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"Introducing Media, Technology and the Migrant Family: Media Uses, Appropriations and Articulations in a Culturally Diverse Europe"

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Special Issue

## **Introducing Media, Technology and the Migrant Family: Media Uses, Appropriations and Articulations in a Culturally Diverse Europe**

**Edited by Myria Georgiou & Cristina Ponte**

This special issue results from the work of the Cost Action IS0906

"Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies"

COST is an intergovernmental framework for European Cooperation in Science and Technology, allowing the coordination of nationally-funded research at the European level.

There is a condition that most people are exposed to in global times: the intensification of connectivity across boundaries. Transnational connectivity depends on physical and mediated mobility or, in other words, on mediation and migration. Since migration and mediation represent two of the key phenomena associated with globalization, they present us with a number of significant challenges, some of which relate to the ways in which we study and understand the significance and consequences of flows of people, ideas,

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information and technologies (Appadurai, 1996). This special issue focuses on the ways in which the intensification of flows of people, especially through migration, shapes communication practices and meanings of media use and consumption. We recognize the cultural and social challenges produced within this fast-changing and complex media environment, as media and communication technologies gain a central role in supporting cultural connections and intergenerational cultural reproduction, but also intercultural and intergenerational conflicts. We feel that the concept of the family – a concept so often taken for granted and so rarely studied within research on migration and the media – presents us with new challenges and new entry points to understanding the complex ways in which migrants and diasporas make sense of their complex media environments. This special issue thus engages with differing elements of media consumption among migrant and diasporic audiences, paying particular – but not exclusive – attention to the family.

In introducing this special issue, we raise a number of key questions with regard to the ways in which we understand the audience and the family through the lens of migration. We then propose a discursive understanding of audiences, and conclude with a brief overview of the contents and of the context of their conception. The interest of this special issue in cultural diversity and media consumption within and across boundaries emerged through a transnational scholarly network, that of COST Action IS0906, *Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies*. This Action and its associated academic network represent the organizational and intellectual point of departure and of reference for this special issue.

### **A transnational field**

The study of migrant audiences invites a set of key questions: Do migrant media consumers represent a distinct field in audience research? Does transnationalism change the meanings of media consumption? Does digitalization carry a particular significance in the case of migrant media users? And how different is the family in a migrant context? In the discussions that follow and across this issue's articles, we pay particular attention to balancing the particularities of migrant audiences and recognizing the wider phenomena that they represent, especially with regard to changes in audiences in times of convergence and to the diversification of media consumption in increasingly diverse societies. We thus recognize and develop research approaches which do not take migration or the family as stable and essential categories or as set conditions of being. Research across generations, gender and class has already demonstrated the complexities of categories such as diaspora and the family. Thus what we propose is to observe and study both continuities and oppositions in practices, discourses and relations, especially with regard to generational continuities and changes; to the moments when the familial and/or transnational experience

matters in media choices; and to the ways in which migration and family intersect with other important categories, especially gender, class and sexuality.

Recognizing these tensions, which relate to migration and diaspora, we are interested in their particular expressions when media use and consumption are concerned. This is not least because audiences are becoming more diverse and media consumption complex and multifaceted. Research (Aksoy and Robins, 2000; Georgiou, 2012; Madianou and Miller, 2012) has shown that media and communications uses are extremely rich among migrant and diasporic audiences, precisely because of these groups' transnational condition and their multiple connections between and within spaces. High levels of multilingual skills among many migrant groups and the wide diffusion of certain technologies among diasporas – especially satellite television – have also advanced the virtual mobility of many migrant and diasporic people across cultural spaces, making the phenomenon of transnational media nomadism increasingly common (Georgiou, 2012). At the press of a button on a remote control or at the click of a mouse, migrants and diasporic populations hop, day-in and day-out, from channel to channel, from one cultural space to another, and from one ideological space to a rather different one. In practices such as those which are ordinary and shared, such as watching television or listening to music or to a digitally diffused prayer, many of these audiences also advance a reflexive and critical understanding of the media.

In light of all this, and while any generalization is impossible – and also undesirable – evidence shows that media literacy among migrant and diasporic audiences is growing fast. As recent research we conducted with transnational Arab audiences has indicated again and again (Georgiou, 2012), for many migrants, the media world is a world of comparing and contrasting, it is a world of daily negotiations<sup>i</sup>. For many, everyday media consumption manages national, local and transnational connections. Media originating in different nations and transnational spaces reflect different elements of a single competitive environment, as well as elements of everyday cultural practices. Over-exposure to different media leads to further scepticism and cynicism towards all media, which can possibly lead to more informed and critical audiences. While in the recent *Media & Citizenship* study (Georgiou, 2012), young people are in the lead on rich, diverse, multi-lingual and transborder media consumption, such practices are by no means exclusive to young people. Rather, arguably, it is the transnational experience, alongside specific media skills and access, that enables and advances transnational media literacy.

Transnational media literacy can arguably be understood as an element of cosmopolitanization. Hall (2008) emphasizes migrants' cosmopolitan competence, developed through exposure to difference and through the need to negotiate this on a regular basis. He explains that migrants often have no choice but to be cosmopolitans: "They have to learn to live in two countries, to speak a new language and make a life in

another place, not by choice but as a condition of survival...So, culturally, they're living "in translation" every day of their lives" (2008, p. 347).

"Living in translation" and in conditions where they have no choice but to imagine the self through systems of mediated and physical mobility, migrants and diasporas invite us to think discursively of the concept of the audience. This is a proposition that emphasizes the complexities and changes inherent in media consumption, especially among migrant and diasporic audiences, but also the conditionality of meaning-making when media consumption is concerned. Making sense of the media is a process subject to other discursive practices, for example, political action, the precariousness associated with migration, community building, but also the politics of media production.

Our understanding of audience as a discursive category emerges through our conceptual and empirical approach to migration and family as relevant categories for understanding audiences. Regarding migration, we argue that community discourses and discourses associated with the wider media culture inform media consumption and its meanings among migrant and diasporic audiences. Communities, for example, are regularly summoned around the media – for example, satellite television – but also divided by particular media uses – for example, religious programming. At the same time, the ideological frames of media consumption among migrants and diasporas are not only culturally particularistic. These audiences, like other audiences, are more than communities: they are also targeted consumers, defined to some extent within wider systems of political economic discourses associated with competitive media environments.

As much as migrant audiences are subject to the discursive meanings of community and consumption, they are also subject to the discursive meanings of the family. Family is discursively and historically constructed in all cases; the concept refers to a universal category with diverse discursive incarnations. When migrant and diasporic contexts are concerned, families can be transnational and spread across boundaries, but they can also be families of mixed heritage and families with different forms of parenting - including single parenting, but also gay and lesbian parenting alongside heterosexual parenting in nuclear family units. Migrant and diasporic families also have different emotional and moral economies, not least because they have to negotiate different national norms of upbringing and sometimes rather different sets of values carried along through travels or interrupted by these. To return to media literacy, many migrant families live in media-savvy households, as research has repeatedly recorded (Diminescu, 2008; Georgiou, 2012; Madianou and Miller, 2012). Thus, some of the meanings of media consumption are negotiated through the transnational articulations of the family as a concept. Early adoption of technologies; flexible and fragmented but also communal media consumption within families; intense intergenerational convergence and divergence of media use: these are only some of the ways in which migrant and diasporic families make sense of the media.

**Audiences and migration: A wider contribution**

While migrant and diasporic audiences can only be understood through a focus on particularities, these same particularities require a reflexive understanding of the links between particularism and universalism.

As proposed by Robertson:

Rather than simply viewing the theme of universalism as having to do with principles which can and should be applied to all, and that of particularism as referring to that which can and should be applied only 'locally', I suggest that the two have become tied together as part of a globewide nexus. They have become united in terms of the universality of the experience and, increasingly, the *expectation* of particularity on the one hand, and the experience and, increasingly, the *expectation* of universality, on the other. The latter – the particularization of universalism – involves the idea of the universal being given global-human concreteness; while the former – the universalization of particularism – involves the extensive diffusion of the idea that there is virtually no limit to particularity, to uniqueness, to difference and to otherness (Robertson, 1992, p. 102).

Taking into account Robertson's (1992) argument about the universalism-particularism continuum, we want to emphasize three contributions made by studies of migrant and diasporic audiences to wider conceptual and methodological debates on audiences and on the family. First of all, research on migrant and diasporic audiences demonstrates the key role of media and communications in "normalizing" transnational cultural practices. In contradiction to many policy makers' fears and to the preoccupations of methodological nationalism (Beck, 2006), increasing numbers of people behave as media nomads, i.e. regularly moving between different media settings and environments. Secondly, growing mobility between different media platforms, and between linguistic and cultural media spaces, has blurred for many the boundaries between cultural and political spheres. Watching soap operas on transnational Arabic-language television becomes, for example and for some women, a way of engaging with and negotiating formal political discourses of gender in their region of origin (Georgiou, 2012). Thirdly, studies of migrant and diasporic audiences have often and inevitably adopted multi-spatial, comparative and cross-national methodological approaches. While in many studies of migration and diaspora this is not a choice, such approaches remind us of the growing significance of comparative and cross-national research as media consumption has become cross-border and dispersed for increasing numbers of audiences.

**Focussing on this special issue**

This special issue emerged from discussions on media, audiences and social integration in Cost Action IS0906, *Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies* (2010-2014). Two topics have been at the core of

the debates: public issues related to media roles and regulation, citizenship and social diversity in a complex and multicultural European space; and issues related to the sphere of contemporary families, such as the roles of the media in relationships among family members. Across both topics, we noted a lack of research on the role of the media among the transnational families strongly represented in a culturally diverse Europe.

The blurring of boundaries between public and private spheres and the shifts in societal and familial spaces of communication and identity require an interdisciplinary agenda and research practice. Anchored in the social sciences domain, these disciplines can also benefit immensely from media and communications research, providing knowledge on the everyday life of people sharing family ties and experiencing a particular sense of belonging to different worlds. On the basis of these perspectives, contributions to this special issue were invited. This was an open invitation to interdisciplinary approaches that could cross-fertilize research from the social sciences and the humanities while drawing attention to research on uses of media and ICTs among migrant families. Some of the key questions that potential contributors were invited to address were: What is the role of the media in advancing or hindering the participation and/or integration of migrant families in local, national and transnational communities? How do digital media impact on the ways in which identity is constructed among transnational migrant communities? How do media roles change according to age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or religion? What role do the media play in intergenerational cultural transmission and in sustaining family ties within and across borders? And how much does generation matter in media practice and in *transmitting/sharing* culture(s) in households?

The Call received a range of positive responses from within and outside the COST Action. At the end of an editorial selection process that included external blind peer-reviews, seven articles were selected to contribute to a rich and diverse understanding of issues associated with diversity, migration, family and identity. Some questions attracted significant attention, while others are still relatively unexplored and new ones have been introduced. Co-authored and single-authored articles emerged from research projects (Huertas and Martínez; Leurs and Ponzanesi), debates within the COST Action (Dhoest, Nikunen and Cola) and PhD research projects (Giordano; Khan; Slette-meås; Vittadini, Milesi and Aroldi). Empirical findings are supported by qualitative methodologies such as focus groups, interviews and virtual ethnography, and some studies include survey methods. A primary focus on young generations and youth cultures does not exclude research on intergenerational and intra-generational relations within families: the migrant couple with and without children; the distant family connected by phone or VoIP; the family where adolescents are the ICT leaders, managing their parents' access to digital communication. New media and their different affordances are at the core of the agenda as it unfolds in these articles, but television, the press and radio continue to attract the interest of researchers, precisely because of their persistence among participants.

In their opening article, *Exploring media use among migrant families in Europe: Theoretical foundations and reflections*, Alexander Dhoest, Kaarina Nikunen and Marta Cola review and discuss key concepts for this topic. How should the definition of the *migrant family* avoid an essentialism bias, and why can *hybridity* and *cosmopolitanism* contribute to theorizing and researching diasporic media uses? Based on a vast list of references that includes classic literature and recent developments of these concepts, the article provides an orientation for innovative research on the contemporary conditions of the European landscape. The critical review of literature led the authors to conclude that future research would benefit from a comparative dimension supported by cross-national research. The authors also consider that research on migrant families and their uses of media for distinctive purposes should cover not only young people, but also older generations. Account should also be taken of all kinds of media and the intersection of multiple cultural and other identifications explored. In sum, research should be more open to the radical diversity of migration patterns and to the diversity of diasporic audiences.

Openness to diversity is central to the article *The dynamics of localizing home in foreign territories*. Supported by a place-based analytical orientation and by theories for reading the everyday - such as the theory of domestication and the theory of practice -, Dag Slettemeås examines processes of home-construction and meaning-making among a diversity of households composed of families from different origins and cultural backgrounds living in Norway. Qualitative research aimed at ensuring attention to the internal dynamics of the households included ethnographic approaches and in-depth interviews with family members in 19 households placed in specific urban areas where migrant/ethnic minority density was substantial. The concept of "home" that emerged from the empirical research identifies five key dimensions: the *locality dimension* including social and material resources, as well as its public representation; the *local network dimension*, at the level, for example, of feeling connected and actually engaged with local social practices; the dimension of *belonging*, both symbolically and practically, to the local and to the distant place of origin; the *distant network dimension*, allowing us to reach broader communicative spaces than the local; and the *cultural consumption dimension*, in which media use is part of wider household practices. Three case studies of migrant families contrast distinctive household orientations - the uni-culturally oriented, the pluri-culturally oriented and the culturally ambivalent household. In his conclusion, the author emphasizes the interest of place-based research on domestication processes and media-related practices, which should also be "open to more flexible and diversified constellations of everyday migrant living".

A diversity of adolescent origins is present in *New-generation ties: Identity, social relations and digital technologies among 2G migrants in Italy*. Introducing the context of Italy as a country experiencing recent immigration from within and outside Europe, Nicolleta Vittadini, Daniele Milesi and Piermarco Aroldi adopt a

“non-marginalizing” approach that highlights elements of continuity and connection (and also differences) between the youth culture of the host country and 2G migrants’ belonging to diverse cultures. A multi-method approach in two phases combined interviews, virtual ethnography, focus groups and questionnaires targeted at both adolescents and their parents, thus allowing an intergenerational perspective. The authors analyze the communicative repertoires of 25 young migrants of 13 nationalities attending Italian technical secondary schools, selected in relation to their digital literacy and use of digital devices. Research results present their distinctive use of ICT in the management of networks of social relations in both real and virtual lives: *in-depth management* in order to enhance and support significant relations in real life; *maintenance management* of social relations with friends and relatives; and *expansive management* aimed at increasing the number of people with whom they come into contact. In their conclusion, the authors stress the role of media technologies in expanding the boundaries of the family network and in reconfiguring the transnational experience of foreign youth in Italy. As the research has shown, while “real-time communication tools re-enact the sense of special proximity and intimacy”, asynchronous communication tools may minimize linguistic and communicational gaps between these youngsters and their school-mates.

In *Bits of homeland. Generation and gender transformations of Moroccan-Dutch youth using digital technologies*, Koen Leurs and Sandra Ponzanesi explore the intersection between generation and gender in order to evidence “a more complex and nuanced vision on integration, transnational networks and the importance of ICT for the construction of flexible citizenship” among this social group, the majority of whom were born in the Netherlands. Combining a large-scale survey with in-depth interviews and virtual ethnography, the article presents two case studies. The first case is focused on generational transformations, contrasting mediated relations with the distant homeland. While young people act as facilitators of their parents’ contacts and talk with relatives in Morocco and the diaspora, they use their migratory background as an identity marker, actively hybridizing cultural legacies with the dominant local and global youth cultures. The second case is focused on the reconfiguration of gender identities, paying attention to the double standards (male/female) and to the negotiation of gender identities in the forum *Marokko.nl*. Spending more time at home, girls turn to the internet and use their private spaces to share and discuss intimate issues such as love or sexuality. Both case studies evidence the ways in which generation and gender differences in ICT use within these families are intertwined. This intersectional approach should be taken into account within the field of digital media and migration, the authors conclude.

*Maghrebi women in Spain: Family roles and media consumption* considers the same migratory group in a distinct context. For years, Amparo Huertas and Yolanda Suárez have researched the situation of women of



Moroccan origin who live in Spain, combining data from quantitative surveys and interviews among adolescents and adults. The authors stress the difficulties of interviewing Maghrebi women, who are highly controlled by husbands and present minimal command of foreign languages. Maghrebi households are also the least digitally equipped among migrant families in Spain. Television and radio are the family media diet. While Arabic channels are largely seen by Maghrebi women, their children present low rates of watching these. The authors analyze these media-related practices using theoretical frameworks from feminist studies and Latin-American cultural studies. According to the authors, the concept of "identity overburden", a certain feminization of tradition where women comply with standard duties as carers and as cultural mediators, may be reinforced in the context of cultural diversity. Another contribution comes from the concept of *mediation*, explored by Martín-Barbero. Not only "individual mediation" marked by gender, ethnicity, social class, origin and place of residence influences processes of media decoding. Also "institutional mediation" such family order supports certain "rules" with regard to consumption. Among these Maghrebi families, there is a male institutional order: wives are controlled by husbands, daughters are controlled by fathers, and male teenagers reproduce the male practices learnt in the household. Only young women who are employed and live in urban areas seem able to break away from traditional gender roles, the authors sustain, naming these young women the "bridge generation".

*Mobile phones in migrant contexts: Commercial discourses and migrants' appropriations of ICT in Spain* presents this resource for maintaining bonds with geographically scattered family members and for building networks in the different spaces of migrants' trajectories. Cecilia Gordano explores the meaning-making processes and the power relationships at play between demand and supply, and between low-income users and their providers. Theoretically supported by Cultural Studies, the research is also framed by the ICT4D perspective. The qualitative approach is based on interviews with 28 Ecuadorian and Moroccan users and five spokespersons from the marketing departments of telecom companies. From the migrants' accounts emerged differences in the available technological equipment and services and that the most extended use of mobile phones was for national calls, although providers' advertisements stressed communication with the distant family. Mobile phones could not be so commonly used for international calls, not only due to the costs. Intergenerational differences in digital literacy and the local availability of technological equipment and infrastructure in both origin and host societies also affect its use. Low-cost strategies, popular among low-income migrant users, confront the interests of private telecom companies. Thus, the politics of pricing and the profit-driven provision of services shape and are shaped by users' appropriation strategies. As the author concludes, "this affects the levels of individual and social well-being that people experience through communication, acquiring special relevance in contexts of mobility and management of family relationships at a distance."

The last article, *Asylum seekers/refugees' orientations to belonging, identity & integration into Britishness: Perceptions of the role of the mainstream and community press*, explores the intersection of asylum seekers/refugees, UK media and social processes of citizenship, meaning-belonging, identity and participation or inclusion. The article, unusually written by frequently assuming the first person (*I*), is based on the author's PhD research. Amadu Khan, who is himself an asylum seeker/ refugee, analyzes and discusses how these perceptions of the dominant pattern of news representation in the mainstream media in different ways affect the sense of national belonging, national identity and ability to integrate into the UK. Khan notes the role of community news media in providing asylum seekers/refugees with a local sense of belonging, identity and integration. These representations in the news are discussed with the recent UK political policy on migration as backdrop. The author problematizes the ideological orientation towards "an 'imagined' British national and cultural community" that has developed in recent years. Discussing migrant integration, this closing article closes with a call for "an integration policy that prioritizes migrants' demonstration of localized forms of belonging and identities rather than large-scale demonstrations of national affiliation". Criticizing this "neo-assimilationist" approach to integration, the author also stresses the role of the media and their social responsibilities: "migrant integration is illusory if perceptions of a media influence to structural inequalities, psychosocial trauma and exclusion remains unaddressed." Thus, starting with a discussion of theoretical concepts that provide keys to interpretation, the following articles based on empirical research among migrant families move from the realm of the household or the adolescent's bedroom to the public space of commercial companies and their interests in relation to communication as well as to public migration policies and patterns of media representation and interpellation of migrant families. Articulating media, technology and the migrant family in a culturally diverse Europe, blurring boundaries between public and private spheres and considering the shifts in societal and familiar spaces of communication, this special issue of OBS\* comes with an ambition to make a contribution to understanding audience transformation, cultural diversity and social integration.

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