Routledge
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Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies

ISSN: 1369-183X (Print) 1469-9451 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cjms20

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To cite this article: Myria Georgiou (2005) Diasporic Media Across Europe: Multicultural Societies and the Universalism–Particularism Continuum, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 31:3, 481-498, DOI: 10.1080/13691830500058794

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13691830500058794

Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies
Vol. 31, No. 3, May 2005, pp. 481–498

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Diasporic Media Across Europe: Multicultural Societies and the Universalism–Particularism Continuum

Myria Georgiou

Europe is a cultural space of meeting, mixing and clashing; a space of sharing (and not sharing) economic, cultural and symbolic resources. Dominant ideologies of Europeanism project an image of Europe as a common and distinct cultural Home, a Home that excludes and (re-)creates Otherness when it does not fit a model of universalism and appears as competing particularism. Cultural diversity has always characterised Europe, but growing potentials for mobility and communication have led to the emergence and intensification of diverse cultural experiences and formations. In this context, the growing numbers and kinds of diasporic media have significant implications for imagining multicultural Europe and for participating (or not) in European societies and transnational communities. What is argued here is that diasporic media cultures do not emerge as projects that oppose the universalistic projects of Europe and of global communication, but that they gain from ideologies of globalisation and democratic participation as much as they gain and depend on ideologies of identity and particularism. Drawing from a cross-European mapping and three specific case studies, I try to explain why diasporic media cultures challenge both the limits of European universalism and of diasporic particularism.

Keywords: Diaspora; Transnational Communications; Universalism–Particularism; Multiculturalism

Introduction

The rows of satellite dishes in multiethnic neighbourhoods have become the ultimate symbol of ethnic segregation in the eyes of some local authorities; inflammatory

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ISSN 1369-183X print/ISSN 1469-9451 online/05/030481-18
DOI: 10.1080/13691830500058794

comments posted on religious websites are flagged as proof of fundamentalism's expansion in Europe; and local Internet cafés are targeted for attracting too many young men who use technology and public space for all the wrong reasons. Arguments such as these, which revolve around the potential threats of diasporic and migrant media cultures for European democracy and values, are becoming increasingly common in popular media and mainstream political discourses. The fast-growing number of minority media projects and diverse technology appropriations, combined with the visibility of difference they entail (e.g. satellite dishes, different television programmes, Internet cafés, various language broadcasts), bring mediation into the heart of debates on inclusion, integration and democracy in Europe. Studying diasporic media cultures in their complexity, beyond the cultural singularities and moral panics, can help us understand what is different and what is common in the European cultural space, what is shared and what is not between minorities and majorities. Such debates invite us to think how media cultures might bring together, represent and include difference and how they might exclude it and lead to conflicts between different groups.

Diasporic media that expand across and beyond Europe, connecting and also acting autonomously in local, national and transnational cultural spaces and populations, become a key area for thinking of recognition of particularity on the one hand, and of respect for universalistic values of democracy and communication across Europe on the other. Universalism and particularism become central analytical concepts for understanding diasporic media cultures beyond binaries and oppositions (e.g. ethnic segregation *vis-à-vis* integration; national *vis-à-vis* transnational, minority *vis-à-vis* majority) and in their actual expressions and implications for multicultural Europe.

What this paper will try to do is to address the continuities and interdependencies between diasporic, national and local cultures, minority and majority media, and projects of local, national and transnational participation. As will be argued, the reproduction of interpretative binaries neither contributes to understanding the complexities of communication processes, nor helps in interpreting the actual cultural (mediated) experience within multicultural societies. The dialectic interconnection between universalism and particularism—as conceptualised in the works of Robertson (1992) and Balibar and Wallerstein (1991)—as well as Hall's articulation of *différance* (2001) and Silverstone's discussion on contrapuntal cultures (2003), are useful and influential starting points for my analysis. Empirically, this paper draws from an EC-funded research project mapping the diverse diasporic media cultures across Europe.[1]

Diasporic media cultures develop in the intersection of local, national and transnational spaces. Diasporic media are of various sizes, levels of professionalism, success and lifespan; they employ different technologies and have different entrepreneurial, cultural and political goals. What they all have in common is that they address particular ethnic, linguistic and/or religious groups that live within broader and diverse multicultural societies. Their audiences are based within

localities and nation-states. They are minorities in these nation-states, but they all have some connection (imagined or real) and share a sense of belonging within a larger community spreading beyond national boundaries (the diasporic element). It is very important to realise that diasporic media address those audiences both in their particularity, and also in the universality of their (imaginary) cultural existence (e.g. Somalis in London share a commonality with Somalis in France; Palestinians in Paris have some common interests and tastes that relate to their ethnicity). These commonalities are not necessarily real but, even if imagined, they can have real consequences. Sharing common cultural repertoires and information, as these appear on satellite Greek television shown across Europe for example, can lead to the (re)invention of shared identity and community; this is a case of sharing particularity in global scale. Such projects of particularism, though, are neither closed nor competitive with universalistic values of democracy and communication. Actually, and inevitably, they depend on the universalism–particularism continuum. Even when their content promotes insularity and closure, they still depend for their existence on universalistic values ingrained in the modern nation-state (that supports them with money and infrastructure), on universal human rights and the freedom of communication (that protects their rights to exist). This is a key contradiction that has implications both for diasporic media as projects of community and identity and for the national and European policies which aim to integrate and smooth difference within European mediascapes. This contradiction will be illustrated in the case studies that follow.

There are many ambiguities involved in the development and success of diasporic media; but the ambiguous character of such projects and their implications is what makes the universalism–particularism debate relevant as an interpretative framework. Later in this paper, three case studies, each originating in one of the three spaces where this research took place and which emerge as the significant (interconnected) contextual locations for diasporic media cultures, will illustrate the proposed articulation of the universalism–particularism continuum. The *local*, the *national* and the *transnational* form the spatial context where diasporic groups live and imagine their diasporic space to expand. They are the locations where the diasporic media cultures are shaped in the production of various media and in the consumption and appropriation of different media and technologies. The three case studies are:

- transnational: the *other* satellite television—the example of *Al Jazeera*;
- national: constructing multiple communities in mediated spaces—the example of the website *New Vision*; and
- local: interpreting the mainstream—the example of *London Greek Radio*.

Defining Universalism and Particularism: Beyond the Binary

Balibar and Wallerstein (1991) and Robertson (1992) have challenged the binaries and antinomies that much of the globalisation literature has depended on: the global

and the local; the national and the transnational; and, most importantly, universalism and particularism. Within such binary analyses of globalisation, diasporic media have traditionally fallen into the particularistic category and are seen as representing ideologies of identity, community, belonging and difference. Yet, such binaries are problematic as they undermine the grey areas, the ways centrifugal and centripetal relations of power are formed within and in the meeting of the particular and the universal (Appadurai 1990; Robertson 1992); they obscure the actual interdependence of the majority and minority and of the global and the local for the construction of their meanings (Miller 1995; Urry 2000).

Roland Robertson's analysis of globalisation involves 'the attempt to preserve direct attention *both* to particularity and difference *and* to universality and homogeneity. It rests largely on the thesis that we are, in the late twentieth century, witnesses to—and participants in—a massive twofold process involving *the interpenetration of the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism*...' (1992: 100). This process has to do, on the one hand, with the human condition in general, and on the other, with the specific formation and intensification of this interpenetration within recent history:

> 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: 102).

This analysis highlights much of the ideological basis of the universalism–particularism continuum within globalisation. The diffusion of such ideologies allows space for projects such as diasporic media, which are global in their reach but particular in their cultural role. In their vast majority, such projects celebrate particularism within universalism and rely on the assumption that they can function as particular, different and unique projects, because the present condition (of universalism) allows space for *all* different and unique projects to emerge and develop. For example, the *London Greek Radio* can exist in its uniqueness because the ideological, political and technological context also allows the *London Turkish Radio*, *Kiss FM* and *Sunrise Radio* to exist. Diasporic media cultures are expressions of the universalisation of particularism as they are expected to form part of the diverse and multicultural media settings. They are expressions of the particularisation of universalism because media are considered and experienced as universal cultural products, references and communication tools. Diasporic communities expect and seek to enjoy media, not only for their particular content and meanings but also as

they are universal and globally-shared technologies, means of communication and cultural references integrated in everyday life.

Universalism and particularism, in their co-existence and interdependence, become tools within an interpretative framework of understanding the construction and meanings of diverse mediascapes in multicultural societies and across transnational spaces. Thinking of cultural difference and ideologies of particularism as interwoven in universalistic ideologies can help us understand cultural tensions and conflicts as the inevitable struggles that take place in the process of surpassing exclusive and Orientalist universalisms and exclusive and insular particularisms. This is an invitation to break off the romanticism and the pathologisation of particularism on the one hand, and the fear and demonisation of universalism as the ideology of domination on the other.

There are different areas in which the universalism–particularism continuum becomes relevant to diasporic media cultures. Most of them are *emic* and relate to diasporic politics and media practice. While outlining below what I understand to be some of those emic articulations under three headings (ideological, functional and experiential), it is a fourth one, an *etic* one—the analytical articulation—which I intend to develop further in this article.

- *The ideological articulation*: As a rule, media rely on ideologies of universalism—freedom of communication, democracy, media autonomy—but minority media translate the ideological basis of universalism from a particularistic viewpoint. This means that they adopt ideologies of democracy, human rights and freedom of communication in promoting their role as representatives of minority and/or marginalised groups and as agents of diversity and multiculturalism. They promote this role for both minority audiences and the broader society.
- *The functionalist articulation*: This relates to the ideological articulation, but it is primarily related to the actual tactics adopted by minority media in their attempt to develop and function as institutions, especially in the local and national contexts. Minority media promote themselves as agents of particularism and as alternative sources to the mainstream information and cultural products. Yet, most of them depend on the universalistic project of nation-states, where they are based, for gaining recognition and support. Nation-states and local authorities recognise and support such projects, not in the name of particularism, but in the name of an inclusive, democratic but singular society (i.e. the universalistic values of the modern nation-state).
- *The experiential articulation*: Most minority media rely on diverse sources, forms of production and agendas for their outputs. This relates to the nature of their audiences—embedded in specific national and local spaces, but also being connected with networks across space. Minority audiences seek information from the country of origin, the broader diasporic space, and from the national and local contexts where they are embedded. Media output becomes a combination of

repertoires reflecting the universalistic and particularistic interests of their global audiences.

- *The analytical articulation*: There is a growing recognition of the urgency of re-articulating and re-conceptualising binary oppositions (i.e. the local versus the global; the national versus the transnational; the universal versus the particular) within the present understanding of globalisation. The analysis of minority media development and expansion across spatial contexts allows us to think of the continuities in the global condition and for the implications of the universalism–particularism continuum for multicultural societies. This last kind of articulation is at the core of this paper and the discussion on diasporic media cultures' implications for multicultural Europe.

Universalism and Particularism in the European Context

> European identity is becoming increasingly identified with a capacity to tolerate considerable cultural diversity—at least of those values that European citizens consider to be most worth preserving (Reif 1993).

The debate around the cultural richness of Europe is not new; in the European Union the differences between ethnic communities have been projected as an advantage of the continent's pluralism (Gatling 1989). Yet, this discourse of celebrating diversity has not always been significantly and meaningfully inclusive. As Gatling argues, in the EU there is a discussion on diversity within unity, but such unity can have racist overtones. This is often expressed in the idea of Europeanism, based on the values of Western democracy. This combination often embraces the dominant status quo and relations of power, which cannot but reproduce exclusions.

What many of the dominant ideologies in Europe undermine is the heterogeneity characteristic of all multicultural societies. Heterogeneity causes a tension in the whole of society, not because it is a negative condition in itself but because it is being pathologised as a condition. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1992) emphasise the role of invented tradition for sustaining this tension: 'the invention of tradition is an integral task in the nation-state's reproduction of its continuity. There is then an inherent tension between the invented "heritage" which roots national identity in history, and the change and heterogeneity that characterises the contemporary western Europe nation-state' (quoted in Husband 1994: 6–7). The invented 'heritage' and the myth of inherited culture characterising the ideology of the nation-state have greatly influenced the way Europe and the European project of (exclusive and exclusionary) universalism have been imagined. In similar ways, Pieterse (1991) argues that there is a myth about European culture as characterised by the inherited civilisation based on Judaeo-Christian religion, Greek ideas of government, philosophy, art and science and Roman views concerning law. Pieterse challenges this: 'The problem is that, in addition to being chauvinistic, elitist, pernicious and alienating, it is wrong. This myth undermines regional cultures and subcultures; it represents elite culture as tout

court, it denies popular culture, it defines culture in relation to the past and it ignores Europe's multicultural realities' (Pieterse 1991: 3).

A crucial question is how Europe is or can be lived. The dominant ideologies of Europeanism (Amin 1989; Morley and Robins 1995) and of universalistic values of democracy and progress project an image of Europe as a common and distinct cultural Home, which excludes and (re-)creates Otherness when it does not fit within this model of universalism and appears as competing particularism. But the construction of Europe as singular is as much exclusive as it is unreal; Europe is not *a Home*, but several *common homes* (Balibar 1991); it is a space of co-existing and competing cultures, of exclusions and struggles, of multiple cultural formations expanding from the local to the national and the transnational.

The population of peoples who at some stage in their history migrated from an original *homeland* and settled in a EU country is estimated at around 8 per cent of the European Union's population.[2] One seventh of all manual workers in Germany and the UK came as immigrants, and in France, Belgium and Switzerland a quarter of the industrial workforce is formed by immigrants. Next to that, millions of people belonging to the older diasporas—Jews, Roma, Armenians—have been integral components of the European past and present, even if their experience of Europe has sometimes been of pain and prosecution. More recently, hundreds of thousands of refugees have been settling in the EU and though these are small numbers compared to the world refugee population, refugee mobility is central in debates for the future of Europe. Framing this discussion in a global context, we have to take into consideration that only 3 per cent of the world's refugees reach the UK and that in some EU countries the migrant population does not actually exceed 2 per cent of the population (Council of Europe 1993). Thus, the interest in migrant and diasporic populations is not a mere reflection of numbers.

Challenging the Reproduction of Binaries

The growing human diversity in Europe during the twentieth century led to rich and tense political, policy and academic debates. Universalist ideologies became in many ways an integral part of the new European universalism, which is more aware of diversity and global change. Yet European multiculturalism, as a rule, is based on the recognition of difference through cultural compartmentalisation (Hall 2001). It has rarely recognised or addressed the continuities and the co-existence of different cultures as integral parts of what is called European culture as a whole—this denied continuity is what Hall has addressed in his conceptualisation of *différance*. 'The important thing about the concept of *différance* is that this is not a binary, either/or form of difference between what is absolutely the same and what is absolutely other or different, but is "a weave of similarities and differences which refuse to separate into fixed binary oppositions"' (Hall 2001: 11). Inviting a similar understanding, Silverstone (2003) emphasises the dialectic between the minority and the majority—and, I would add, the dialectic between the universalistic and the

particularistic—and the different components of cultures. Drawing from music, he develops a metaphor around the contrapuntal or the counterpoint: 'The important thing ... about counterpoint, is that every theme requires another in order to be meaningful' (2003: 13). He adds:

> ... we can only grasp the meaning of a particular minority media initiative, and assess its significance, in its contrapuntal relationship to the presence of other media and media texts which it addresses, contradicts or seeks to bypass. Likewise we can only grasp the meaning of dominant mainstream media insofar as we register their contrapuntal relationship to the experiences, voices and practices of both the included and excluded (but still present) minorities. These draw on and in sounds, images and values from outside the boundaries of the mainstream and the national. In so doing, of course, they draw on other mainstreams. And in so doing they also challenge the integrity of the claimed boundaries around European culture and add a further contrapuntal layer to it, through their relationships to transnational media (Silverstone 2003: 18).

Dominant ideologies of Europeanism and top-down politics of multiculturalism usually fail to recognise this dialectic and the unstable, creative and tense condition of multicultural societies (Husband 1994; Kymlicka 1995). This kind of multiculturalism has not been more inclusive than older (or newer) forms of exclusionary or assimilationist ideologies; within it, *culture* and cultural difference function like *nature*, locking people and groups a priori into genealogy, into a determination (Balibar 1991). *Culture* and identity can reproduce one-dimensional and stereotyping identifications of those minorities that are excluded; dominant discourses of multiculturalism lock them into exclusionary cultural categories as much as they did around race in the past. *Thin multiculturalism*—as Modood and Berthoud (1997) call it—positions groups of people in self-contained, closed and unchanged ethnic categories but fails to recognise *différance* and the change and clashes that involve minorities and majorities in different schemes and relations. It is this kind of continuity and co-dependence of minority and majority cultures, of multicultural formations and diasporic media cultures, that the universalism–particularism continuum helps us understand. The particularistic cannot be understood but in its dialogue and co-dependence from the universal and the other way around. This is what helps us understand the competing multicultural tendencies within Europe—the top-down compartmentalising ones, and the bottom-up, which inevitably and in their actual practices, depend on that dialectic.

The ever-changing cultural map of Europe, reflected in the diversity of media and the different appropriations of communication technologies (e.g. commercial and community media, Internet cafés), in new musical genres that different groups claim to be *their own* but which only exist as products of particularistic themes and universalistic forms (e.g. Garage music, Bhangra), and in the sharing of airwaves and bits (e.g. multicultural radio, digital television), invite us to think of continuities rather than of closures and exclusivities. As the examples to be discussed here will

indicate, there is a growing co-existence of universalistic and particularistic cultural claims, aims and outputs, and this continuity, though full of tensions and contradictions, unsettles the perceived boundaries and boundedness of *the European (cultural) whole*.

Beyond the 'Immigration Problem'

The ideological closure of the dominant European universalism comes with the ascription of a closed particularism, which opposes and threatens universalism. The verbal recognition of minorities and the ethnicisation of societies around concepts such as *the immigrant*, *the migrant* and *the ethnic minority* reflect and reproduce a political compartmentalisation of Europe and ideologies of exclusion based on cultural difference. The word *immigrant*, especially, is 'a catch-all category, combining ethnic and class criteria, into which foreigners are dumped indiscriminately, though not *all* foreigners and *not only* foreigners' (Balibar 1991: 221). The *immigrant* becomes a chief characteristic that replaces *race* in a racist typology; it is a form of 'racism without races', a verbal construction of opposition between Europe and the Other. The words immigrant and migrant are becoming increasingly inseparable from phrases such as 'immigration problem' and 'immigration crisis'. Such discourses that pathologise migration and minorities appear in official language and often force academic and counter-political discourses to adopt a defensive, oppositional stand that also pathologises or victimises minorities. Such discourses not only deny individuals and groups their journey in time and space, but they also undermine the history of settlement, of inclusion and exclusion in specific locales and nation-states.

Against the catch-all category of *the immigrant*, I draw from approaches within transnationalism and contemporary theorisations of diaspora. Transnationalism refers to the development of dense networks across borders (Portes 1997) and to the processes by which migrant and diasporic communities forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations across geographical, cultural and political borders (Basch *et al*. 1994). Contemporary theorisations of diaspora become useful in thinking of continuity (*the changing same*; Gilroy 1995), community and attachment in transnational spaces (see, among others, Brah 1996; Clifford 1994; Gillespie 1995; Gilroy 1997; Hall 1990). While diaspora is a contested concept—having at times implied ethnic homogeneity and essentialised identity—recent debates around globalisation, transnationalism and mediation have re-formulated the concept of diaspora to recognise heterogeneity and diversity, transformation and difference. Gillespie highlights the shift in diasporic experience through globalisation: 'A diasporic perspective acknowledges the ways in which identities have been and continue to be transformed through relocation, cross-cultural exchange and interaction. The globalisation of cultures is deeply implicated in this process' (1995: 7). Mobility of populations and individuals and their changing cultural geography, reflected both in flows and in language—in adjectives rather than

nouns (*diasporic* instead of diaspora; *migratory* instead of the migrant)—challenge such closures of cultural compartmentalisation.

The Diasporic (Mediated) Space

Both place and space are important elements for understanding diaspora, diasporic dislocation (Dayan 1999), relocation and the processes of deteritorialisation and reterritorialisation that characterise the real and the imagined diasporic experience. Diasporic minorities live within specific locales, national and transnational spaces. Social relations and communication within and beyond diasporic communities take place in spaces. Some of those spaces (also defined as ethnoscapes and *mediascapes* by Appadurai 1990, 1996) are grounded in very specific places—such as the neighbourhood—while others exist virtually, in 'non-places' (Urry 2000). Social interaction is no longer dependent on simultaneous spatial co-presence; there are also relations developing with the 'absent other' through new communications. When this happens, experience of time and space becomes *distanciated* (Giddens 1990) and diasporic communities can break out of the specificities of space and extend their communication potentials. In this context, there is less and less a possibility for a neat equation between culture, community and geography (Gillespie 1995) and more space for 'imaginative geography and history' (Said 1985). The connections and relations of 'absence' between places are greatly strengthened by modern communication systems, which have augmented a sense of diasporic awareness.

Diasporic communities sustain and partly depend for their shared sense of identity on transnational communications. But the national and local context where diasporic populations live is equally important for the construction of meanings of community and identity, especially as inclusion, exclusion and participation in the broader society are largely grounded in national and local space. Needless to say, this leads to certain limitations in an analysis—such as the one which follows—which aims at drawing out themes and characteristics that go beyond the specific. At the same time, an awareness of spatial dialectics informs my analysis and its construction of themes.

Diasporic Media Cultures: Spatial, Cultural and Ideological Continuums

The afore-mentioned European research project produced both a comprehensive map of diasporic media cultures and a set of themes which address the meanings and implications of these cultures for multicultural Europe. Here, one theme from each of the three spaces which form the context of diasporic media cultures—the local, the national and the transnational—are discussed in order to illustrate their role in shaping the politics of difference and particularity.

Transnational: The Other Satellite Television—The Example of Al Jazeera

Satellite television is homologous to the transnationalism of diasporic experience. Satellite television has radically altered transnational mediascapes as it has encouraged simultaneity and richness in the circulation of images and texts consumed by diasporic populations across the globe. With satellite technology, television produced in the *homeland* has become available across the globe. Dispersed audiences watch the same news and the same comedies, they know what the weather is like and what kind of music is popular in their country of origin. At the same time, new satellite television channels, which are not rooted in any one *homeland* but which become significant for identity and community as they specifically address transnational audiences, become important players in global communications. The connectedness, simultaneity and sharing of common images and narratives across boundaries remind dispersed populations of the existence of a transnational community which is—potentially—inclusive of all the groups around the globe. On the one hand, satellite television reflects the diasporic project of sustaining cultural particularity. On the other, diasporic satellite television has managed to develop the promotion of technological innovation and the liberalisation of telecommunications. The relation between the mainstream/universalising and the particular/minority is reciprocal here—diasporic satellite culture is not just *mimicking* the mainstream and globalising appropriations of satellite technology, it is also actively (even if sometimes invisibly) shaping European and transnational satellite cultures.

In many European countries, diasporic communities have introduced and/or increased the popularity of satellite television. The density of satellite dishes and cable television subscription is higher in migrant households compared to indigenous ones, as Böse *et al*. (2002) note for Austria. Similar findings appear in other countries with large migrant communities. According to the mapping of satellite diasporic channels, there are at least 200 diasporic satellite channels available across the European Union and the numbers are fast increasing. Turkish satellite channels are the most numerous and diverse; they include dozens of channels produced in Turkey and abroad, some of them state-controlled and others commercial. Other channels with a rapid increase in numbers are those originating in the former Soviet Union countries. Most of these are commercial enterprises addressing the new migrant communities originating in these countries and now being spread across the EU. A third group worth mentioning is the Arabic channels, increasingly recognised as key players in global communications by Western governments and other major media commentators.

Access to diasporic satellite television within Europe is becoming an arena of political action with unpredictable consequences. Local authorities in a growing number of EU countries (e.g. Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands) have introduced restrictions on the installation of satellite dishes which allow the reception of diasporic channels. Such restrictions are problematic in many ways, especially as they reinforce a sense of Otherness among minorities and reproduce oppositional

ideologies between diasporic (particularistic) and national (universalistic) cultural projects. Yet, as the popularity of satellite television among diasporic populations is growing, this opposition is challenged. As empirical research has shown, minority populations not only consume diasporic media, they also consume mainstream media. More than competing, their diverse media consumption is complex and engages diasporic populations with a variety of texts and cultural products, which they consume ever more critically (Aksoy and Robins 2000; Georgiou 2001; Gillespie 1995). The engagement of diasporic audiences with satellite television reflects the ways mainstream and minority media interweave and how it is more about continuity between the particular and the universal than about competition.

The example of *Al Jazeera* reflects this continuum, even if it has been used in some political debates to illustrate the opposition between universalism and particularism. *Al Jazeera*, an Arabic satellite television station extensively consumed by transnational Arabic audiences but unknown until recently in the West, has entered mainstream mediascapes and everyday political discourse as a powerful player in the last few years. After 9/11, *Al Jazeera*, which is based in Qatar, broadcast a series of monologues by Bin Laden and exclusive reports from Afghanistan when no other medium had access in the country. Overnight, *Al Jazeera* became one of the most broadly quoted media, visibly altering the balance in global communication settings. The US Secretary of State Colin Powell demanded of the Emir of Qatar that the station stop the broadcasts of the Bin Laden videos, while the station's Brussels-based European editor, Ahmad Kamel, found himself detained and deported by the Swiss authorities on 14 October 2002.

The power of *Al Jazeera*, bringing it to the centre of global publicity, is directly connected to its ability to cross boundaries and overcome the broadcasting restrictions of nation-states. *Al Jazeera*'s content and access to its sources are difficult to control, though such attempts have not only been expressed by the US, but also in the Arab world. However, *Al Jazeera*'s popularity is increasing fast: it now has 50 million viewers around the world. This is a station that addresses an Arabic transnational community. This large audience turns to *Al Jazeera* for two main reasons (El Nawawy and Iskandar 2002). On the one hand, it is a station that proposes an alternative to the mainstream Western media agenda, which has alienated many of the Arabic populations living in the West. On the other hand, Arabic audiences turn to *Al Jazeera* more often than they turn to Arabic official and state-controlled media, as *Al Jazeera* challenges the restrictions and censorship imposed by most Arabic governments. The position of this station's audiences cannot but be understood as a dialectic and critical interweaving of the universal and the particular. From their position in the West, *Al Jazeera*'s audiences become critical of the restrictions imposed on free communication by some Arabic countries. At the same time, this station's audiences turn to *Al Jazeera* for receiving what they perceive as information and entertainment that is of particular interest to Arabic audiences.

National: Constructing Multiple Communities in Mediated Spaces—The Example of New Vision

Challenging the binaries between minorities and majorities or between universalism and particularism is not only a matter of interpretation of the relation between different media; many specific projects become by themselves spaces for the expression of such continuities, dialogue and negotiation. The case of *New Vision* (www.newvision.org.uk), an Ethiopian initiative on the web, is very characteristic as a challenge to singular boundaries and to the separation of media between mainstream and minority.

New Vision—The Independent Refugee News and Information Service—addresses primarily the refugee community in the UK, but also the Ethiopian diaspora and a community of refugee rights activists in Britain and beyond. The website campaigns for refugee rights and includes up-to-date information about events and activities in this area. At the same time, it has a space especially devoted to news and information regarding the Ethiopian diaspora, and a broader *social space*, with news on refugee everyday life, job advertising and updates on asylum-seeker politics and policies. Positive representation of refugees, which challenges their representation as a problem, is the declared mission of *New Vision*. This agenda becomes prominent, for example, in an article about the contribution of migrants employed as nurses and doctors to British society and in frequent reports on refugee artists. *New Vision* constantly reminds its audiences—refugees, migrants and members of the support community—of the possibilities for an inclusive, diverse society and of a mediated space which is not exclusionary and exclusive, but which can actually fit and include issues of identity and community. At the same time, it can present and promote agendas that relate to the universalistic project of the (multiethnic) state. *New Vision* calls itself 'The Voice for the Voiceless' and it defines its mission as a contribution to harmonious integration in multicultural Britain, while at the same time it claims to be one of the most popular media spaces for the Ethiopian diaspora.

There are several dimensions of *New Vision* that are interesting and important in the context of the present discussion. Firstly, *New Vision* is a case that illustrates the development of a new form of community space. On the one hand, this is a space for the multiethnic refugee community (and its supporters) and for campaigns that relate to democratic participation and inclusion in the nation-state. On the other hand, it is a diasporic project for the Ethiopian community. In *New Vision*, the boundaries between the ethnic and the multiethnic are both blurred and negotiated. The potential for the co-existence of multiple flows of communication within an alternative mediated space reflects the possibility for developing a more inclusive and dialectical form of multiculturalism. This example also indicates very clearly how the Internet, more than any other medium, can become the space where new migrant communities lacking numbers, resources and know-how can develop alternative mediated spaces. For transnational communities, such as the Ethiopian, the immediacy and access to community information and communication on the

Internet reflect the visibility that a community needs for surviving—in its connectivity and its imagining. Furthermore, this case indicates how a website can become an active political forum and a point of reference for minorities and activists when their agenda is excluded from mainstream discourses. *New Vision* is not only a site of political campaigning; it is also a social—even if virtual—forum and a space of positive refugee/Ethiopian representation. Sites such as this highlight aspects of multiethnic societies which are overlooked and undermined in mainstream media and public discourses. Examples such as the presentation of migrant doctors and nurses, discussions on the long European history of cultural diversity, the promotion of refugee art projects and other positive representations of migrant and refugee everyday life, reflect an alternative to the binaries and divisions between projects for identity and community on the one hand and projects for participation and inclusion on the other.

Local: Interpreting the Mainstream—The Example of London Greek Radio

Much of the success of diasporic media across Europe depends on the continuing loyalty of the migrant generation to such media. This loyalty is more complex than can be fully explored here, but one of the elements worth addressing in the context of this paper is minority languages. Many members of diasporic and migrant groups still have low skills in the majority language and feel more comfortable with their native language. The level of language skills has multiple consequences for economic, cultural and political participation in European societies and for gaining access to and understanding of information about services, rights (e.g. social benefits, training, jobs) and political developments in the country of residence. Many of the local and national minority media pay special attention to this area, publishing and broadcasting relevant information in minority languages and in popular and simple language that makes it accessible to members of a group with low literacy and low mainstream language skills.

One such example is the weekly programme on social benefits broadcast on the *London Greek Radio* (*LGR*). This programme is presented in the Greek language and aims at popularising information about benefits offered by the state and local authorities. The programme also encourages listeners to get in touch with the producer and presenter (a Greek working in social services) and to seek answers to their specific concerns. Many listeners of *LGR* mention this programme as an accountable and constant source of information (Georgiou 2001). As they argue, it is a source of information they trust and which *speaks* their own language. Such programmes enforce the feeling that they can participate in the broader society while keeping their diasporic particularity.

It is the local diasporic media which play this role most often. Being usually semi-professional and set up by members of local diasporic groups, they reflect many of the characteristics of the groups they address. The local media adopt the role of the mediator of mainstream information to the particular group for a number of reasons.

Often they are obliged by the state that licences (and often funds) them to do so. More importantly, by including information that relates to the mainstream and which goes beyond particular information and entertainment products (e.g. news from Greece and Cyprus, Greek pop music), they reflect the complexity of their audiences. Diasporic audiences are positioned in complex cultural settings, which include particular connections and a sense of belonging, but also imply engagement in universalistic projects of communication and (struggles for) participation in multicultural societies.

Conclusions

The three case-studies above are an attempt to illustrate the construction of diasporic particularism, which is sustained neither in binary oppositions between the mainstream and the minorities, the national and the transnational, nor in media systems that are closed systems by and for themselves. The themes discussed above invite us to understand diasporic media cultures as an interplay of *différance*:

> . . . every concept and meaning is inscribed in a chain or a system within which it refers to the others, to other concepts and meanings by means of the systematic play of differences. . . . Its political value cannot be essentialized; that is to say, it can't be snatched out of the play of similarity and differences which are constantly constructing it, it can only be defined in relation to all the other forces which are trying, as it were, to define the cultural sphere at that moment (Hall 2001: 11).

This play of *différance* and of non-closure relates: (i) to the character of diasporic cultures as changing, unfixed, contested and non-singular; (ii) to the continuities and dialectic interrelation between spatial positionings; and (iii) to the interweaving of the ideologies of particularism—i.e. identity and community—and of universalism—i.e. media culture, communication, construction and participation in democratic (mediated) spaces.

The shape of diasporic media cultures, as illustrated in the context of the universalism–particularism continuum, has three broad implications for multicultural Europe:

- Different minority groups raise issues of recognition and of alternative politics within universalism. Just as the feminist movement fought for recognition of difference and for alternative forms of organisation in the name of the universal values of equality, inclusion and democracy, so other minority groups aim at reshaping the agenda of universalism. In similar ways to the feminists, many diasporic and ethnic minority media projects argue that equality is not based on sameness or assimilation, but actually on the celebration and promotion of difference. Such minority movements propose forms of *particularisation of universalism* and re-shape universalistic European values.
- The development and success of minority diasporic media are, at least partly, expressions of reaction and resistance to the universalistic ideologies of the nation-

state. As Roland Robertson (1992) argues, the modern state system is a model of *Gesellschaft*, based on concentration of power, bureaucracy and hierarchical structures. This model leads to alienation and suppression of cultural expressions that threaten the power and dominance of the state. Minority or community media projects challenge the alienation and suppression of free creative expression which takes place through the mechanisms of control adopted by the nation-state, and propose alternatives. These alternatives develop, either on the basis of what people have in common against concentrated power and the state—i.e. their common humanity—or on the basis of ideologies which see one specific particularism as more meaningful than the all-inclusive modern state. Both examples can be seen in diasporic media projects—the first in community projects and the second in fundamentalist projects. Both expressions of particularism emerge through processes of mirroring/continuity/interpretation of universalism. A real consequence for Europe is the tension between minority media and the European states. The universalistic project of the nation-state implies inclusion and participation of all citizens. At the same time, such alternative cultures which are not contained or controlled by the state are seen as potential threats to its power and integrity. European state policies in this area are full of contradictions—there is an attempt on the one hand to include/assimilate minority media and, on the other, to control/suppress their power and influence.

- The Orientalism thesis (Said 1985) has been very influential for thinking about the Othering of non-Western subjects and cultures and for analysing the (re-)production of relations of power between *the West and the rest*. The other side of Orientalism, which is understudied, relates to the interpretations *of* the West *by* the rest, especially through tense global encounters (Robertson 1992). Minority media cultures bring this interpretation of *the West by the rest* within the Western societies, within the limits of Europe. The singularity of European universalism (and its Orientalism) is challenged from within.

The development of diasporic media cultures across Europe is about flows and scapes that cut across Europe vertically and horizontally and which expand beyond it; it is also about vertical and horizontal schemes of difference—of *différance*, not the binary—across diasporic communities and about struggles of representation and power within and beyond the specific groups. Recognising and acknowledging the development of emergent networks and flows that challenge the mainstream is not about celebrating particularism, diversity and cultural richness alone. Observing diasporic identities and communities in their spatial continuity and as they are sustained primarily through mediated networks and in the merging of ideologies of universalism and particularism has implications both for our thinking of multicultural societies as truly diverse societies (beyond the hype and *thin multiculturalism*) and for our thinking about transnational media cultures as the outcome of the universalism–particularism continuum.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Roger Silverstone for his comments and advice during the research on diasporic media cultures across Europe and during the development of this paper. Special thanks also to P.X. Beck for his inspiring input when this paper was no more than a vague idea.

Notes

[1] The author acknowledges the support of the EU 5th Framework Programme (Contract HPRN—CT2000–00063: The European Media Technology and Everyday Life Network) in the preparation of this paper. The research was conducted at the LSE with the direction of Professor Roger Silverstone. Apart from the research I conducted, a network of researchers from across Europe participated in the collection of data. I am indebted to them for their hard work. All the reports produced for this research are available online at http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/EMTEL/Minorities/minorities.html.

[2] Of course, with the recent EU enlargement and the inclusion of several new member-states, the demographics will have significantly altered.

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