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Cities of Difference: Cultural Juxtapositions and Urban Politics of Representation

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In the memory of Roger Silverstone

Abstract

This paper explores urban politics of representation and their role in processes of political and cultural participation for migrant and diasporic urban dwellers. Urban politics of representation are about finding a location in the city and about locating the city (or one's *own* city) in the world. Living, representing and being represented in the city is attached to looking for and finding (or failing to find) a place in the world. The strangers, the mobile subjects, the migrants seek (and sometimes find) a place of work and of sociality in the city. Often marginalised, patronised and excluded from formal (national) politics, they engage with the urban politics of representation either as actively seeking political representation or, and more often, as a reflection of their mobile status and their everyday engagement with images and representations of the self, community, the city, and global culture. Unlike formal and national politics, urban politics of representation involve activities in the street, participation in local life, engagement with creative practices and the arts, among other things – all of which increasingly involve appropriations of media and communication technologies. With reference to empirical material from London and New York, this paper argues that in the study of juxtapositions of difference in the city, we can observe politics of representation and forms of active (and mediated) citizenship, which are often ignored in formal politics for the management of diversity.

Keywords

Global city, urban politics of representation, multiculturalism, migration, cultural

diversity, media culture

Introduction

The rhetoric of social cohesion, citizenship and participation is a site of paradoxical oppositions. Multiculturalism is under attack in nation-states which have long promoted politics of recognition of difference, such as Britain and The Netherlands. At the same time, nation-states which have adopted policies of assimilation/integration[1] saw their models shaken in conflicts and riots, such as those recently seen in France and Denmark. Are both models of multiculturalism and integration equally bankrupt? If so, why do states turn to models of governing difference which have been tried, tested and failed elsewhere? Should governance learn from sites of opposition and dialogue which national policies usually overlook? And could the real challenge be in understanding the dynamics of living in/with diversity in locations in and across nations rather than assuming the desire to live as/in *one nation*? What becomes more and more apparent is the need to revaluate national politics of diversity and representation, taking into account the challenges of living with difference, the growing physical and mediated mobility as well as fragmentations within and across nation-states. While numerous cultural tensions around Europe have forced governments to revaluate their politics, paradoxically the tendency has been to reinforce ideologies of national cohesion rather than to question their relevance. Such tendencies presently overshadow dialogical practices of difference

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[1] Assimilation as a political/policy concept has been abandoned in the recent years. The concept of integration has become widely used, though, I argue, integration politics largely follows the assimilationist tradition. As a rule, integration politics desire the adoption of dominant norms and values by all groups within national societies.

while reinforcing ideologies (and sometimes practices) that oppose dialogue. Difference ends up being attacked from both sides: the national cohesion ideologies on one hand and the long standing enemies of diversity on the other[2].

Against the politics that blame diversity and its manifestations for alienation and extremism, I propose a closer look at the locations of lived difference. Attacks to difference and its politics tend to make generalisations by projecting extreme cases as indications of the failure of multiculturalism (e.g. the British Muslim bombers of the 7/7 attacks became the embodied nightmare of *the enemy within*). Such generalisations reflect the disconnection of the polity from the realities of diversity as it is lived and experienced by the vast majority of denizens and citizens. Lived diversity is unexciting and as it occurs day in day out is mundane and ordinary. Especially as experienced in the city, where urban dwellers of various cultural and religious affiliations live cheek by jowl, diversity takes particular meanings that challenge the assumed divides based on ethnic and religious lines. In the city, contact and the inevitable share of symbolic and physical space increase the – desired or not – communication and sometimes even advance participatory politics of representation.

In this discussion, I focus on the ultimate locations of diversity: the multicultural neighbourhoods of the global city, and more specifically two multicultural locations in the par excellence global cities: London and New York. Urban multicultural

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[2] The rise of the racist far right on one hand and the fundamentalist movements of ethnic/religious closure on the other are partly products of policies which propose unsustainable administration of difference. Fundamentalists within minorities gain ground among disaffected minority populations who feel the pressure to assimilate. At the same time, the far right uses the failure of policies promoting national cohesion as an excuse for attacking minorities' refusal to assimilate.

neighbourhoods host diversity and a (working class) cosmopolitanism (Werbner, 1999), maybe more than any other location in the global city. While looking at these locations I observed a specificity of urban relations (mediated or not) which accommodates a management of diversity that transcends current considerations of sameness/difference (especially as expressed in current policy). The specific forms of managing difference observed in the city – and especially the global and extensively diverse city of western modernity – sometimes translates into politics of representation, which are integrated in everyday life and which deal with elements of commonality and difference along lines that do not correspond to ethnic particularity (though they tend to be informed by it).

This discussion develops while drawing from ethnographic illustrations and interview material I collected in two global city multicultural locations: Haringey, North London and Astoria, Queens, New York City[3]. Both locales have their distinct identity, in terms of cultural location in the city, in the country and in the world. However, a number of elements of living with diversity at the two locations surpass Haringey and Astoria's particularity, both in terms of geography and in terms of relevance for politics of representation. There are two main elements that surpass local specificity and which frame this paper's outlook and argument. On one hand, both Astoria and Haringey have a peripheral position within urban, national and global top-down politics. This peripherality

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3 This research has taken place over longer and shorter periods of time between 2000 and 2005. It involved living among the urban dwellers of Haringey and Astoria and conducting research – including interviews, participant observation and focus groups – in domestic and public domains where everyday life unfolds. The study focussed on the Greek Cypriot diaspora, though in public domains a selective focus on one particular diasporic group could not always be sustained. The sometimes more and sometimes less meaningful meetings of the urban dwellers in the urban locale often surpassed many of my presumptions about the predominant role of the ethnic community vis-à-vis the multiethnic.

characterises most multicultural neighbourhoods and results in their engagement with forms of creativity and expression outside exclusionary top-down projects of representation. On the other hand, global cities develop their role in global economic and communication affairs partly because of these locations (Sassen 1991). Migrant and diasporic working force contributes to the development of global cities' identity, not only as uniquely important nodes in global financial networks, but also in networks of communication and cultural exchange. Thus, urban politics of representation in such locations are significant not only within diverse neighbourhoods, but also in the global city as a particular location and as a node in global networks.

The manifestations of difference I am looking at, reveal a particular form of politics of representation, which are experimental and (multi-)positional. These politics take their shape through everyday practices that involve cultural and communication practices engaging urban dwellers of common origins but also urban dwellers of different origins who presently share urban positionalities. During my study and in numerous occasions, participants repeatedly shifted their narratives from a focus on their diasporic group as a central point of reference to people or activities that do not necessarily have to do with their particular diasporic culture or community. When talking about racism and discrimination for example, diasporic identity tended to be a central point of reference. However, when talking about quality of life in the locale (e.g. education, safety, entertainment) the references were as much related to the diasporic group as they were to other local players (e.g. friends from other ethno-cultural groups; multiethnic schools). Active engagement with defining the qualities of life in the urban locale has proven to be

even more diverse in its references. In one case in London, a male middle-aged

participant referred to his council estate neighbours and their campaign to improve their

housing. In another occasion, a male participant in his 30's talked enthusiastically about a

residents' association and its efforts to stop the construction of another high-rise building

in his neighbourhood. He talked about a Greek friend who is also actively participating in

the association but also about a number of non-Greek fellow members. These politics

challenge both ideologies of national cohesion and of ethnic segregation. Even if not

always in impressive ways, these informal politics of representation and presence reflect

important ways in which urban dwellers seek visibility in the city, the nation and the

world. Theoretically, my main point of departure is Benjamin's *transitivity*, a proposed

urban category for understanding the meanings and the effects of contact in the city

(1997). In developing my argument, I discuss a number of effects of transitivity – as

Benjamin suggests one should – as manifested in a particular kind of urban politics of

representation.

**A Framework for Understanding Diversity: Global City, Transitivity and Politics of
Representation**

Critical and reflexive intellectual engagements with the multicultural paradigm have

already challenged significant limitations of the policy discourse which adopts normative

and singular approaches to difference. In works by Barry (2001), Benhabib (2002), Fraser

(1992), Kymlicka (1995), Parekh (2000), Taylor (1994) and Young (2000), we are

invited to explore the complexity of multicultural societies (and systems) beyond singular

approaches to difference. What these scholars propose is to move away from considering the disobedience of minorities towards liberal, capitalist and Eurocentric ideologies as an indication of their mutiny against the state and the nation. On the contrary, we need to think of difference as more than a decorative element of society which can actually – and does actually – challenge the status quo. Though these scholars have different proposals about the management of organic and active difference, they all agree that minorities should have more unrestricted access to spaces of expression and forms of citizenship, which do not always fit within the dominant political outlook of the liberal western state.

Research which focussed on the everyday (mediated) conduct of diasporic and migrant life (cf. Aksoy and Robins 2000; Fortier 1999; Georgiou 2005, 2006; Gilroy 1993, 2004; Gillespie 1995; Hall 1992, 2000; Mai 2005; Naficy 1993; Robins 2001) has taken this argument further by deconstructing the dominant and often essentialised perceptions of policy makers about what minority populations actually do where they live. In looking at the mundane and ordinary activities of everyday life, this literature shows that the divides based on ethnic lines in multicultural societies are less stable and essential than policy assumes. Following this tradition, and while learning from multiculturalism debates, I propose a closer look in the specific locations where diversity is lived and investigate what kinds of politics actually emerge there.

Transitivity

The concept of transitivity, as developed by Benjamin (1997), inspires the present discussion. Benjamin's transitivity implies that the city is temporally and spatially open. The encounters of people, places, things and technologies, their interaction and interpenetration in the city lead to unforeseen constellations. 'The stamp of the definitive is avoided' (1997: 169). Populations and ideas move in and out of the city through airports, train stations and the media. The city expands its spatiality through airports and train stations, computer terminals and satellite dishes. This condition leads to a growing porosity of the city. The city's temporal and spatial porosity allows – and even *imposes* – the juxtaposition of differences (Benjamin 1997; Amin and Thrift 2002). The city's growing mobility highlights the significance of diaspora and migration for the formation of urban politics and urban social interactions. Benjamin's proposition of thinking through transitivity and mobility undermines assumptions of singular national politics, desires and interest. It also contests the centrality of origins – geographical, cultural, and political – in defining identity, politics and interests in and across nation-states. In engaging with this proposition, I aim at further understanding what takes place in terms of intercultural interaction in relation to processes of (self-)representation. The focus is on urban transitivity as observed in practiced, imaginary and mediated mobility of the contemporary and culturally diverse global city which leads to unexpected (or understudied) encounters and equally unexpected (or understudied) forms of political expression. Local movements about the improvement of education, multiethnic lobbies pushing for the diversification of material available in local libraries, but also youth initiatives for the appropriation of public spaces for sports, musical and dancing activities are only some of the practices observed.

Urban Politics of Representation

Currently, policy making in most western cosmopolitan societies becomes trapped within a binary dead-end. On one hand, integration politics increasingly blame cultural difference for conflicts, terrorism and anomie[4]. On the other, multicultural politics often translate diversity as whole monolithic minority cultures and do not provide efficient systems for recognition of contestations and differences within and across cultural particularity. These normative interpretations of difference (either in celebrating or condemning it) find little relevance in the multicultural city. In multicultural urban locations another kind of politics can be observed. These politics have less to do with normative interpretations of culture and more with everyday practices and points of contact between cultures, politics, people and technologies.

Urban politics of representation are processes of communication and interaction initiated by city dwellers as part of their planned or unplanned attempts to find a location in the city and a location of the city (or one's own city) in the world. Living, representing and being represented in the city is attached to looking for and finding (or failing to find) a place in the world. The strangers, the mobile subjects, the migrants seek (and sometimes find) a place of work and of sociality in the city. Often marginalised, patronised and excluded from formal (national) politics, they engage with the urban

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[4] See for example recent attacks to multiculturalism by Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality. He argues that minorities should make more of an effort to integrate in the mainstream, while in other occasions he argues that multiculturalism does not provide the answer anymore (cf. http://193.113.211.175/media/nr_arch/2004/nr040924a.html).

politics of representation either as actively seeking political representation or, and more often, as a reflection of their mobile status and their everyday engagement with images and representations of the self, community, the city, global politics and cultures. Unlike formal and national politics, urban politics of representation involve activities in the street, participation in local life, engagement with creative practices and the arts, among other things – all of which increasingly involve appropriations of media and communication technologies. Urban politics of representation can advance more effective and reflexive multicultural politics outside the compartmentalisation of societies within minority and majority communities; politics which take into account the various layers of difference and involve contact, not mere co-existence of different people and compartmentalised communities.

Unlike the nation-centric demands for singular belonging and for clarity of political commitment, urban politics of representation are multifaceted. Urban politics of representation meet and contest multicultural politics at the same time. As multiculturalism has established, migrant and diasporic populations sustain a variety of different practices, cultural but also economic and often political. In the cities with high concentration of different migrant and diasporic populations, various intra- and inter-community activities take place. These include everyday practices, such as the sharing of schools and shopping centres and more organised activities such as organised local (short-term and long-term) movements around residents' associations, community centres and arts centres. In the city, more than anywhere else, the critical mass needed to establish churches and mosques, minority language schools and community centres is

present. Additionally, the city has always been a point of arrival and of transition for different populations and has hosted diverse cultural practices. Traditions of tolerance are the norm rather than the exception in the city, which has become increasingly cosmopolitan. London and New York are by far two of the most diverse metropoles in the world (Eade 2000; Sassen 1991). Not less importantly, the city has always been a location of important divisions and economic segregation. Many minority populations find themselves stranded within 'ethnic enclaves' and socio-economic relations of dependency which reinforce community belonging (as this is expressed in networks of financial, emotional and social support). Inequality and lack of support for members of minority groups in the mainstream has been recognised as one of the reasons for ethnic group membership (cf. Benhabib 2002; Fraser 1992; Parekh 2000). Some of these works make specific references to the consequences of inequalities for vulnerable groups (such as women, gay, lesbian and transgendered individuals, the elderly) who have no choice but to depend on community networks, even if they do not represent or respect their rights. A London male participant, 36, participant gives a cynical definition of the community: 'What does community mean to me? A collection of people being together out of a need to survive…It provides shelter for those who would have a hard time outside a Greek Cypriot community. Some other people have invested in different things, like for example common interests. Others are in it because they desperately need it for politics and other interests'.

Urban politics of representation as outcomes of urban transitivity challenge the normative and defined within distinct migrant/ethnic/diasporic communities definitions of

difference. Struggles around diversity and representation take place between groups and also within them. In many occasions, politics of representation are formed in points of contact between individuals (such as in multiethnic locales or internet cafés) or in contacts between humans and nonhumans (Law, 1992; Latour, 2005) (e.g. in the appropriations of the internet where alternative forms of representation are offered outside the divisions between communities or societies of origin or destination). For example, a Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot gay and lesbian group in London functions mostly around a mailing list (next to a bimonthly gay and lesbian club night). The online space advances politics and discourses of representation which are largely excluded from the mainstream diasporic politics that assumed heterosexual and ethnic (either Greek or Turkish) normativity.

Living in the City: Seeking Representation in Everyday Life

The experiential element of diversity which is being undervalued in national politics (and nation-centric research) was recorded in the two urban locations of Haringey in North London and Astoria in Queens, NYC. One of my main findings was that the experiential element of diversity informs not only cultural activities but also processes of seeking representation in the locale, across the city and beyond. Urban politics of representation bring closer together experimentality and urban dwellers' positionality, bridging everyday culture and politics of representation. As Parekh has argued, cultural processes have significant consequences for politics: 'The cultural fabric of a society expresses

ideas of who "we" are. To the extent that it is inclusive, it gives all people a sense of belonging and makes a strong stand against racism' (2000: xviii).

One of the key elements of the urban politics of representation, as manifested and shaped in the everyday life in the global city, is its high level of mediation. Media and communication technologies are integrated in everyday life and very often used in processes of seeking representation. Media and communication technologies, in their appropriation and uses, play a role:

(i.) as innovations inviting a 'hands-on' practice of representation;

(ii.) as an authorship exercise for writing and drawing one's *own* city and one's *own* world;

(iii.) as a political tool – used as such deliberately or not – for becoming visible and heard;

(iv.) as a tool for the construction of the urban *imaginaire* – the urban landscape of diversity, fluidity, belonging;

(v.) as a two or multiple-way medium for listening to the self, the community as well as the others, or for becoming louder than others;

(vi.) as a consumer device, packaged, sold and bought and compatible with urban and global consumer practices.

For migrant and diasporic people in particular, the connection of the city to the globe through activities of everyday life, including shared consumption of satellite television

and the internet, participation in urban local life and community centres, to name but a few, is of key significance in finding a location in the world and a sense of representation in the city.

More precisely, and in relation to the variety of media and their appropriations, migrants and diasporas use communication technologies:

- for being with others and for talking to others [members of the diasporic group in the locale, but also others sharing the locale]
- for challenging others' viewpoints and politics [people within the diasporic group representing different ideologies or interests or others outside the group contesting diasporic interests or particular individual or group interests and ideologies]
- when meeting the other and when engaged in (communal) consumer practises, like others [in community centres, shopping centres and internet cafés].
- when trying to avoid the other by attempting to form separate, protected, particularistic communication spaces next to, but away from the other [exclusive or excluding political networks and groups; religion-based communities of interest]
- when trying to connect with others who are far away but close in global mediated spaces [the broader diaspora, family and friends across the globe].

Effects of Transitivity in (Mediated) Urban Politics of Representation

In this section, I focus on a number of key expressions of transitivity as observed in London and New York City and as they manifest themselves in politics of representation and more specifically in mediated forms of urban politics of representation. Following Benjamin, this discussion engages with transitivity not for the sake of illustration, but in order to record its effects. In this case, the effects reveal active politics of seeking and sometimes achieving recognition in ways that formal politics tend to overlook. I will conclude by arguing for more informed multicultural politics that learn from urban politics of representation and which pay a closer look at the (mediated) everyday. This more informed politics, I argue, should take into consideration the dynamics of living with diversity and the positionality that is revealed in diasporic everyday life against what presently seems to be assumed in policy discourse as stable positions of closed difference.

While discussing common effects of transitivity across two global cities, I do not make a claim for universal repetitions and same expressions of transitivity across boundaries. The two cities have significant differences, including some important elements: (i.) national politics of difference in Britain and the US have important particularities and they effect in a number of ways city life and city politics; (ii.) similarly, popular culture in the two countries has its distinct qualities that relate to the history of creative industries, relevant policies, presence of key creative actors in specific locations, etc; (iii.) London is a major European city while New York City is the major cultural centre for American culture[5]; (iv.) the history of migration, the waves and the origins of diasporic

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[5] These characteristics are not necessarily 'real' qualities, but at least to certain extent they are ascriptions. However, as such, and in relation to the representation of the city, ascriptions are not less 'real' than any

populations in the two localities have certain similarities but also differences; (v.)

division of the city and city planning: the design of the two cities and their administration

is different (for example, there is much more ethno-cultural mixing in London compared

to New York where the ethnic enclave divisions still largely define ownership of city

spaces, (cf. Massey and Denton 2000). Urban and national particularity needs to be

acknowledged; at the same time, developments that bridge some of these important

differences need to be acknowledged as well. With the growing globalisation of popular

culture, the enormous mobility of people across territories, but also with the growing

globalisation of the politics of fear against Otherness, it is increasingly difficult to define

differences between two megapoles like London and New York City based on national

distinctiveness alone.

The points made in the following paragraphs are neither universally applicable nor

exhaustively reflect urban politics of difference. However, hopefully it becomes clear

how these specific examples become reflections of the unpredictability of (mediated)

encounters in the city and the relevance of such encounters for representation. Under a

number of headings, and with reference to empirical data, I discuss six important effects

of urban transitivity which translate into city dwellers' efforts to find representation in the

locale, the country and beyond.

Urban positionality in politics of representation

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other ways of describing a city's particularity.

Multicultural neighbourhoods are mostly occupied by culturally diverse groups which are characterised by a significant level of mobility (through migration, travel, use and appropriation of a number of transnational media and through participation in family, kin and work transnational networks). While conducting ethnographic research with the Greek Cypriots of New York City I observed the contestation of the normative and singular definition of cultures based on common origins that politicians and policy makers adopt. Interestingly, what was observed – and unlike frequent claims of politicians and policy makers – is that migrant and diasporic people tend to reject their containment in either the country of settlement or the country of origin. During a high profile meeting organised by a lobby for Cyprus in New York City, prominent American, Greek American, and Cypriot politicians spoke to a diasporic Greek Cypriot audience. All politicians eagerly assumed their audience's loyalty either to Cyprus or the US. This top down approach to citizenship (which implies singularity in belonging and loyalties) was challenged by the cosmopolitan diaspora they all addressed. A Cypriot American member of the audience angrily turned to politicians from all sides and said:

> [Addressing American politicians:] When they attacked the World Trade Centre in 1993, I raised my [American] flag and I never brought it down again. After 9/11 I was in Ground Zero…My father was born and raised here [in the US] and fought for this country during the war. But he always fought for freedom in Cyprus too. We want to be treated fairly…[Addressing Greek Cypriot politicians] And you as well, in Cyprus, you should show some respect to us here! We are more patriotic than you! We fight for Cyprus more than you do! (30's, male).

This man's words made many uncomfortable and probably failed to get any message through. However, what is noticeable in this quotation is the anger and anxiety expressed against the demands of the politicians to position their audience within a singular and fixed national framework. Against nation-centric discourses, this man uses his (and his father's) experience to show how much he is committed to both nations and how his everyday life is actually a combination rather than a choice. In his experiential self-representation the dual contact and conduct of a complex cultural life predominate.

The more composed words of a female American Cypriot move even further away from the national narrative and reveal more clearly a cosmopolitan way of living and representing the self (and an imagined community) against the national narrative.

> After 9/11, all of us New Yorkers came closer together. We were trying to collect our pieces, put our lives back together. It really hurt when we saw people on Greek and Cypriot tv expressing bitter anti-Americanism. It made us feel very sad and angry (36, female).

What is obvious in these two quotations is the unease the two New Yorkers have to commit to one culture and a politics which relates to making a choice between origin and destination while ignoring their urban positionality. Urban experience and the representation these two people seek reveal two significant elements of urban politics of representation: (i.) Urban citizenship, at least in certain times, becomes more important

than national citizenship; both these people think first as New Yorkers and then as Cypriots and/or Americans. (ii.) Urban subjects are also global subjects; in global cities the connection with the nation often goes through the global and through the mediated connections that constantly take place in everyday life. The second participant learns about the nation through the media, which she consumes in her city. Her position in the city (as a New Yorker) informs the way she connects to the nation (Cyprus). These quotations are expressions of the city's transitivity against the closure and the clarity of the national narrative. These people make a claim for representation which is about their (mediated) experience. This experience is multifaceted and not necessarily the same as everybody else's in the same cultural framework (i.e. the Cypriots or the Americans). Physical and symbolic mobility, especially through the media, illustrate movement in, out and between public spheres in which they belong (or have an interest in belonging). Their (desired) belonging challenges the ascribed boundaries based on one nationality, one ethnicity, one position.

Juxtaposition of top-down and bottom-up lived cosmopolitanism: A domain for power negotiations

Urban planning and spatial-economic divisions of the city reflect the hierarchies within cosmopolitanism but also motivate different kinds of politics of representation within various city zones. The working class neighbourhoods of Haringey, London and Astoria, New York City are at the bottom of the hierarchy when it comes to controlling global and national politics. However, activities within the specific locations and local public sphere

debates sometimes force national and international political elites to have a closer look to the humble locations of diversity. In some cases, culturally diverse locales shape globalisation and cosmopolitanism in ways which are often underestimated. The emergence of phenomena of Islamist fundamentalism in British working class neighbourhoods has attracted great attention and it is probably the most well known case of urban politics as a bottom up reaction and as an effect to top down national and global politics. British urban Islamic fundamentalism and its use of the media (the internet in particular) reflect only a miniscule element of urban politics. However, as an example it clearly illustrates the dialectic and mediated connection between the local and the global and the tension between top down and bottom up politics. In much less dramatic ways, local public sphere debates and activities in mediated and non mediated spaces across urban locales, try to play a role in shaping politics of significance in local, national and transnational scale.

Community centres become locations where politics are discussed over cups of coffee and while watching television, but also during more formal and organised activities that involve lobbying politicians. In both cities, I have witnessed lobbying events where politicians from the local and national government are questioned about their actions that relate to the management of urban and national affairs, but also to international politics. Arguably, the political power of progressive political parties in these locations – like in others of similar demographic composition – relates to the high concentration of working class migrant and diasporic people. Both politicians and community leaders I've spoken to, acknowledged the significance of the diasporic/migrant vote in the diverse societies

and the diverse cities. Politicians acting locally and nationally know that diasporic voters are concerned with local governance, national politics but also with international politics, especially when they relate to diasporas' countries of origin. The politically and economically marginalised multicultural locales take centre stage when they lobby politicians forcing them to consider alternative cosmopolitan thinking (though not always effectively). Interestingly, local community leaders told me in two different occasions how they use diasporic media as an indication of their group's influence in negotiations with political leadership. Additionally, specific community leaders often refer to their cooperation with other diasporic/migrant groups as indication of their commitment to mainstream political projects of integration. Is this another way of advancing social cohesion? Or do such activities become a site of negotiation between top down and bottom up cosmopolitanism?

Public locations of mediation map urban cartography

Internet cafés and telephone communication centres are mushrooming in the multicultural neighbourhoods of Haringey and Astoria, like in most other diverse working class urban areas of global cities. The migrant clientele comes and goes and shows a visible familiarity with the space, the owners and the other visitors. This unforced familiarity is expressed in long chats, joking, but also in the exchange of tangible (CDs, DVDs, magazines) and intangible products (e.g. information about how to use the internet; recommendations for websites to visit and use). Such social and technological exchanges turn these places to something more than functional locations. They become vibrant

locations of interaction and part of the lived cartography of the city – one's *own* city as it exist in her/his neighbourhood and the places urban dwellers routinely visit. Such places, becoming increasingly synonymous to multicultural neighbourhoods, are key locations where *the poor* of the city – the working class – take control of communication technologies. Here, they consume media and produce representations outside the mainstream, which are then shared with other users in the locale, but also across the globe (e.g. on email exchanges, website production, discussion group participation). Users and habitués of these communication centres exchange British/American media products (software, films, music) and media products from their country of origin and the globe (films, music) outside the costly restrictions imposed by the media industry and outside the censorship control imposed by governments of the countries of origin and settlement. What has been repeatedly observed in such locations is the enormous exchange of information, communication products and know-how which arguably contributes to new forms of mediated, participatory and global citizenship.

Juxtaposition of difference in urban creative practices: Youth culture represented

The city is a setting where experimentations with politics of representation are illustrated in walls, in music, in entertainment spaces, in local community centres and in the street. The effects of contact between different cultural repertoires are often reflected in urban creativity. Urban creativity has artistic as much as political significance. Urban creativity is often a counterpoint to mainstream, national and elite culture as it is impure and hybrid. Elements of urban culture sometimes cross the line and enter the mainstream

(urban black music and rap being the most characteristic cases in Britain and the US) but its significance for representation is not necessarily understood on policy level. A young New Yorker Greek Cypriot participant shows how he mixes Greek pop music with urban rap. The outcome is a product of the city's transitivity. He masters communication technologies in an attempt to develop communication codes that bring closer together his culturally diverse surroundings. 'I don't feel I have to declare that I'm Greek. I am Greek but my friends are from all over the place. When I go out I don't go to Greek places only. This would be boring. Besides, with my friends we like going to all sorts of places', he says. His everyday, as he describes it, is lived in multiple locations locally and in parts of the city outside the Greek context. At the same time, his network of peers comes together largely through their shared consumption, especially of music (including his own). His music as an amalgam reflects urban and cosmopolitan youth culture and creativity. His produced musical hybrids are far from being defined by origin or by destination. His produced music is an informal appropriation of communication technologies that resist formal politics of both the national and the diasporic ideologies of cultural clarity. What his musical production reflects is a constant effort – expressed vividly in his words in various occasions – to disconnect from any commitment to a singular fixed culture (and a singular politics of representation and identification). It is also a lively and material expression of transitivity and of the unpredictability of urban juxtapositions of difference. The hybrid music does not only reflect a meeting of various musical genres but also a politics of representation that is about meetings, about youth culture and about consumer culture. These young urban dwellers grow up within consumer culture and often seek (and find) forms of expression through urban creativity and in appropriations of the

consumer culture they are so familiar with. It is likely that for them this amalgam of expression has more to do with active citizenship that it is often assumed by politicians and policy makers.

Being cosmopolitan through resistance to ideologies of cosmopolitanism

Resistance to ideologies of cosmopolitanism are not uncommon among migrant and diasporic populations. However their significance is often misunderstood, especially in policy which considers such acts as a rejection of cosmopolitanism and mutual understanding. Resistance to cosmopolitan ideologies is often expressed as diasporic concerns for *preservation* of the *homeland culture*. Especially among parents of young children, such concerns are being observed in the practice of parenthood. 'I want my children to grow up with the values I was brought up with: respect for family, education and religion', says a Greek mother of two in London. In another case in NYC, and for a mother much concerned about her children 'abandoning' Greek values and traditions, participation in activities such as theatre plays and sports organised by the local Greek Orthodox church is an imperative form of practicing everyday resistance to (what is seen as) threatening cosmopolitanism. This expressed ideology of resistance however, as practiced, is more of an expression of the particularism-universalism continuum (Robertson 1992; Georgiou 2005) rather than its rejection. As suggested by Robertson, universalism needs global human concreteness to become meaningful, while particularism becomes universally relevant because of expectations of particularity – i.e. the fact that there is no end to differences in experience, emotions and interpretations of

the world. Thus, in the above cases, while promoting what appears as uniquely Greek

values of family and religion, these mothers also promote universal values (family, belief

system, the value of education). What is actually observed in these acts of perceived

resistance is the appropriation of cosmopolitanism through experience in ways that make

it viable and *one's* (or a group's) *own*. The diversity observed in traditions that groups

sustain entails a cosmopolitanism that actually eases entry and dialogue with other

cultures and the mainstream (though this does not mean surrender to mainstream values).

The values behind the *resisting* traditional customs do more for promoting common

language of cultural communication than restricting it (e.g. through the reproduction of

family values, activities around popular culture, shared media consumption).

Transnationalisation of politics of representation challenges political loyalties

The city is always in movement and the city as a position where ideas and products are

exchanged is in the core of its history and its representation. City life develops around

trails of mobility that go all different directions and involve people, consumer products

and technologies. Media have become mechanisms for living and experiencing mobility

in everyday, banal and taken-for-granted ways. Mobility – physical, imagined, mediated

– becomes one of the great challenges to the nation-state and demands for loyalties to one

nation/one state. Diasporic and migrant people, but not only them, constantly move in

and out and between public spheres and spaces of communication, though most of the

time this mobility is mediated and not physical. Mediated mobility, enabled in the use of

various media and communication technologies, is neither an exception nor a special

event, especially for the younger media literate generations. Rather, it is a way of understanding and positioning oneself in an increasingly interconnected world. Mobility between different cultural and political spheres means that commitment to one ideology or one state is often challenged. Such commitment cannot be expected (though it can still be enforced) without recognition and acknowledgement of rights, representation and consideration of the interests of individuals and groups. A characteristic example is that of a transnational women group with Greek Cypriot, Turkish Cypriot and non-Cypriot female membership. The group *Hands Across the Divide,* which aims at advancing understanding among all Cypriots, sustains its links across boundaries mostly through online communication. Online space is ultimately transnational and it is not controlled by the authorities that restrict and survey physical contact between the group's members. In its appropriation of communication technologies the group challenges the national expectations of the governments of their origin. Interestingly, the extension of contact in the offline world has been largely (at least initially) enabled by meetings in the diasporic, global city of London. London becomes a physical and political space which inspires communication between the group's members outside the divided country of origin. London in its cultural diversity seemed more appropriate and compatible with the group's online activity physical space compared to Cyprus. London is a location where ethnic difference is lived beyond the national imposition of fixity and division which dominates interethnic relations in Cyprus. The global city became the physical and symbolic location where the transnational online politics of the group managed to gain physical substance (and face to face validity) outside superimposed singular loyalties.

To conclude

Following Rajchman (in Amin and Thrift 2002), it can be argued that in the city it becomes less possible to tell straight narratives about origins of people and ideas. In the city, people become 'originals' without origins (Rajchman in Amin and Thrift 2002) and their narratives are constructed through superposition or juxtaposition, rather than through oppositions and stable self-contained positions.

Unlike present national politics, urban politics of representation reveal the different shapes and shades of difference which cannot be contained in specific cultures – i.e. *the Indian* culture; *the Afro-Caribbean* culture, *the Greek* culture – but which have local, national and transnational connections and continuities. What I observed in the city is the significance of cultural positionality rather than of position. Formal politics approach culture as being unchangeable and people as functioning just within one culture. However, in closer observation of everyday life and urban politics of representation, the significance of positionality is predominant. Positionality implies interaction, internal difference within cultural groups and also a condition of complexity that does not only have to do with culture as ethnicity, religion and language, but also with their filtering depending on one's more or less privileged position in a society and their ability to move in and out of various contexts.

What this discussion tried to illustrate is a need to advance an understanding of difference rather than pathologising it and abandoning its recognition in national and formal politics

of representation. What is needed is not to throw away multicultural policies, but rather to take them a step further in understanding difference outside the majority/minority binary and beyond seeing each ethnic and diasporic group as a singular, homogenous and self-contained entity. Experience and growing cosmopolitanisation of both experience and social relations has been undermined in national politics of difference, which either focus on discrimination or extremism. Unlike these extremes, multicultural living is mostly experienced in complex (even if mundane) acts of seeking representation and advancing informal acts of citizenship in everyday life and in the culturally diverse city. In everyday life and in uses of media and communication technologies in particular, alternative practices of representation and informal efforts for participation in local, national and transnational pubic spheres are formed. The problem with multiculturalism is not its refusal to accept that cultural diversity will eventually be replaced with integration, assimilation, common destinations (ideological, cultural and political). On the contrary, this is its major strength. While having the inevitable and unending diversity as a political and conceptual starting point, multiculturalism needs to advance its policies by thinking more about mobility, encounters, the city and the globe. Difference is not only about coming from somewhere else (and less and less this is important for new generations of diasporic populations). Difference is about various positions and positionalities depending on where one lives, if s/he gets access to symbolic and material sources and as discussed here, depending on whether being represented and recognised in and across multiple spaces: the local, the national and the transnational. This demanding task and outlook is more necessary than ever for meaningful politics of recognition.

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Bio

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