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Europe and its non-familiar faces: A study of Ghanaian women migrants' use of new media for identity and belonging in Hamburg and London.
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Abstract

Today's migrants are more likely, compared to their predecessors to maintain ongoing ties to their societies of origin because of efficient communication and transport (Schiller et al.1992, 9). With increasing mediatization, the possibilities for relationships in and through media communication have resulted in complex forms of citizenship (Hepp & Hasebrink2013, 15).

This is a comparative study of Ghanaian women's use of new media for identity and belonging in Hamburg and London. This research is relevant for the conference as it aims to understand the possibilities offered by new media, which have resulted in connections beyond national frames and identities becoming mobile (Hepp2005, 3). For minorities, cultural connections, and transnational networks, present elements of a complex system of communication that can advance participation and recognition. This is an important area of study when it comes to migrant women who are often marginalized (Georgiou2012, 794).

New communication technologies are essential in navigating gendered, diasporic-cosmopolitan identities, and creating sites of belonging in the context of everyday life where many face racism, and exclusion from the broader society. New media open up possibilities of cultivating social networks, which are crucial in sustaining diasporic identity, and community, as well as creating alternative spaces for inclusion.

However, little is known about the role of new media such as the internet in the maintenance, expression and advancement of identity especially when it comes to empowerment in marginalised communities (Siddiquee & Kagan 2006, 190). Therefore, questions arise as to how the uses and appropriations of media and communications counter balance socio-political exclusion and marginalization (Georgiou2012, 794).

Key words: migration, diaspora, new media, identity, gender

When I first saw the call for the seventh global Euro-Academia conference, Europe Inside-out, Europe and Europeaness exposed to plural observers, I was particularly intrigued by the term, "Europeaness". Does it refer to a European identity? Is this identity mutually exclusive or inclusive of the "non-familiar faces"?

This is a research on the "others" of Europe, or what one might call multicultural Europe. Although in recent times, the term has become synonymous with negative connotations and has been cited by many as a source of societal disintegration. There is a conservative discourse that mediates between us and them, by identifying other cultures as a danger to the survival of the culture at home. Hence the protection and transformation of cultural identity, are one of the key issues through which the politics of belonging and the question of migration are connected (Huysmans2000, 757-758).

Migration has become a security question in Europe. With many countries facing a number of challenges to their mechanisms of societal integration and political legitimacy, exacerbated by economic globalisation, the rise of poverty and deteriorating standards of living in cities. Across Europe, this atmosphere has led to the discontent in the form of the revival of xenophobic, racists, parties and movements (Huysmans2000, 751-752).

The researcher's focus is on studying women migrants since they are a minority, often marginalized within their own ethnic communities and the broader society (Georgiou 2012, p794). Women are often disadvantaged in having access to the labour market of the receiving countries, due to the restrictions in the host country on migrants admitted as dependants. This situation forces them to work in low status occupations with low wages, benefits, and unpleasant working conditions with either physical or sexual abuse (Twum Baah 2005, 71).

Gender and migration literature has tended to over-emphasize the role of structures and constraints thereby producing an impression of women as victims of circumstance. However it is important to understand the narratives of women migrants while referring to these hardships (political, social and economic) show that women are not just passive receivers of social processes, but are active agents in the construction of their destiny (Anthias2000, 35).

In the recent years, massive migration to western countries has occurred, and continues to occur, creating minority groups which insist on preserving their cultural heritage (Adoni et.al.2002, 411). This is made easier by the development of efficient communications and transport systems; hence, today's migrants are more likely, compared to their predecessors to maintain ongoing ties to their societies of origin (Schiller et al.1992, 9).

The possibilities offered by new communication technologies have resulted in connections beyond national frames and identities becoming mobile (Hepp2005, p3). With increasing mediatization, the possibilities for relationships in and through media communication have increased resulting in complex forms of citizenship (Hepp & Hasebrink2013,15).

The paper proceeds as follows: first is an elaboration of the theoretical framework, followed by the methodology, and lastly a section on some of the preliminary findings of the study.

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Research question: How do Ghanaian women migrants use media to negotiate identity and belonging in Hamburg and London?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.

Transnationalism and diaspora

Transnationalism is useful as it takes in to account the complex web of social relations that trans-migrants draw upon to create and maintain connections, political, social, economic and cultural, resulting in the creation of fluid and multiple identities (Schiller et al.1992, 11). Transnationalism is a condition in which despite the great distances and international borders, certain relationships have been globally intensified. The emphasis is on the importance of people within networks, focusing on multiple ties and interactions, linking people across the borders (Vertovec1999, 447).

The acts of migrants and their communities contribute to the formation and maintenance of new identities and communities, which assist in the shaping of practices of incorporation and belonging. In this globalized economy , no place is secure, so migrants keep their options open by translating economic and social positions gained in one political setting in to political, social and economic capital in another (Schiller et. al.1992, 11). However, Ruba Salih (2001,655) question the celebratory literature on transnationalism by pointing out that it fails to take in to account "how these structures operate in gendered ways". Transnational experiences are not as unproblematic as they may seem, but rather there exists a hierarchy within the community based on gender, and class, which highlights the complex ways migrants negotiate the unpredictable experience of migration. Similarly, the experience of exile, as well as the problem of racism, prejudice and xenophobia in the host country lends unique qualities to the transnational community (Burrell and Anderson2008, 212).

Diaspora takes in to account three characteristics that define its new meaning. The first one refers to any kinds of dispersal, such as trade diaspora, for example the Chinese, and migration of labour such as the Turkish diaspora. The second characteristic refers to cross border experiences of homeland and destination. While the older notions referred to a return to an imagined homeland by contrast the newer definition, replace return with dense continuous linkages across border emphasizing lateral ties. The third characteristic concerns incorporation of minorities in to countries of settlement. The notion of diaspora is often associated with boundary maintenance of the majority through discrimination against the diaspora groups. Assimilation could mean the end of the diaspora. However newer notions imply cultural hybridity going beyond the idea of cultural distinctiveness and focusing upon the idea of cultural innovation which raises an important question as to whether migrant integration on the one hand and cultural distinctions on the other may co-exist (Faist2010, 12,13).

Diaspora is defined as a type of consciousness where on the one hand there is awareness of issues concerning social exclusion and discrimination, and yet at the same time there are intense connections to the homeland, its culture, heritage and history (as a counter to the exclusion faced in the countries of migration, and as a strategy towards social, political and cultural empowerment). These connections are reinforced by transnational activities that create the possibility of connecting the local to the global through new communication technologies (Fazal2007, 35-36).

Among the many characteristics of diaspora, the element of homeland which implies an orientation to the real or imagined homeland as an authoritative source of identity applies to the Ghanaians in this study. By having an orientation towards Ghana, and participating in diasporic groups that aim at collective action towards the prosperity of home through transnational practices, the Ghanaian women strengthen their ties to home. Many women in this study are part of diasporic groups and associations, which foster the idea of identity, community, belonging, and reliving the memory of homeland especially for the first generation. It is also a means of passing on their cultural heritage to the next generation. At times, these articulations and practices are very specific to particular ethnic groups. There are a number of diverse diasporic associations, especially in London, that cater to different needs and interests.

The identity of the diasporic imagined community is far from fixed or pre-given; it is constituted within the crucible of the materiality of everyday life. In the everyday stories, we tell ourselves individually and collectively. Diasporic journeys are composite in another sense too. They are embarked upon, lived and relived through multiple modalities, for example of gender, race, class, language, religion and generation. Therefore, Diasporas are heterogeneous, differentiated, contested spaces (Brah2005, 183-184). Diasporic identity is one that is marred by contradictions; it can be a space for nurturing belonging, while at the same time creating difference and alienation.

The concept of everyday life, Identity and belonging

The concept takes in to account the socio-cultural influences of race, class, gender, as well as socializing factors such as religious beliefs, neighbourhood influences, family life, and peer culture (Steele and Brown1995, 557). Often asking direct questions about identity, results in not so useful answers. This is because subjects have not understood the question, and neither do they have the answers. Consequently, researchers can tease out the answers referring to

identity by allowing the subjects to talk about their lives and experiences, and then identity will emerge through this narration (Anthias2002, 492).

The everyday is shaped by the complex, interlinked with mediated spaces of diasporic life, where the local, public, urban and transnational spaces are characterised with information flows, creating possibilities of belonging in multiple communities. Media is active in the everyday life debates of what it means to belong, what the identification of a group consists of, the imagined self, the other, and the community and how the boundaries around these spaces are appropriated (Georgiou2006, 13).

Everyday life is the context for social relations and network construction; it is where habits and routines are established, where individuals and groups become involved in struggles for control of cultural production and consumption, and where identities take their shape in interaction with both humans and communication technologies. It is a site of contestation, a site of action, subordination and alienation, as much as it is of resistance. It is where creativity and authenticity fight an equal battle against inequality and exclusion, which establish their control through the alienating systems of controlled consumption (Georgiou2006, 25).

The concept of intersectionality

Intersectionality as an approach reveals how an individual's social identities profoundly influence one's beliefs about and experience of gender. Feminist researchers understand that the individual's social location as reflected in intersecting identities must be at the forefront in investigating gender. Gender must be understood in the context of power relations that are embedded in social identities (Shields2008, 301).

Intersectionality is understood as social identities, which function as organising features of social relations that mutually constitute, reinforce and naturalize one another. Constitute here refers to the fact that one category of identity such as gender, takes its meaning as a category in relation to another category. While reinforce means that the formation and maintenance of identity categories is a dynamic process in which the individual herself or himself is actively engaged. We are not passive recipients of an identity position, but practice each aspect of identity, as informed by other identities that we claim. Naturalize refers to identities in one category come to be seen as self-evident or basic through the lens of another category (Shields2008, 302)

This approach is useful in understanding the everyday life experiences of the Ghanaian women in this study who by virtue of their gender experience multiple layers of oppression which intersect with race and class, thereby constricting them to lower axes of the social ladder. Social identity is a marker of their position in relation to the broader society, making economic advancement, participation in the broader society and social and economic inclusion a challenge. Many studies have shown that this alienation and marginalisation from the broader society are one of the reasons why many migrant communities seek to identify with their ethnic/diasporic identity, as it serves as means of agency and empowerment. Everyday life is experienced through these intersections where identities are negotiated and ascribed through mediated social relations.

Intersections create both oppression and opportunity. In other words, being on the advantage offers more than avoidance of disadvantage or oppression by actually opening up access to opportunities unavailable to other intersections. Furthermore, an intersectional position may be disadvantaged relative to one group but advantaged relative to another. Identities instantiate social stratification, i.e. identity such as gender or social class, may be experienced as a feature of individuals' selves, but it also reflects the operation of power relations among groups that comprise that identity category (Shields2008, 302).

Media repertoires

A repertoire-oriented approach takes in to account how different media users combine different media in to a comprehensive pattern of exposure. The focus is on how people combine contacts with different media, and different kinds of content. The perspective emphasizes patterns, that is, what is the result of different forms of selectivity? How do media users combine their media contacts in to a comprehensive pattern of media use in to their media repertoire (Hasebrink and Jopp2006,369, 371)?

The term media use refers to a practice that varies greatly in intensity and scope, that is the amount of time and mental effort that people spend on media. This includes the regularity of use, the number of media, which make up people's repertoire and preferences for specific media over others. The approach allows us to relate the patterns of media use to specific user characteristics such as level of education, age, gender and factors like time, budget, religion and political interest (Rees, et.al. 2003,465-466,467).

For the women in this study, their diasporic identity means that they have specific needs when it comes to new media use. New media in the form of social networking sites is important for communication as well as access to diasporic sites for news and information about their country of origin. It is also used to build the intercultural bridge, acting as a

means to connect and negotiate their gendered diasporic identity. The results of the study indicate the variety of new media that options available, which combine both new and old media. Participants in the study were asked to illustrate their communication networks in order to understand the networks developed in the process of communication, and the social relationships sustained as community and individuals.

Methodology

The study is based on a qualitative approach, which aims at making sense of, and interpreting phenomena, in terms of the meanings people attach to them in their social world. Qualitative research is useful in prioritising the participants' frames of reference, flexibility in the nature of the research design, and the volume and richness of data obtained (Ritchie and Lewis2003, 3).

A total of 50 semi-structured interviews, were conducted in both Hamburg and London between 2015, and 2016. In addition six focus groups were conducted in Hamburg to supplement the interview data. However, none was conducted in London due to the time constraints, as the fieldwork only lasted two and a half months.

The city as opposed to the nation was chosen because it is here that media are produced and consumed, it is where tensions and struggles for control of information, communication and diasporic ideologies and discourses take place. It is here that migrant and diasporic dwellers establish a dynamic cultural and financial presence, contribute to the urban and global economy, and practices of (self) representation (Georgiou 2007, 20, 21).

The interviews were based on themes on identity, belonging, everyday life and media use from the literature. The researcher was flexible enough to explore themes as they came up in various interviews, which increased the possibility of new insights in data gathering. A feminist approach to data gathering provided greater understanding of phenomena in the context of the women's own accounts of their personal development and histories (Ritchie and Lewis2013, 10). Participants were free to express themselves and the researcher was able to interact openly with them before and after the interviews and focus groups. The feminist perspective in data collection was important in understanding the everyday life experiences of the women along the intersections of gender, race, class and ethnicity. To recognise that in as much as the women had challenges, they are also active in constructing new identities and ways of empowering themselves through agency. This is demonstrated through the creation of communication networks using social media that facilitate spaces for shared belongings and connecting to identity.

Different sampling strategies were applied in both Hamburg and London as both places presented distinct challenges in the sample selection. In London the use of contact persons made it easier to access the community, gain the credibility and trust of the Ghanaians, which was crucial in their participation. After which snowballing was applied to recruit more participants. While in Hamburg, the sampling method of snowballing proved sufficient, as the community is smaller and easier to access. These sampling strategies obviously imply that certain groups are unrepresented, since the researcher found it easier to recruit in churches.

In both cities, I was able to gather a diverse sample in terms of age, but London presented a much more diverse sample in terms of age, migration history, ethnicity, and social class compared to Hamburg. Interestingly I was able to access the first generation in London compared to Hamburg where I interviewed only a few. I credit this to the contact persons I had in London who made it easier, and established a line of trust between the participants and me. Four of the interviewees in London had migrated from Germany, and will be at the centre of the comparison in the study.

A similar interview guide was used in London, but there were issues from the interviews in Hamburg, which the researcher found interesting to explore such as everyday life experiences in relation to prejudice, and racism, access to social advancement, and interacting with other migrant communities. The data collection in London presented new challenges compared to Hamburg, and this made me reflect a lot on whole process in relation to the methodological and ethical issues of doing research in a minority community.

Preliminary Results

The church and diasporic associations are important avenues for networks especially for the new migrants who rely on them for social and emotional support. These are avenues for the new comers get contacts for job prospects as well as advice on how to integrate in to the new society. In London for example, the church often invited immigration lawyers to speak to the congregation and create awareness about immigration issues.

Majority of the transnational literature almost takes it for granted that all migrants participate in transnational activities. As the results of this study will demonstrate, engaging in transnational activities depends on age, resources, migration history, participation in diasporic activities and connection to home.

In relation to media use and identity: new media in the form of social media and networking sites are important in creating networks of identity and community. Many of the interviewees maintain a vast network for communication through social networking sites, thereby sustaining relationships and connecting to their social identity.

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In relation to belonging: the networks are also important in creating a sense of community from which belonging is forged. The networks are carefully cultivated through social interactions based on relations, and commonalities. In many cases, the online relationships reflect the offline relationships.

Many of the second generation are part of the church youth groups. These groups are important circles for friendships, creating networks for affirmation and acceptance. They are able to connect with people with a similar cultural background, speak the same language and socialisation experiences. This makes one belong and in turn cultivates an attachment to their ethnic identity.

The London group is as expected very diverse in terms of different ethnicities, languages, and religions. It's a larger group in number compared to Hamburg. I also noticed that the young second generation Ghanaians celebrate their roots in music, clothes, festivities, a lot more than those in Hamburg. There's an event called "party in the park" where mostly Ghanaians congregate every summer to eat, drink, dance, and celebrate. The sub-culture scene in London where Afro-beats (Afro-pop) has become popular is having a positive effect on second generation who are identifying more with their ethnic identities as a result of its popularity.

The second generation identify with the city as opposed to the nation. The city provides an opportunity for constructing and negotiating identities and creating spaces for belonging. In the city difference is celebrated, tolerated, and migrants can cultivate certain enclaves where multiculturalism is embraced.

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