

Migrants and Media. Needs, Usages, and Effects

Veranstalter: Clelia Caruso / Carina Gabriel-Kinz / Maddalena Marinari / Julia Spohr, Universität Kassel, Geschichte Westeuropas
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Bericht von: Carina Gabriel-Kinz / Sarah Hoffmann, Universität Kassel, Geschichte Westeuropas; Jamila Roth, Universität Kassel

The Chair „Geschichte Westeuropas 18.-20. Jahrhundert“ of the Department of History at the University of Kassel hosted the international and interdisciplinary workshop that dealt with the connection between migrants and media through different perspectives. With regard to the current global political and social situation, the participants considered the question of how migrants use media and, especially, how they are represented in the media. This approach not only shows the actual thinking about migrants and migration that leads to new concepts of the self and the other, but also engages with the question of transnational communication. Therefore, the workshop was divided into three panels focusing on different aspects of the connection between migrants and media: 1. The communication habits of migrants and transnational families throughout the 20th century, 2. migrants between mass media – representation and communication, and 3. the representation of migrants and migration in the mass media.

In the first panel, DANA DIMINESCU (Paris) discussed the genealogy of the concept of the „connected migrant“. She argued that the use of digital technologies in practice shows a double absence of migrants from their host and home country. Moreover, she proposed the approach *migration traceability* as a new model to analyze migration in social research. Until now, the notion of *migration traceability* was understood as „the outcome of the correlating of [...] data recorded by various digitalized sensors“. According to Diminescu, *migration traceability* not only represents the itinerary of migrants, but also „ensures a sense of objectivity and a predictive property, which is particularly sought after by governments, NGOs, media and business“.

Subsequently, CLELIA CARUSO (Kassel) focused on the visualizations of migrants on the phone from a cultural history perspective. Her talk centered around two questions: “how the public imagery around telephoning has shaped the concept of the telephone as, by the 1980s, the primary medium of intimate long-distance communication and therefore mediated intimacy” and “how this imagery is related to public discourses on personal relationships which attributed increasing importance both to intimate communication, *per se*, and to mediated intimacy”. This relation was explored with regard to transnational migration and telephoning. Between the end of the 19th century and the later 20th century, transnational migration and public representations of telephoning were not combined. Before the phone became more affordable, migrants benefited from letters as an important medium of private intimacy until the 1980s and 1990s. As Caruso noted that „it appears as if concepts of the importance of mediated intimacy have expanded socially, concordantly leading to the knowledge about and the practice of emotion-based letter-writing spreading beyond the bourgeoisie“. They did not reach the discourse on transnational migration for a long time. Moreover, she concluded that in the discourse relating telephoning with transnational migration telephoning has appeared as a „poor substitute for ‘real’ contacts“. Additionally, migrants were seen as „hopeless creatures, [who] do not seem to relate well with the shiny world of rather brand-new communication technologies“.

Before opening the floor for discussion, STEVEN VERTOVEC (Göttingen) offered some comments on the first two presentations. He expressed the need to consider ethical questions in any study of media and migration, especially when dealing with private data and mediated intimacy in research nowadays. Additionally, the audience discussed the way in which the change of media evoked a change of communication and the consequences for research as a result of this phenomena.

Opening the second panel, MARI MAASILTA (Rovaniemi) talked about „slow media“, compassion and refugee migrants. Using the examples of the film *Blood in the*

Mobile (2010) by Frank Poulsen and the novel *A Long Way from Paradise: Surviving the Rwandan Genocide* (2010) by Leah Chishugi, she analyzed the impact of slow media contributions on Western audiences. Her analysis was based on „a wide range of blogs, discussion forums, online comments on web-based news sites, mainstream news media and magazines in the UK, Denmark and Finland, chosen as sites of research since the authors of the cultural products have connections to these countries“.¹ Maasilta defined the concept of „slow media“ as media products requiring a long process of editing and creating on the one hand and a slower reception on the other. The categories „compassion“ and „emotional engagement“ played a crucial role in her analysis and led to two key questions: How do journalists and audience engage emotionally in online discussions? And how can „slow media“ build bridges between distant sufferers and a Western audience? As one conclusion, Maasilta explained that compassion is constructed in the material through discourses centered on the binary poles of global justice/injustice and care/neglect. Furthermore, the oeuvres propose different ways of action to audience. The two cultural products manage to create spaces in which compassion-talk can flourish.

Another perspective on migration and media was offered by ALINA C. SCHAEFERS (Kassel), whose contribution dealt with Caritas transports to Spain and their use in Spanish media in the context of short-term migration. Approximately 3,500 children from Germany and 4,000 children from Austria were transported to Spain by the Caritas between 1949 and 1952. The Caritas selected Catholic children from war-affected areas, especially those in difficult situations at home or economically disadvantaged families. Spain took part in hosting the children to project an image of a welcoming peaceful country, combined with the hope of being re-integrated into Europe. In order to gain host families, the organization used much propaganda that oversimplified the task of hosting and targeted women in their role as a loving mother. Additionally, Schaefer mentioned a link between the processing of Spain's own traumatic past and the representation of the chil-

dren's difficulties in the host families based on the film *Familia Provisional* (1955).

As a common feature of both talks, Vertovec highlighted the creation of compassion on the basis of certain tools such as emotional language or images and emphasized the arbitrariness of their use for different purposes.

In the third panel, ADRIANNA HLUKHOVYCH (Bamberg) reflected on the cultural aspects of food and migration. She analyzed strategies of integration of foreign food cultures and discussed what can be learned from them. According to Hlukhovych, food is culturally coded and represents a significant part of identity. Therefore, she contended, eating habits can reveal power struggles in which the process of othering and inclusion take place. Migrant eating spaces serve as places of autonomy and independence, where open-minded people with high cultural capital gather and change of values occur. Hlukhovych exemplified her argument by showing a scene from an UNESCO film on the French cuisine, which is an important part of the French national identity. She argued that in this scene, foreign influences are only shown as ingredients and are never directly addressed. By juxtaposing scenes from the British-American film *Chocolat* (2000) with a scene from the Danish film *Babette's Feast* (1987), the scholar illustrated how both films show a confrontation between the local culture and the immigrant culture, which leads to acceptance and tolerance in one case and to revolution and contradictions in the other. The lecture ended with the final scene of *Chocolat*, in which a pastor demands to measure goodness by what we embrace and whom we include in our communities.

ERMELINDA XHEZA (Amsterdam) focused on the visualization of refugees in popular Greek media and the politics of hospitality. She deconstructed the ancient Greek concept of *philoxenia* (love/friendship for the stranger) along with hospitality, which later was accompanied by *xenophobia* and the fear of exploitation. Xheza emphasized this national narrative of hospitality and analyzed

¹ Camilla Haavisto / Mari Maasilta, Towards a journalism of hope? Compassion and locality in European mediations of distant suffering, *Critical Arts*, 2015, 29:3, 327-341, p.331, DOI: 10.1080/02560046.2015.1059548.

its construction in the visual discourse following the Greek refugee crisis in 2015/16. Moreover, she showed how identity was constructed within the visual discourse. The famous photograph from Lesbos in October 2016, taken by Lefteris Partalis, which depicts a group of Greek grandmothers feeding a baby of a Syrian refugee woman, exemplifies the Greek discourse of solidarity and hospitality. According to Xheza, the photo perpetuated the national narrative of hospitality rather than presenting the point of view of the refugees. Due to their exclusion from the discourse, they are subject to the process of a second dehumanization (Judith Butler) and remain faceless in order to promote the national narrative of greatness.

In the last contribution, ANNA MAZURKIEWICZ (Gdansk) presented political exiles from East Central Europe as an instrument of debunking hoaxes during the Cold War. She showed how exiles maintained the collective project of their homeland politics while facing the host country's interests. The Assembly of the Captive European Nations (ACEN), for example, aimed for the withdrawal of Soviet troops and free elections. Therefore, they sought to elevate their own prestige and presented themselves as spokespeople for the ones silenced behind the Iron Curtain. Exiles functioned as media sources. While they depended on American financial and political support, they were regarded as useful instruments to promote American foreign policy. It was only later that the involvement of the CIA became public. Mazurkiewicz argued that exiles were not well integrated into American society and that few of them returned home after the end of the Soviet Union. Additionally, returnees were often disappointed by their limited influence in their home countries. In order to fight fake news, Mazurkiewicz advised to look at it from an historical perspective in order to understand its mechanisms.

In his comment, JÖRG REQUATE (Kassel) identified two poles in the talks. First, he raised the question of media usage, and, second, he asked how the subjects are represented. Requate concluded that media conveys more about the people who use and create it than the people represented. Caruso

mentioned another variation of the caring grandmothers: the global caring mother. Xheza responded by mentioning the case of the child Alan Kurdi who died in 2015 and did not remain faceless. Yet, his case raised the same questions of responsibility. Maasilta emphasized the division within the media into „good“ (women and children) and „bad“ (young men) refugees who are seen as a potential danger. Regarding Mazurkiewicz, Caruso asked if the American government would limit its financial support to conservative groups and stressed that the US government would only support democratic platforms.

In the final discussion, MADDALENA MARINARI (Minnesota/Kassel) asked why there was a lack of action and what justified the pushback. Xheza answered that Europeans wanted to preserve their privileges and, therefore, created a narrative justifying exclusion. According to Caruso, the narrative of the dangerous immigrant is attached to old stereotypes that have also been used in the 1950s and 1960s. Mazurkiewicz also sees an anti-globalist backlash in the response to the refugee crisis. However, Requate observed different voices in the media discourse and noted that while prominent exiles have a voice of their own, the faceless refugees are instrumentalized to demonstrate a political point.

Conference overview:

Maddalena Marinari (Minnesota/Kassel): Introduction

Panel I

Maddalena Marinari (Minnesota/Kassel), chair

Dana Diminescu (Paris): Researching Connected Migrants: From a Sociology of Migrants' Digital Practices to a Digital Sociology of Migration

Clelia Caruso (Kassel): Visualizations of Migrants on the Phone or Reasons for the Lack thereof

Steven Vertovec (Göttingen): Comment

Panel II

Julia Spohr (Kassel), chair

Mari Maasilta (Rovaniemi): Slow Media,
Compassion and Refugee Migrants

Alina C. Schaefers (Kassel): The Caritas Trans-
ports to Spain and their Use in Spanish Media

Steven Vertovec (Göttingen): Comment

Panel III

Sarah Hoffmann (Kassel), chair

Adrianna Hlukhovich (Bamberg): Migrants
Eating Habits on Film

Ermelinda Xheza (Amsterdam): Visualizing
Refugees in Greek Media: The Politics of Hos-
pitality

Anna Mazurkiewicz (Gdansk): Political Ex-
iles from East Central Europa as an Instru-
ment of Debunking Fake News during the
Cold War

Jörg Requate (Kassel): Comment

Final Discussion

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