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## Introduction: gender, migration and the media

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## Abstract

Mediated representations of gender, ethnicity and migration play an increasingly important role in the way these categories are understood in the public sphere and the private realm. As media often intervene in processes of individual and institutional communication, they provide frameworks for the production and consumption of representations of these categories. Thus media – in their production, representations and consumption – need to be analysed, not only as reflections as pre-existing socio-political realities, but also as constitutive elements in the production of meanings of the self and the *Other*. This special issue includes a number of articles that examine the articulations of gendered ethnic identities and of gendered citizenship as these are shaped in media production, media representations and media consumption.

## Introduction

Debates on media's role in the cultural and political representation of ethnicity and gender are not unknown to scholars of race and ethnicity. This is the case especially in culturally diverse societies where political struggles for minorities' visibility, rights and recognition have a long history and a current relevance. In fact, media have often been summoned and held into account about their role in influencing public opinion on issues of culture, 'race', gender and citizenry. More than ever, this becomes a familiar public discourse at times of crisis. At other

times, media are less often discussed, sidelined in public debates about participation, inclusion and citizenship. Yet it is the permanence and invisibility of the media in everyday life and their taken-for-granted authority that sustains media power. Media are as ordinary as they are ever-present in social, political and cultural life, becoming almost invisible as cultural and political agents. Our growing dependence on knowing about the world and about each other through media representations reaffirms and reproduces media's symbolic power. Thus, media need to be understood not just as reflections of reality but also in their role in constructing reality (Couldry 2000).

As the social world is increasingly colonized by the media (Silverstone 1994), we need to understand how media contribute to framing meanings of the self, the *Other*, the society we live in. We locate this special issue within scholarship that studies media as 'resources for thought, judgment and action, both personal and political' (Silverstone 2007, p. 5). This scholarship gains particular relevance at times of intense public debates on the 'failure of multiculturalism', the intensification of border control, and the feminisation of migration. How central is the role of media in framing these debates? Do alternative and community media challenge hegemonic discourses of ethnic and gender stratification? And how much do uses and appropriations of media and communications counter-balance social and political exclusion and marginalization? Addressing these questions requires research in all elements of the media system: media production, representation (content), and media consumption.

The articles in this special issue come out of research on different elements of the media system and their regulation. Some of them have a primary focus on cultural life (identity) and others on political life (citizenship). Yet they all aim to understand the ways in

which media and communications become involved in power struggles around the representation and recognition of women migrants and refugees.

The discussions and analyses presented here recognise the distinctiveness of each element of the media system (production, representation, consumption), as well as two kinds of important continuities: between different elements of the media system and between minority media worlds and the broader socio-cultural context where they are located. The first continuity is 'internal'. The institutional basis of the media informs the ways representations are framed, while regulation of the media and of everyday life shape the context and limits of their consumption, argue du Gay et al. (1997) in their definition of the *circuit of culture*. Media power does not just trickle down from the producers through media representations to consumers. It is a social process 'reproduced in the details of what social actors do and say' (Couldry 2000, p.4) and is more complex than a lineal model of media transmission implies. The second 'external' continuity refers to the relation between minority and mainstream media and the voices they represent. While our focus here lies on the ways in which ethnic minority and migrant women are present (or absent) in media production, representations and consumption, we also recognise that this communicative space is not fully distinct and separate from the wider communicative spaces where these groups are located. The diversity of media production, experiences of exclusion and inclusion, and the various patterns of consumption in contemporary societies all represent elements of a single media environment, a media ecology, writes Silverstone (2007). Consequently we can only grasp the meanings of minority media worlds in their contrapuntal relation to other media systems they address or contradict, as much as we can only understand mainstream media when we register their contrapuntal relationship to the experiences, voices and practices of the included and the excluded (but still present) minorities (ibid.). Thus, the debates that

unfold in the following pages are not about *Other* and distinct media worlds, but about elements of the complex media world we all occupy in culturally diverse societies.

### **An interdisciplinary crossroad: gender, migration and the media**

As Downing and Husband (2005) argue, there are many good reasons why we should be worried about media's role in shaping meanings of race and ethnicity in culturally diverse societies. In liberal democracies, media often claim their role as the fourth estate of the realm (ibid.). Research and public debates have repeatedly emphasised the importance of the free flow of information in democratic deliberation and the representation of diverse interests in the society (Dahlgren 2009). In supporting the exchange of ideas and information thus, media support civil society and provide systems of control of the state. At least this is the case according to the idealised liberal democratic model of media function. How much is this ideal a reality?

The position that different groups take in the mediation processes – as producers, as consumers, as neither or both – has multiple implications for participation in communication and, to a significant extent, to the wider social and political processes. The struggles around the control of media, technologies, and systems of representations have become more intense with the emergence of different players in the terrain of mediated communication, especially with the wide diffusion of new technologies. Though the web, Twitter, mobile phones and other personal media challenge existing hierarchies, we are far from celebrating the full democratisation of mediated communication. Television, and national media more generally, retain their central and influential role in popular culture and in framing public debates around migration, ethnicity and gender. Something has changed though and this is not just the

technological terrain. While 'old' media have great cultural and political influence, their authority is now, more than ever perhaps, conditional.

New forms of mediated communication are now as ordinary and banal as once television was. Recording the diversity of outlets is not in itself enough to understanding what the shift from mass-communication to mass self-communication (Castells 2009) actually means. The diversity of outlets gives voice to ideologies, which are not necessarily (though sometimes they are, indeed) contained within the ideological systems of the nation-state and the dominant media corporations. New technologies allow communication from many to many outside the system of dominant and established media (ibid.). While media power remains unequally concentrated in the hands of the few, the level of autonomy among alternative, minority and community media has noticeably increased.

There is no doubt that the diffusion of communication technologies has benefitted migrant, diasporic and other dispersed groups. There is also no doubt that the fragmentation of media spaces (with personal media and social media, for example) also diversified communication within migrant and diasporic groups. Women, often marginalized, alongside other internal minorities within ethnic communities, are given some new opportunities for voicing their interests and alternative sets of representations against hegemonic ones widely circulating within ethnic communities and the broader society. This diversification, Cunningham argues (2002), advances the emergence of public sphericules. A dystopia and an indication of the end of the public sphere for Gitlin (1998), public sphericules reflect the changing public sphere, not a destruction from it (Cunningham 2002). For minorities and for minorities within minorities, cultural connections, transnational networks and affiliations with multiple spheres and sphericules present elements of a complex system of communication that can advance participation and recognition (ibid.) unlike the exclusive and

excluding national public sphere where the demonstration of singular loyalties is often a requirement.

It is in this networked and fragmented space of mediated transnational communication that possibilities for multiple identities and expanded meanings of citizenship can be observed. When it comes to migrant and refugee women this is a particularly important area of study, since often these are groups that face multiple forms of marginalization from the public sphere: as a result of their ethnicity, lack of citizenship rights, and gender relations within their own ethnic group and the broader society.

### *Media power and resistance*

In an ERS special issue on Feminism and Postcolonialism, Suki Ali argued:

the need to think through issues of ‘race’, ethnicity and class as situated within globalized networks of economic, cultural and technological expansion is central to feminist discussions of power and resistance, as it is of course to feminist politics and practice (2007, p. 197).

In similar ways as Ali emphasises the need to locate globalized networks at the core of feminist analysis of power, media and communications research on networked mediated communication needs to relocate ‘race’, ethnicity and gender in its analyses of (media) power. A set of shared key empirical and conceptual questions underlie the study of ‘race’, ethnicity and gender, especially questions of recognition, (mis-)representation, stereotyping and visibility. It is in this context that two framing points for the analysis of gender, migration and the media need to be highlighted.

Intersectionality provides a necessary analytical framing concept for understanding how gender, ethnicity and ‘race’ become intertwined in the construction of meanings of

identity and citizenship through the media. There is significant evidence in our research that demonstrates how these categories and the mediated construction of their meanings intersect. The second point is that of another kind of intersectionality, that between the different elements of the media system. Media production, content and consumption represent not only elements of the media system but also interrelated elements of a social field where meanings of ethnicity, 'race' and gender take their shape.

The dominance of white, middle-class men in the management and production of the media is well recorded in feminist media and communications literature (Gill 2009; Ross 2009). The intersectionality of specific gender, class and 'racial' identities in newsrooms has reproduced the concentration of symbolic power in the hands of social elites with consequences not only for women and men professionals of minority backgrounds but also for the outputs of these media. With decision power in the media remaining stubbornly concentrated in the hands of elites, hegemonic racial and gender ideologies have become repeatedly reproduced and circulated in the society and habitually accepted as 'truth'. Tuchman (1978) influentially argued that women are symbolically annihilated in the media through omission, condemnation and trivialization. Arguably this applies to other minority groups, like ethnic minorities and refugees. As Tuchman adds, if a group is absent or trivialised in the media then it becomes easier to believe that it doesn't exist, it doesn't matter or only matters when it fits appropriate roles (e.g. beautiful, in the case of women or 'integrated' in the case of ethnic minorities).

The reoccurrence of particular representations of women and ethnic minorities in the media also reproduces stereotypes. Media stereotypes confirm social and political hierarchies Lippmann wrote in the early days of mass media ((1922) 2007), and his thesis still remains relevant. Representing difference in the media in a fair, realistic and coherent manner has



never been an easy task and it has raised concerns among academics and activists since the 1970s (cf. Hall, 1977; Hartman and Husband, 1974). Critical cultural studies has for long discussed media's role in misrepresenting social injustice and attributing problems such as crime to the behaviour of specific (ethnic) groups (Hall 1977).

As all media represent specific ideological interests it would be naive to try to locate resistance by looking at the production and content of the media alone. The point of media consumption and appropriation reflects the point of meaning-making and interpretation of the diffused media messages. Audiences are also citizens or hopeful citizens. In an interconnected world, media can provide new tools to minorities for seeking visibility and a voice. New media give opportunities to some marginalized groups to seek new roles as producers of their own messages. Yet, the vast majority of people are on the receiving side of representations of gender, 'race' and ethnicity. Everyday life is the space where the hegemonic ideologies of gender, ethnicity and 'race' becomes diffused, accepted but also resisted.

### **Locating a transnational debate**

We here explore cases where media create spaces for deliberation and provide opportunities for groups and individuals to locate themselves, to become visible and heard. We also examine cases where media reproduce minorities' social marginalization and ethnic and gender stratification. But we also explore some of the ways in which media outside the mainstream resist but also sometimes reproduce hegemonic systems of racial and gender stratification.

The regulation of migrants' and refugees' access to systems of communication is in the core of the two first papers in this volume by Sarikakis and by Titley. Individuals' and groups' sense of belonging in a society can be supported or restricted by both media and state mechanisms, argues Titley. With a focus on Ireland, Titley argues that this country's short-lived integration regime deployed culture and interculturalism as resources for the self-governing integration of all foreign nationals, while at the same time developing a system of civic stratification designed to limit claims to citizenship and social and economic rights. Titley argues that migrants largely depend on transnational media in managing tensions associated with social exclusion and possibilities of participation.

Sarikakis focusses on asylum seeker detention centres and examines the effect that loss of communication rights under detention immobilises and silences migrants, especially women. Sarikakis investigates the process of silencing and immobilisation of migrants and the particular forms it takes for female migrants through disablement of communicative acts. The state of exceptionality assigned to detained migrants is supported in the criminalisation of migration laws and securitisation, which together with widespread policies of incarceration in the west have become the antipode of the fundamental principles of free movement and expression, she concludes.

Locating these debates in the city, the articles by Christensen and by Bailey examine the gendered experiences of migration in city spaces. While their studies have very different starting points, with Christensen focussing on online communication and Bailey on interpersonal community communication, they both demonstrate the *placeness* of identities. With reference to Turkish migrants in Stockholm and their use of online social networks, Christensen examines expressions of identity and belonging as these are shaped at the intersection of online communicative practice and offline locality. With a focus on the

specificities of gendered constructions of sociality and subjectivity in the diaspora, Christensen reclaims the significance of place in the study of mediated and transnational communication. Media, she argues, do not necessarily detach identities from place, but rather relocate them in it.

With a focus on African asylum seeker and refugee women in the British city of Nottingham, Bailey's study demonstrates some of the ways in which these women develop systems of everyday gendered resistance to the destitution, lack of cultural recognition, and gender inequality. Her study examines these systems of resistance through an ethnography of a women's NGO which provides them with a collective and safe 'home' space. Bailey argues that the NGO, established by the women for themselves, represents significant evidence on how local grassroots movements challenge the invisibility of asylum-seekers' and refugees' lives and reflect an expanded notion of politics with community and solidarity in its core.

Rigoni turns to ethnic community media as institutions that provide space of solidarity and community but which also become involved in struggles around gender and class power. For this reason, Rigoni emphasises the significance of intersectionality as an important conceptual tool to analyse practices of cultural production in ethnic minority media. Drawing from empirical research on female journalists' experience in ethnic media, she reveals the contradictory realities of work in ethnic media. On the one hand, she demonstrates how ethnic media often reproduce gender and class hierarchies observed in other kinds of media. On the other, she refers to cases where women have found spaces of expression and emancipation in such media, especially when these are constructed primarily as female initiatives (e.g. minority women's magazines). The paper juxtaposes media research with gender studies and ethnic studies in order to understand these internal contradictions of gender roles within minority media.

Ogan and D'Haenens locate the struggles around female sociality and recognition within the social world that migrant women occupy in the Netherlands and Flanders, Belgium. Their study of migrant women's social capital comes at a time when cross-European debates on the 'failure of multiculturalism' intensify. Critics of multiculturalism have located the problems associated with cultural diversity on the retreat of ethnic minorities within their own separate ethnic worlds. Ogan and D'Haenens examine the accuracy of these claims. They particularly examine the relevance of arguments according to which minorities, especially women, would be better integrated if they build social capital by bridging to people and institutions in their new countries and by adopting the 'shared values' of the host countries.

For the Greek Orthodox Christian women in Istanbul who Tunç and Ferentinou study, satellite television plays a key role in building social capital. In a series of interviews with female members of this group, Tunç and Ferentinou observe that satellite television provides core material for sustaining a sense of identity between the very local, grounded and urban experience of Istanbul and a transnational cultural community of Greek Orthodox people. For this group of heavy viewers of the Greek satellite television channels, television provides the primary link to Greece but also a daily companion that helps them manage isolation and regional nationalistic ideologies.

With a focus on a different group of female television viewers, Georgiou examines how soap opera consumption supports Arab women's efforts to manage conflicting cultural ideologies. Georgiou studies Arab women in London and their consumption of the female oriented genre of soap opera on Arabic language satellite television. The paper shows that soap opera viewing provides female audiences in the diaspora with opportunities to reflect on their own identities as distant from hegemonic discourses of gender in their region of origin

but as proximate to a moral set of values they associate with this same region. As this is especially, but not exclusively, the case with young women born in the diaspora, it becomes apparent that gender identities in culturally diverse societies are in flux.

The discussions that unfold in this special issue demonstrate some of the ways in which personal and group experiences and understandings of identity and citizenship are located in historical and political contexts. Media do not just observe and report on the context of political and policy debates. Media often provide frames for understanding what these categories mean. They channel authority to speak and rights to be heard. And sometimes they also leave space for voices to be heard when they otherwise get no access to the public sphere. As such, a focus on the media is not peripheral but core to understanding the challenges associated with governance and cultural life in societies of difference.

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