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Mapping Minority Media in the EU: Mapping Participation in Communities Beyond a Bounded Europe*

ABSTRACT This paper draws from the European research project: ‘Diasporic Minorities and their Media in Europe: A Mapping’. This study investigates how diasporic ethnic community media – especially the Internet – get involved in processes of exclusion and community building and how new communication and information technologies enable or obstruct community and cross-community communication within Europe. Europe is becoming increasingly multiethnic; the mobility of migrant populations, the establishment of diasporic communities and the emergence of many co-existing, competing and hybrid ethnic cultures, are all involved in the shaping of the contemporary social and cultural European condition. Within this context, the growing numbers of ethnic community media reveal an active – and alternative to the mainstream – cultural production with implications for identity and for belonging in ethnic and multiethnic communities. The alternative – and parallel to the national and European mainstream – diasporic minority media cultures could play a key role in sustaining communities, in expanding participation in national and European publics, but also in leading to segregation and inward-looking cultures. With reference to rich empirical data, collected in 12 European countries and in a series of case studies, I highlight the richness of the minority community media map in Europe. I then argue that new media offer potentials for empowerment and community as a diverse, decentralised experience that takes place across and beyond multiethnic Europe.

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Introduction

There is no doubt that new communication technologies have challenged meanings of distance, boundaries and time. Have identities changed radically as a consequence? Are communities on the retreat as people become more mobile and their everyday life more flexible? Can we talk about new forms of relations, loyalties and belonging (or of non-belonging)? Much is being said about a communication revolution that alters our experience of the world and of ourselves. Fluidity, fragmentation and mobility have become buzzwords within a discourse that assumes that people are more and more flexible and mobile players in a global arena. Yet, these assumptions are challenged as many people still seek refuge within communities, as they express ethnic loyalties and oppositions, as they still define themselves in relation to homelands and diasporas. These conditions remind us that the increasing possibilities for communication and hybridity do not imply any teleologies for either belonging or for being. They remind us that communication possibilities allow the emergence of new conditions, but also of alternative scenaria within new conditions. As it is impossible to reach easy and homogenising conclusions about identities and the media, research needs to be sensitive and seek understandings in the particular – in the experience that is positioned in history, space and time. Individuals', groups' and communities' positioning in relation to the possibilities and consequences of information and communication technologies varies extensively; so does their experience of identity. This particularity needs to be studied in order to understand difference and change in their consequences. Empirical work and case studies make analysis possible, realistic and meaningful.

Ethnic and diasporic media can become powerful mouthpieces of the community they represent, they can create powerful images of self-representation for the group (Riggins, 1992; Husband 1994) and in their communal consumption they can sustain a sense of ethnic commonality (Georgiou, 2001). Minority media can become symbols of empowerment, they can inform and communicate symbols of community and they can potentially mediate a group's participation in the public sphere of the country where they live in, in the public sphere of their country of origin and in transnational public spheres that emerge in the diasporic experience – as people who come from a common distant *homeland* and are presently spread around the globe

seek communication and community. Such potentials for participation and inclusion in communities, for the widening possibility of being informed and part of an interpretative diasporic community are advanced by ICTs. In the era of digitisation the space for alternative media is broader than ever – though so is the competition for audiences’ attention; the cost for developing and sustaining alternative minority media has decreased substantially and the spatial specificity and boundedness of the media – in terms of possibilities for broadcasting and circulation and of regulatory limitations – are presently much more flexible than in the past.

Through the possibilities for production and consumption of different minority media, multi-sited and decentralised media cultures emerge. The meanings of spatial and temporal restrictions and boundaries (Harvey, 1989) have been challenged through the media – as images of a distant *homeland* are disseminated on satellite television, as the image of the distant family is reinvented on a home-made web page, as the sound of a friend’s new-born baby is mediated and heard on a home video. The immediacy of access to images and sounds that once would be unreachable, the mediation of the experience and the way both are appropriated allow the media to become part of everyday culture, of people’s emotional and communicational experience. Everyday culture has become media culture (Alasuutari, 1999). In discussing media as part of everyday culture, we turn to the notion of mediation. ‘The notion of mediation therefore provides a route into a concern with the delicate, but always historically and sociologically specific, ways in which public (and inevitably private) meanings emerge and merge in the socially and culturally contested spaces of everyday life’ (Silverstone, 2001: 11). In the same paper, Silverstone argues that mediation is a dialectic concept, which ‘requires us to address the processes of communication as both institutionally and technologically driven and embedded...At the same time it requires a consideration of the social as in turn a mediator: institutions and technologies, as well as the meanings that are delivered by them, are mediated in the social processes of reception and consumption’ (ibid. 10).

In this research, we want to investigate how media technologies, the institutions of minority media in particular and minority audiences interweave in everyday life and how they are involved in processes of community building, in processes of inclusion, exclusion and participation. Within this triangular relation our focus is on diasporic

minority media production. Minority media production is of particular interest as it (i.) reflects the activity of different communities within media cultures; (ii.) partly reflects the cultural identity of diasporic groups (e.g. monolingual or multilingual media; local or/and global media) and (iii.) allows us to investigate how media production interweaves with media consumption in complex relations that go beyond a conceptualisation of a 'sender – receiver' relation. As we map the diasporic media, we set questions around the role of ICTs and their contribution in the development of the (new) diasporic media cultures.

Mapping Minorities and their Media in the EU

This paper draws from the EC-funded project 'Minorities and their Media in the EU: A Mapping', which is based at [Media@LSE](#), the media programme at the London School of Economics. This project is an ambitious attempt to understand some of the complex realities and conditions in the relations between identity, community and the media in the case of ethnic, diasporic minorities in Europe. This research project, which is still in progress, aims at drawing a comprehensive map of the ethnic and diasporic media cultures across the EU and at examining how minority media cultures relate to issues of exclusion, participation and community. Particularly important for this project is the role of new technologies and of digitisation in the development of minority media cultures and their creating of new possibilities for communication and/or new exclusions.

Research has already shown that during the last decade or so, communication technologies have enabled the development of decentralised, local and transnational media, allowing groups to re-imagine themselves and Europe beyond the dominant and national ideologies of European and national homogeneity (Morley and Robins, 1995; Aksoy and Robins, 2000). As these changes occur, ideologies about the singularity of Europe and European identities are challenged and important questions are raised.

Beyond Eurocentrism

For centuries, Eurocentrism has assumed a predominant role of a singular European cultural heritage within the continent and beyond (Amin, 1989) and European culture has been imagined as being defined by the Judaeo-Christian religion and the ancient Greek ideals (Pieterse, 1991). This imagining has undermined the heterogeneity of Europe, the cultural conflicts between different populations inhabiting the continent and the tensions the actual European cultural has always been about. Pieterse argues about this imagining: ‘in addition to being chauvinistic, elitist, pernicious and alienating, it is wrong’ (ibid.: 3). This myth undermines regional cultures and subcultures, it denies popular culture and ignores multicultural realities. Furthermore, it implies a static understanding of both culture and Europe, while failing to take into consideration the historical, communication and, among others, technological changes that have been taking place. The dynamic presence of minorities in Europe, which extends beyond physical presence, and includes the dynamic development of alternative cultures, politics and communities, increasingly undermines the stereotypes around European cultural homogeneity. Minority media become some of the most vibrant agents of alternative cultures and their presence alone reflects multicultural Europe and its diverse, often tense and conflicting qualities.

In this context, we address some key questions around multiculturalism in Europe, media and community:

☞☞ Do communication developments alter minorities’ position in Europe?

☞☞ How do ethnic diasporic media challenge minorities’ sense of belonging in local and transnational spaces and what is the role of mediated communications for the shaping of minority identities?

☞☞ Do minority communities sustain separatist cultures or do they participate in an emerging European multiethnic culture (or diverse multiethnic cultures)?

☞☞ How extensively do particular media cultures participate in creating new conditions for social inclusion and exclusion?

✍✍What is the minorities' particular take on media technologies' appropriation and what are the consequences for minorities and the broader society?

This is an attempt to map cultural and ethnic difference within Europe and interpret it. We are mapping cultural difference as expressed in media cultures. Cultural difference can lead to segregation, to the emergence and sustaining of communities that are distinct and separate from the mainstream, but also to the emergence of communities that are becoming integral part of the mainstream, of the national and transnational European societies, though often radically innovative in appropriating diversity within their boundaries and outside.

This research is still in progress. The map of the estimated 140 diasporic minorities and their media is unfolding in data from 12 European countries. This data reflects the richness of the minority media cultures and the map being drawn reveals a multiplicity of experiences, settings and directions. For some communities – the newer diasporic communities especially (e.g. Croats, Albanians) – mediated communication primarily reflects their interest in staying in touch with their *homeland*. For communities that have been in the diaspora for generations, diasporic media offer a chance to keep long-term, on going and adapted to their everyday life, communication with other members of the broader diaspora (e.g. Jews, Armenians). But for most of the diasporic communities, minority media meet their multiple needs to communicate with other members of the same group in the locality, in the country of origin and in the broader transnational diaspora (e.g. Greeks, Turks, Caribbean).

An important point to make is that diasporas are not homogenous, neither are diasporic identities. Diversity characterizes any cultural experience (Papastergiades, 1998; Woodward, 1997). As Hardt and Negri (2000) argue, the identity of 'the people' has been constructed around an imagined unity that eliminates internal difference and identifies the whole group with a hegemonic group, race or class. Against the ideology of cultural homogeneity, Hardt and Negri suggest the category of 'the multitude'. They argue that the multitude is a multiplicity, a plane of singularities, an open set of relations, which is neither homogenous nor identical with itself and bears an indistinct, inclusive relation to those outside of it (ibid.). This is an important point to make in discussing the multicultural character of Europe. Groups

are not characterised by internal homogeneity, while their interdependence with Others is inevitable. There is no clear divide between the 'Europeans' and the 'Others', there is no such divide between 'the culture' of the 'Europeans' (or the Germans, the French, etc.) and 'the culture' of the Others ('the foreigners'). The complexity of the cultural relations within and between cultural, ethnic, majority and minority populations is extensive enough to make the investigation of diasporic significance much more interesting than a model assuming a division between a homogeneous majority and a homogeneous minority would suggest.

Thinking through diaspora

The concept of diaspora goes along way back in human history; it was initially used by the ancient Greeks to describe their spreading all over the then known-world. For the ancient Greeks, diaspora signified migration and colonisation. For the Jews, the Armenians and the Africans who later adopted the term, the concept implied more painful meanings of loss of a Homeland, violent deterritorialisation and longing for return (Cohen, 1997). As much as the history of migration and settlement for these populations and for other populations that have moved across the globe has changed, so did the concept of diaspora.

Today, diaspora has made a dynamic comeback in the debates around ethnicity, nationality and nationhood, boundaries and identity. A concept that has transformed in time, diaspora has returned to address and assist the understanding of migration, post-migration and reterritorialisation, people's multiple sense of belonging and loyalties beyond national boundaries. Diaspora has become 'an intermediate concept between the local and the global that nevertheless transcends the national perspectives', Gillespie argues (1995: 6). Diaspora implies a decentralised relation to ethnicity, real or imagined relations between scattered people who sustain a sense of community through various forms of communication and contact and who do not necessarily depend on returning to a distant *Homeland* (Peters: 1999).

Diaspora, as it applies to late modernity conditions, illustrates the hybrid and ever-changing nature of identities that are not inescapably dependent on homogeneity, purity and stable localisation. Cultures' viability does not depend on purity, rather

they survive through mixing (Boyarin and Boyarin: 1993). Identities in the diaspora become 'diasporized', Boyarin and Boyarin suggest (ibid.), explaining that these identities can go beyond dualisms. Diasporas' hybridity implies a diversity in cultures, that co-exist, compete, merge and emerge; cultures that may be the outcome of cultural meetings or of suppression, exclusion and domination; cultures that reflect the difference of starting points, histories, journeys and (imagined) destinations within Europe; cultures that do not imply the existence of a given original or pure ('the European') and a new impure and other ('the migrant/the foreign'). Rather diasporas' hybridity implies multiple points of departure and multiple destinations, it implies instabilities and inequalities, not only in the meeting of two different cultures or populations (e.g. 'the Turkish' and 'the German'), but within any of those cultures, group and communities, as much as in-between.

In this context, concepts such as hybridity and diaspora become useful for understanding (i.) how European cultures emerge in the uneasy meeting of the old and the new, the local, the national and the transnational; (ii.) how diasporic minorities are characterised by internal diversity, especially within generations and how diasporic communities involve as much internal conflicts of power, as well as conflicts with others; and (iii.) how diasporic cultures are not homogenous, harmonious or singular expressions of community consensus and how they actually involve negotiations and conflicts within and outside the group.

Diasporic communication

As much as the diasporic experience varies, so do diasporic media cultures. Communities such as the Turks for example, enjoy an extensively developed media setting, benefiting from satellite technologies in particular (Aksoy and Robins, op. cit.; Ogan and Milikowski, 1998). Other communities, such as the Kurds, increasingly balance their limited access to conventional media with an increasing communicative presence on the web. Dozens of new Kurdish web sites make their appearance on the Internet every month and, apart from the fact that are all (self) identified as Kurdish, the variety in their style, content and the fraction of the transnational Kurdish audience they address, vary significantly.

The Kurdish example is one that reflects very vividly the complexity and diversity of mediated communication, especially communication on-line, with consequences for identity. Kurdish, being one of the most tightly-linked and politicised diasporas, have been using the Internet to make their political cause known, their own voice against Turkish and other opposing voices heard and for renewing a sense of belonging in a transnational community. Political web pages and discussion groups and sites of Kurdish culture and language have a prominent presence within Kurdish on-line production. It is worth noting though that, even for a community whose transnational communication is characterised by a lively and transnational political and politicised discourse, this is not the only kind of communication developed on-line. Kurds still produce and consume a variety of web sites and use emails for communicating not only political concerns, but also personal, professional and other news. No matter how tightly linked and political this group is, it still includes various subgroups – people of different generations, ages, classes, locations and interests. This internal identity diversity cannot but to be reflected in their communication and their communication cannot but inform their identities. For example, new generations choose English as a shared language; for them this choice does not conflict with their Kurdishness, rather it allows them to communicate with other Kurds all over the world. For the older generations of Kurds though, the predomination of English in on-line communication is often considered to be a threat to their ethnic identity.

Overall, the media open up possibilities for communication between populations in local, national and transnational spaces, they create new possibilities for cheaper and quicker communication and shape community spaces that are not restricted by geography. The vivid diasporic media space, the development of diasporic networks and the increasing, yet diverse use of the diasporic media by different communities indicate that information and communication technologies have not only eased diasporic local and global communication, but they have actually changed it. When grandparents living in Trinidad learn how to use the Internet in order to send emails to their granddaughter in London (Miller and Slater, 2000) their understanding of communication, as well as the intensity of family relations change. When every third Cypriot household in London invests on a huge satellite dish in order to watch the news from their country of origin every evening, the distance between Britain and

Cyprus diminishes; everyday Cyprus news become common references in London and the sense of being Cypriot is being reinvented every evening (Georgiou, 2001).

The Specific Case of the Internet and Diasporic Communities

As the examples presented already highlight, new communication technologies alter the possibilities and conditions of communication and community. As the Internet surpasses the nation-state limitations and usually the legislative limitations that bind other media, it opens up new possibilities for sustaining diasporic community relations and even for reinventing diasporic relations and communication that were either weak or non-existent in the past.

In discussing the condition of diasporic on-line communication, it is important to set up two main starting points. On one hand, on-line communication for the members of diasporas has similar characteristics with other groups – with all the qualities, inequalities and rapid changes that characterise on-line communication overall. For example, the numbers of members of diasporas using the Internet increase rapidly. Also, as a rule, people with higher levels of education and income enjoy more access than those of lower educational and economic capital. In most cases, diasporic on-line communication is diverse and it combines the use of email with a more limited use of the web for information, entertainment, education. Like for the vast majority of Internet users, for diasporas as well, on-line communication is increasingly instrumental (Castells, 2001). At present, it is estimated that over 85 % of general Internet usage represents email communication, primarily with friends, colleagues and family – relations that are initiated in ‘real’ ‘off-line’ conditions as much as on-line (Castells, *ibid.*). My own research with the British Greek Cypriots (*op. cit.*), as well as other research on diasporic communities and on-line communication (Miller and Slater, *op. cit.*), indicate towards similar findings. The Internet increasingly saturates everyday life but it also becomes compatible with it. Most people use email as a cheaper, faster and more direct way to communicate with family and friends living in the locale (especially those who have continuous access to email – e.g. students and professionals) and others living in the country of origin or around the globe. One of the participants in my research in London told me how he managed to trace a friend from his high school years in Cyprus through the Internet and almost twenty years

later he actually re-establish a long-lost relationship with him. The difference is that this relation is now on-line, without excluding the possibility of a meeting in off-line life. 'It was so easy to find him on the Internet. I did a search under his name and I found him. It was so great...He is a solicitor in Florida now', he says.

On the other hand, however, there are certain distinct characteristics of diasporic on-line communication. The fact that diasporas are transnational communities means that their communication is very often mediated – until now mainly the telephone and snail mail served that role – and more recently email has developed as a powerful competitor of the telephone and post. Family photos travelling from Cyprus to the UK and the other way around are among the most popular attachments in communication between dispersed Greek Cypriot families and friends. With on-line communication, the exchange of everyday, banal news has also increased. Sharing the banality, the routines and the common activities of everyday life (De Certeau, 1984) increases the sense of belonging to a community and furthers the limits of the imagination of sharing (Georgiou, *op. cit.*).

Another point of particular importance for the relation between diasporas and the Internet is that of exclusion. In the case of diasporic minorities, like in the case of other groups that face social exclusion and discrimination, the inequality in on-line communication is extremely relevant. As Castells (*op. cit.*) argues, exclusion from on-line communication and networking is one of the most exclusionary processes from contemporary economy and culture. This form of exclusion is increasingly complex. Firstly, there is a divide between those having access to the Internet. Though this is considered to be a decreasing and short-term condition, it still has important consequences for large sections of the population. Secondly, exclusion from on-line communication and on-line networking is increasingly connected to computer literacy and to education and the cultural capital that allows its users to make sense of it. Both of these conditions are particularly relevant when referring to certain underprivileged groups – like the aged, the generation of non-computer-literate and those who either lack the cultural capital to make sense of the Internet or their culture differs substantially from that of mediated communication. Finally and more importantly in the long run, and as Castells points out (*ibid.*), there is inequality between the 'producers/users' and the 'consumers/users' of the Internet. The first category refers

to those whose activity on the Internet feeds back into the technological system and the second to those who do not interact directly with the developments of the Internet. This is a key dimension of an exclusionary relation which relates to what Massey (1993) was referring to when she was talking about the division between those in the receiving and those in the producing side of globalisation. A dimension of key importance this last one relates directly to the production, use and consumption of the Internet by such minorities as the diasporic ones. Does the Internet disempower and exclude diasporic communities further or does it actually fight exclusion?

The answer to that question is not straightforward; neither is the relation between diasporic communication and the three kinds of on-line exclusion. Nevertheless, there is a need to be sensitive both to these possibilities of exclusion and the possibilities of the Internet for furthering diasporic communication. Indeed, some communities remain on the receiving side of the media, and though less so in the case of the Internet, poverty, social exclusion and cultural capital still remain powerful boundaries, often stronger than those of space and Eurocentric ideologies. On the other hand, for the new generations of diasporic populations the Internet is a new way for direct communication, for decentralised and alternative to the mainstream media production. Those new generations of diasporic people experiment with the Internet, participate in their own on-line fora and express alternative voices to those claiming homogenous and bounded European and national cultures. Furthermore, diasporas, like all media consumers, communities and societies transform technologies by appropriating, experimenting with it and making it compatible to their everyday life and culture (Castells, *op. cit.*; Silverstone and Hirsch, 1994; Silverstone, 1996). This means that on-line communication makes sense for diasporas in the context of their everyday life and in dialogue with their culture and history.

If there is any meaning in discussing the relation between diaspora and the Internet is because that has a particular value in the context of diasporic cultures. Diasporic communities – even if diverse and with particularities in different cases – have always relied on networks, which expanded from the immediate locale to the global and transnational. Thus, the Internet takes even further the possibilities for the long-time developing diasporic culture of mediated, transnational and partly free from state control communication. Furthermore, for communities such as the diasporic, which

are characterised by disparity and diversity, the construction of shared imagination, images and sounds of commonality have always been key elements of sustaining community. The Internet has allowed most of these communities to discover and rediscover this shared imagination and commonality. The web pages and discussion groups that reconstruct communities, bring together friends and families and even do business with this community of consumers, are the most powerful diasporic presence on the Internet, apart from the invisible, banal but very crucial for community and identity email communication.

Some Concluding Remarks

New communication technologies have not only eased communication within diasporic communication; they have partly altered its form, content and meaning. The Internet in particular has an unprecedented value, which has not yet been extensively appreciated in relevant research. In concluding, I want to sum up some key points in relation to the role of the Internet for diasporic communication:

☞☞The Internet creates empowering potentials for diasporic communities. It is an easy and cheap way for different minorities to gain visibility, voice and surpass the boundaries of space and of dominant cultural ideologies within Europe. Nevertheless, the digital divide and the exclusion from mediated communication and networking (Dutton, 1999) still makes it difficult to celebrate the Internet without highlighting the existing inequalities in communication, technology competence, in the social and cultural capital of its producers, users and non-users.

☞☞As the Internet was designed, developed and dynamically established in everyday life primarily as a technology of free communication (Castells, op. cit.), the culture of free and unconventional communication usually characterises its use. This is so in the case of diasporic communities which usually see in the Internet an opportunity to communicate beyond geographical and national boundaries; as a way to establish a dynamic presence, an often resisting (even fundamental) and proud voice vis-à-vis discrimination, exclusion, political and social subordination.

- ✍✍ The geography of the Internet is partly defined in its use by such communities that, though dispersed, do exist and are sustained in virtual spaces and mediated relations.
- ✍✍ Through their on-line presence, diasporic communities can claim their space, rights and celebrate their identity and cultural particularity in the national contexts where they live, in the European Union, in relation to the country of origin and within a broader diaspora of people claiming a space in a transnational, decentralised community.
- ✍✍ For many members of diasporas – especially for the younger generations – their presence in the Internet and other media allows them to actively construct, communicate and celebrate their particular diasporic identities, which are not the same as those of their parents and those of the people living in the distant *homeland*.
- ✍✍ The decentralised on-line communication empowers different sections of diasporic communities, which can negotiate their identities within these communities, promote and experiment with different versions of ethnicity.
- ✍✍ The nature of the Internet means that diasporas can communicate and get information from local, national and transnational spaces – all these at the same time or separately. The flexibility of communication in space allowed by the Internet is compatible with the flexibility of the relation of diasporas with space – diasporic belonging is shaped in local, national and transnational spaces.
- ✍✍ The Internet allows the development of autonomous and decentralised networks of communication; in the case of diasporas, which are spread across different countries and continents, it creates potentials for more democratic relations within these communities. Yet, this potential for democratic relations is not unobstructed; often diasporic production is dominated by specific and more powerful voices within those communities. Mediated communication is an area of struggle.
- ✍✍ The Internet gives space to extremist voices that otherwise could be less visible. Yet the extremist presence should not be overestimated. In on-line communication, as in all communication, participants and consumers appropriate media products and make choices; communication and media consumption is not a passive process.

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