Editorial: Diaspora Beyond Nationalism

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Abstract

This is the editorial for the special issue 'Diaspora beyond Nationalism'. It makes a case for the research focus of the issue, explaining that it grew out of a conference of the same title, held in September 2015. Debates about migrants in many Western countries have increasingly taken a contentious tone, and have propelled nationalist and far-right parties, putting pressure on governments to resist further arrivals as well as becoming more demanding of migrants and diaspora communities that already live in those countries. The West has a long history of migrant settlement and when this is coupled with global notions of human rights and the responsibility to protect, managing migration becomes increasingly complex. Academic engagement can unpack and contribute to the understanding of some of this complexity. This *JOMEC Journal* special issue seeks to make a timely intervention on the lived experiences of migrants and diaspora communities, the multifaceted roles they play, the identities they occupy, the cultural transformations they carve out and undergo, and the centrality of media representation and communications technology usage, to provide meaningful insight into these processes.

Contributor Note

Idil Osman is the editor of this special issue of *JOMEC Journal*. She is co-author of *Somalia to Europe: Stories of the Somali Diaspora*, a book that chronicles the civil war experiences of Somali Europeans and their subsequent migration to the UK, as well as several journal articles and reports on mediated migration, conflict, diaspora communities and public policy. She holds a PhD from Cardiff University's School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies: this work examined the role of diasporic media in conflict zones. Previously a Teaching Fellow in Media and Communication in the University of Leicester's Department of Media and Communication, she is now a Research Associate and Senior Teaching Fellow in the Department of Development Studies at SOAS.

Citation

Population movements across borders are not a new phenomenon, yet significant shifts in the scope of international migration, as well as rapid advancements in transportation and communication, combined with decreasing prices of the latter, make today's globalized world evermore interconnected (Held et al. 1999; Castles and Miller 2003), while at the same time, also contributing to further migration. Movement of people at such scales across state borders cannot but have substantial political, economic and social consequences (Casles and Miller 2003).

Diasporas have existed in one form or another since ancient times, but there are reasons to believe that the political weight of diaspora communities has increased importantly throughout the late twentieth century (Demmers 2002). Diasporas are not homogeneous units. Individual members and groups within diaspora are 'stratified by class, caste, education, occupation, religious affiliation, cultural interests, urban or rural background' (Werbner 1999: 24), and often act from differing positions and backgrounds. Huge varieties of actors, political, social and economic leanings constantly define and redefine diasporas and their agendas (Bush 2007, Hall et al. 2007). Diasporas can often reflect alliances and divisions dominant in the country of origin, but they can also transcend traditional structures and dividing lines, and shape new realities (Horst 2007). Due to their political and economic potential, their knowledge of multiple cultures, and the easy access they allow to networks of local partners in their home countries, diasporas can be seen by some as important factors to approach in order to reach foreign policy and development ends.

The growth in a globally connected technological infrastructure has opened up spaces for transnationally available media to become a viable alternative to mainstream media. This potential was brought home in the first half of 2011, when revolutionary uprisings swept North Africa and the Middle East, which quickly came to be known as the Arab Spring. These uprisings saw the exit of two heads of states (Mubarak in Egypt and Ben Ali in Tunisia), and a political shake-up across the Arab-inhabited lands.

Among other things, the Arab Spring might be taken as an indication of the palpable role that social and new media can play in mobilising for political and social change. The Internet, along with mobile phones and digital video, enable people to organise in ways that overcome limits of time, space, identity and ideology, resulting in the expansion and coordination of activities that would be unlikely to occur by other means.

This special issue provides articles that engage with these issues from wide perspectives. It was developed initially from papers that presented at the 'Diaspora beyond Nationalism' conference, that was held in September 2015 at Cardiff University's School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies. It also includes several articles submitted subsequently.

These articles span a range of academic disciplines and theoretical perspectives, all sharing concerns with the social, cultural and political significance of migration and diaspora communities in a range of national and transnational contexts. Their common thread is the notion of shifting identities, and the flexibility of identities in realignment and reconstruction amid changing tides, means and circumstances, which

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expand far beyond notions of national identities.

Panayiota Tsatsou and Maria-Nerina Boursinou's paper sheds light on the need to rethink how we collect data on migrants in transition. It argues for studying immigrants' usage level of digital technologies within the time frame and context of 'immigration travel', and while immigrants are in transition. This perspective allows researchers to gain meaningful insight into the implications of digital inclusion and the crises and wide spectrum of problems that migrants encounter during their journeys.

Gabriel Moreno and Rosa Angélica Martínez Tellez refine the concept of simultaneity with regards to a diasporic public sphere, through their study of public comments in response to a variety of news sections about Mexico and the U.S. on Univision.com. Their article offers an argument for interactive digital news spaces providing a dynamic platform from which to explore the political participation of diasporas in home and host countries.

Marlo De Lara's contribution shows the ambiguous existence of the Filipino diaspora in the U.S. Through the use of film and different art forms, her study demonstrates how Filipino-American diasporas are addressing citizenship, cultural negotiations and social and racial structures in America.

Brian Chama's article argues for the centrality of black newspapers in empowering black British diasporas in relation to race, representation and conflict.

Claudia Bucciferro's paper explores the use of music in social activism in Latin America. Focusing on new media platforms such as YouTube, her study highlights how this music has taken up a new 'position' in terms of memory and connectedness between dispersed Latin American diasporas.

Ruth Sanz Sabido examines the perceptions held by Spanish migrants of the extent to which social media facilitate the development of a sense of community within their host towns and cities. Her article gives a particular insight into the use of Facebook groups in connecting diasporic Spanish comm-unities and that limits assumptions of bonds created through national identity.

Ahmet Atay and Nathian Shae Rodriguez both examine LGBT migrants and their diasporic encounters and experiences. Atay's article explores the ways that cyberspace can provide new avenues for articulating emerging identities but can also produce more of a state of confusion than empowerment.

Rodriguez's article demonstrates the significance of intersectionality, power and marginalisation in shaping LGBT identities, which it argues are in constant flux, produced and reproduced through social interactions.

Anna Klyueva and Anna Mikhaylova's paper analyses the use of soft power by the Russian state in influencing loyalty and cultural and ethnic identity constructions amongst Russian diaspora communities in the U.S. This exploration is particularly timely as tensions currently exist between Russia and the U.S. over Syria and the Middle East in general.

Hojeong Lee's article argues that the news consumption patterns of Korean diasporas in the U.S. influence and shape cultural identities in terms of relations between home and host-land. Her study

proposes that new identities are shaped and positioned amidst transnational existence between the country of migration and that of origin.

Overall, this special themed issue offers a range of stimulating new perspectives on diaspora, based on research that shows how diaspora goes beyond nationalism.

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