Diaspora and (post-)digitality. Imagined communities in cyberspace

Diaspora und (Post-)Digitalität. Vorgestellte Gemeinschaften im Netz

Diáspora y (pos-)digitalidad. Comunidades imaginadas en la red

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The growing popularity of diaspora studies in the fields of cultural studies, is happening around the same time as diasporic movements is generating renewed interests in the news media, as well as in art and literature - a phenomenon that is associated with the effects of globalization, particularly transmigration and transnationalization. At the same time, diaspora studies still speaks to W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of "double consciousness" - being in two places simultaneously. William Safran (1991) describes "diaspora" as a minority community that spreads out from an original centre to several locations and cultivates a memory, even a myth, about the lost homeland. In this context, collective identity is constructed through an imaginary relationship to "home" and through the idea of a desire to return to a lost homeland.

More recent approaches have analyzed the term with regard to postcolonial contexts, and migration in the age of globalization. These studies look at diaspora as a transnational formation and hybrid network in the sense of an "imagined community" (Benedict Anderson 1983). From this perspective, a definition that relies on the dichotomy of "here" and "there" is problematized, although – so one might guess – this idea lives on in particular in popular imaginations of diaspora. In the age of the internet, social digitization arguably involves a fundamental change in the make-up, self-image and practices of diasporic communities. Our workshop takes on the task of theoretically exploring a fresh relationship between diaspora and (post-)digitality, and using case studies to investigate how marginalized groups design themselves as imagined communities in cyberspace. For this we take up the term "digital diaspora" which, due to its vagueness to date, offers potential for the reflective processing of the indicated field of tension.

In Benedict Anderson's classic study on nationalism the construction of imagined communities is linked to media-related innovations. Diasporic communities also rely on the media to as the Internet has created unprecedented opportunities for trans-territorial networking with homeland as well as between decentralized diasporic networks. Koleade Odutola (2012) uses the term "cyber-framing" in discussing the way in which cyberspace enables digitally-wired Africans - who are based outside of the continent - the chance to shape and re-frame the way they, and their societies are seen and perceived. Odutola's theorization reflects Arjun Appadurai's argument in *Modernity at Large* (2008 [1996]), when he links diaspora in the 21st Century, to a globalized world shaped by mass migration and electronic media. But what is the specificity of the (post-) digital diaspora? Volker Gassmuck and Claudia Wahjudi (2000) explain that the digital "over-all" offers local communities a wide range of opportunities for global networking in the "Internet as a cultural space". The fact that today's diaspora movements are

defined via community media rather than mass media has consequences for their self-image and their performances.

In the light of these studies, our workshop focuses on this (non-) place in cyberspace, and its function for representation practices and identity constructions of diasporic communities. In this context, it examines its media, cultural and also aesthetic nature and takes a decidedly cultural-scientific look at the "textures" of these movements. It intends to overcome dichotomies of here and there, but also of producers and consumers, that is, of "digital" and "analog" reality. In fact, these pairs of opposites are already resolved in the concept of post-digitality. At the threshold to the 21st century, Nicholas Negroponte (1998) described this new condition in *Beyond Digital* as a non-territorial form of existence in a contradictory world in which the nation was in a state of flux; neither big enough to be global, nor small enough to be considered local. In addition, Negroponte heralded the historicization of digitality, as the digital has absorbed all spheres of modern life, (even analog). "Post"-digitality refers to a configuration in which the "analog" and the "digital" converge, as the point of focus changes from "production" to "circulation". At the same time, it represents a critical revision of digitality itself. Accordingly, the presumed utopian dimension of the internet, in the context of transnational community-building and solidarization is increasingly challenged.

We want to discuss conceptualizations of diaspora in cyberspace from the perspective of cultural studies. It needs to be asked how do digital diasporic communities constitute themselves in comparison to the analog world, and if these two areas can still be analyzed separately in terms of a postdigital approach and which points of friction might arise in this context? What kind of narratives and conceptualizations of memory arise in cyberspace and what role do decentralization and connectivity play in the context of a "new" poetics? To what extent do diasporic groups articulate moments of agency in cyberspace and which media do they use (online platforms, blogs, social networks, but also print formats that negotiate the digital or that are entangled with articulations in cyberspace)? What spatial dimensions of digital diaspora arise and what importance does (trans-)territoriality have? Moreover, we need to discuss symbolic stagings of ethnicity, 'race', class, gender, sexuality, and religion, as well as the intersections of these regimes of inequality within cyberspace. These are suggested ideas but potential contributors are welcome to expand on them and introduce their own relevant reading of the digital diaspora.

The contributions should have a theoretical focus and discuss case studies from different cultural spaces. We want to concentrate on diasporic traditions and contemporary diasporic movements in Europe. The workshop is aimed at re-analyzing classic diasporic groups as well as diasporic communities that have been marginalized. The focus is on contributions from the fields of Anglophone literature and cultural studies, German studies and Romance studies.

Deadline: Please send an abstract (200-300 words) and a short CV (max. 100 words) until March 30, 2020, to Dr. Linda Maeding (maeding@uni-bremen.de). Conference languages are German, Spanish and English. All participants must cover their own travel costs and living expenses.

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