribe they come from. They belong there, not here. We lived in the UK when I was born here and we stayed for a while and we return to Sudan where I have lived for less than a third of my life. However because of the social connections or the technology we use to stay in touch, not a single person thinks that I have been outside Sudan for even a day. (London, Male group, 26-45)

What is interesting in this man's words is the way he projects a passionate sense of belonging to a distant community through his use of media. While this man is born in the UK, he projects a strong sense of detachment from Britain, which he can support through what he presents as evidence of his Sudanese belonging: his mediated connections. Importantly, his reference to the use of digital networks is not a reference to the way he connects to his country of origin alone. It also serves as an ideological statement that uses the media to illustrate that mediated co-presence is more powerful than physical co-presence (cf. Siapera and Veikou in this JEMIE issue). As Castells (2009) continues, networked communalism is a response to the uncertainty and vulnerability that some individuals feel in contemporary societies. In this analytical context, we can understand some diasporic individuals' attempt to find community at a distance rather than in proximity as a response to the marginalization that many migrants and diasporic people feel as minorities. This participant, among many, has expressed a sense of alienation from the mainstream of the society where he lives. Many other participants linked this marginalization to racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia and other forms of social exclusion they feel they experience in Europe. A number of young male Arabs in London, for example, told us that they have experienced discrimination by the authorities in the UK just because they were Arabs and/or Muslims. Those incidents reinforced a sense of exclusion and marginalization from the mainstream.

What emerges as a common thread among many – both those seeking the lost security of a stable world and those adopting more individualistic positions – is a high level of media literacy. While this is a finding that cannot correspond to the experience and position of all participants, it was still repeatedly observed across the

three European cities and across a range of participants. A high level of media literacy[4] was expressed in comments such as:

> Personally I don't have loyalty to any channel. You use more than one source but it's not like if something is reported in one channel I think this must be true. (London, Male group, 46-65)

> I don't trust Western nor Arabic media 100%. Every channel wants me to see events as it is considered by its agenda, every channel is reflecting its own politics. (London, Female group, 26-45)

Such arguments show that, for many, the media world is a world of comparing and contrasting, a world of daily negotiations of boundaries and ideological frameworks largely managed through diverse media consumption. In turning to different media and by comparing and contrasting them – and often being very critical and sceptical towards them – members of this diasporic group appeared to manage different forms of exclusion and marginalization. The participants with the highest levels of media literacy tended to see national, local and transnational media as reflecting elements of a single, albeit competitive in ideas and content, media universe. In this complex media environment, members of minorities find themselves seeking, and sometimes finding, some sense of cultural and political belonging – as citizens and members of the communities with which they associate (or hope to be associated).

4. What does it all mean? Implications of a complex media environment

I started this article by arguing that we need to look at media uses and appropriations in the context of everyday life. I return to the two main reasons for which I make this claim. The proposed analytical focus can advance our understanding of the ways minorities relate to the media; and it allows us to examine the opportunities and challenges for advancing representation and freedom of speech in the converged digital media world. In developing this argument I turned to empirical evidence associated with practices and reflections among people who identify with one of the most significant diasporic groups in Europe: the Arabic diaspora. This diasporic group also represents a minority across most western European countries and it is a group often marginalized, politicized and stereotyped in the media. The findings of the *Media & Citizenship* project referred to in brief in this article have demonstrated that members of diasporas – and we could argue that these findings have relevance for different kinds of minorities – use the media in complex ways in trying to find spaces

of representation and expression as citizens, as individuals and as members of different communities. The diversification of media and communications is not only an issue associated with technological progress but also an issue associated with the ways new technologies enable – and sometimes restrict – access to information, communication and expression. In a world where spaces of belonging and engagement with communities surpass the boundaries of the nation-state, important questions about inclusion in the Information Society, freedom of speech and communication across difference need to be revisited. In light of some of the complexities in minorities' engagement with media and communications, I point to four main themes that, I argue, should inform future policy and research agendas on minorities and the media:

- Recognition of the multiple spaces of belonging: all human subjects move between various spaces of belonging – physical and symbolic. Though not all individuals or groups enjoy the same levels of mobility (and in particular restrictions need to be taken into serious account, especially those relating to ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and age), increasingly human subjects develop their sense of being and becoming in relation to the interconnected spaces, which they might experience, associate with or be excluded from.

- Understanding of transnational connections: transnational mobility and the intensification of transnational politics challenge the nation-state and many of the taken-for-granted assumptions around identity; diasporic cultural and political activities develop across boundaries and so does the sense of belonging to communities.

- Consideration of the juxtapositions (and not just the hierarchies and linear relations) of difference in the cosmopolitan cities: minorities tend to congregate in major cities. For many participants, their life in the city partly defines the ways in which they relate to different communities locally, nationally, and transnationally. The increasingly diverse cities and the complex social action among migrants, diasporas and other groups marginalized in the national and supranational formations of citizenship and economic engagement illustrate the significance of the physical – and more often than not, urban – points of contact in understanding identity, its meanings and its limitations.

- Revisiting systems of citizenship and belonging through recognition of their complexities: Citizenship, cultural and political representation spill outside the bounded sphere of formal politics to include practices and experiences that give meaning to citizenship. Marginalized groups claim citizenship and assert simultaneous belonging in various communities, often including the nation, but also distant or transnational communities, such as diasporas. Recognizing the complexity of citizenship is directly linked to further studying identity, as the boundaries between cultural and political representation become increasingly blurred. Concepts such as flexible citizenship, multicultural or polycultural citizenship, or dissenting citizenship are only some of the propositions for recording the meeting of multiple belongings and representation.

Empirical explorations such as the one from which this article draws offer glimpses from the experiences, reflections, concerns and interests of minorities. More particularly, such empirical evidence provides invaluable insights into the media worlds that minorities occupy and into the strategies and tactics that minorities adopt in making sense of this complex media world. Such evidence then feeds – or needs to feed – into policy and research on media and minorities more generally and on media more particularly. What are the real challenges and opportunities presented in the contemporary media environment for minorities' expression, representation and belonging? In light of the present discussion and in reflecting on its policy relevance in particular, I propose an approach to the media and their role for minorities that surpasses certain set binary divides between old and new media and between social and mainstream media. I have argued that we should go beyond technologically deterministic understandings of the media and look first and foremost at practices and meanings of the media. Thus, and in conclusion, I propose a three-dimensional mapping of the media that both recognizes the different ways in which minorities use them but also the three different ways in which media ecologies become – or could become – more democratic, inclusive and diverse.

- *Media for seeing the self*: minorities turn to media that use minority languages and make links to particular communities – locally, nationally and transnationally – and distinct practices that can partly diverge from

mainstream media agendas and interests. Access to these kinds of media is necessary for any community in order to be able to initiate and shape the content of transmitted and shared messages. These are particularistic media, such as ethnic and diasporic media; online transnational diasporic media; niche media in different platforms that create spaces for minorities to shape the message, a sense of self and of community and thus advance a sense of security and inclusion. Importantly, in the digital media world, diversification of platforms creates opportunities for different voices within minorities to find expression. Yet, struggles for power also take place within those particularistic media environments. Thus, particularistic media alone are not enough for addressing issues associated with inclusion and participation in the media.

- *Media linking 'I' with 'We'*: community and alternative media that allow individuals with different backgrounds to come together; these are media encouraging collective identities to emerge and to connect, identities that bring together different individuals and groups into horizontally accessible spaces, that challenge pre-existing hierarchies between minorities and majorities or between community leaders and other members of minorities. The role of these media is to represent diversity as ordinary but also to challenge the taken-for-grantedness of set community boundaries; these are media for seeing each other in our complexities and sometimes in our diverting cultural, ideological and political trajectories.

- *Media linking a big 'We' with a minority 'We' and with 'I'*: as a rule, and as our empirical data shows, the vast majority of people belonging to migrant and diasporic minorities, use a diversity of media, including mainstream media. Mainstream media can function as mechanisms for sustaining and enhancing shared community across differences within cities and nation-states. At the same time, mainstream media that exclude or stereotype minorities can further exacerbate the marginalization of minorities and their sense of "otherness" and exclusion from national communities. The role of public service broadcasting in this case is crucial but also commercial broadcasting and print media can contribute to sustaining or jeopardizing culturally diverse urban and national communities.

A mapping of the media environment such as the one proposed above can hopefully offer an entry point and a point of reflection about the ways in which representation and participation in the digital media world does and can look. Such a mapping is proposed as a way to think of the different media and their distinct roles as elements of a complex and interconnected media environment. It also encourages research and policies that advance opportunities for participation, expression and intercultural dialogue in the media, while recognizing the real complexities of cultural diversity within and across European societies. As with any group, when it comes to minorities in the diverse European societies, media represent institutions and spaces for *seeing* both the self and others as part of the society, for *recognizing* points of contact and communication between different groups, for *reflecting* on the opportunities and challenges of living with cultural diversity and for *being recognized* as individuals. This multi-layered system of communication is paramount for sustaining a sense of recognition and respect of minority groups and individuals as members of communities and as citizens.

Notes

1   Project title: *Media & Citizenship: Transnational Television Cultures Reshaping Political Identities in the European Union*. The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Community's Seventh Framework Programme FP7/2007-2013 under grant agreement 217480. The research team was a consortium of five European universities (consortium leader: C. Slade). The author led the team conducting research in London, Madrid and Nicosia.
2   This claim is based on participants' self-identification as Arabs.
3   At least to the group in question.
4   Media literacy refers to the critical and thoughtful engagement of audiences with different media, as this results from their engagement with many diverse media products and discourses.

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