

DIASPORIC IDENTITIES AND MEDIATED EXPERIENCES IN EVERYDAY LIFE

[IDENTIDADES DIASPÓRICAS E EXPERIÊNCIAS MEDIADAS NA VIDA COTIDIANA]

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‘There is a peculiar new force to the imagination in social life today....One important source of this change is the mass media, which present a rich, ever-changing store of possible lives, some of which enter the lived imaginations of ordinary people more successfully than others’.

Arjun Appadurai (1996, p. 53)

Introduction

Immigration may now be considered one of the most fraught political issues in Europe. Over the past 40 years, immigration from developing countries – and now from East Europe - has changed the face of Western Europe. The periphery has moved to the centre. This move has generated western’s response towards more draconian immigration policies coupled with more nationalist discourse in the public sphere, including the media. In the political culture of post-September 11, the question of ‘othering’ in terms of ethnic, national and/or religious identity assumes great significance in various parts of the world. The racialised ‘other’ as a designation given to non-westerns, to those at the ‘fringe’ of national as well as geopolitics, brings with it a constellation of meanings that are fundamental to the reinforcement of preferred

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discourses based on ‘difference’. In other words, contemporary forms of paranoid nationalism, working alongside discourses of ‘the war on terror’, often invoke the racialised ‘other’ in terms of religious and/or ethnic difference and its negative web of signification as threat, hostility and antagonism towards the ‘Other’. What these narratives fail to show is the life stories, the daily life of immigrants and diasporic

groups; what means to live in a new culture where, on the one hand, ‘difference’ is celebrate and, on the other, feared as a threat to the western way of life.

Being a foreigner, an immigrant, by force or choice, can change people’s lives in ways they could never have imagined. People can feel scared, isolated as well as optimistic and confident about their lives in a new ‘home abroad’. Suddenly everyday routines and taken-for-granted assumptions about their lives are questioned (or self-questioned) and they can feel that, as they live within a new culture (with its values, norms, experiences and ways of thinking), they might need to ‘reshape’ themselves to cope with the new realities of being/becoming the diasporic ‘other’ as well as to make sense of the challenges posed to them by the (and belonging to) new culture and a newly and chaotic globalised world, where there are massive transnational shifts of capital, people and media communication.

In this scenario of uncertainties and challenges, one should be able to re-imagine the diasporic ‘other’ in ways that appreciate their modes of dealing with the reality of everyday life (De Certeau, 1984) as well as the complex processes of identity and belonging that so often shape the tensions and anxieties carried by those who have experienced migration and displacement. It is in this respect that the everyday becomes crucial, as a site of contradictions where power, alienation and possible resistance are experienced and enacted as well as a resource for competing reactions and coexistence of both strategies and discourses of belonging and no-belonging (Kerner, 2007:125). In other words, how diasporic groups negotiate their identities and cultural experiences and traditions in everyday life, and more important to this discussion what role the media have (if any) in diasporicⁱ identity negotiation processes, how diasporic groups engage with the media available to them, and how the media might inform, constrain, and enable many of their practices, decisions, and behaviours. The aim of this chapter is to explore the role of media in shaping the daily

experiences of diasporic Latin American women which involves concerns about the simultaneous process of ‘diasporic’, transnational identity formation in mediated experiences, and their inclusion or exclusion in the host society since we recognize that diasporas are positioned in complex socio-cultural contexts characterized by diverse

interactions through which their identities are formed dynamically as much through the diaspora-homeland relationship, as in response to exclusion by the host culture.

The every day of diasporic groups are mostly negotiated in the convergence of different cultural influences and constrained by different power structures. Their experiences are lived ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ a ‘diaspora space’ which is constructed by several axes of differentiation and inequality – nationality, class, gender, ethnicity - (Brah, 1996). They face discrimination, antagonism, celebration, as well as ‘internal-group’ pressures to resist or/and comply with a defined ‘cultural identity’. The media seem embedded in this ‘in-between’ cultural process lived by diasporic groups, and is important to understand if the media help to shape the parameters within which diasporic groups articulate their experiences, articulate reflexivity or absence of it – conformity or resistance - in order to change their everyday histories. Needless to say that one is not suggesting that the diasporic and mainstream media define identities or experiences but rather that they might play a part in creating communicative spaces of inclusion and belongingness or/and segregation.

In order to ground my inquiry, I focus on a particular case study, that of Latin American migrants living in Britain. All across the Europe now, Latin Americans are using a diversity of media, mainstream and alternative, including local, national and transnational ones. There are numerous transnational – satellite channels and internet – media which are directed at Latin Americans migrants scattered across the world. These communication technologies have improved communication across spaces with significant importance to the daily life of Latin Americans migrants.

To address the role of media in the lives of Latin American migrants I draw on research I have been undertaking amongst the Latin American group in Britain (Bailey, 2007a).

Latin Americans in Britain

Latin Americans migration to the UK started mostly in the 1970s due to political and economic upheaval in their countries. Although most countries now have stable democratic regimes, people still migrate because of economic and social problems in the region. It is almost impossible to find official figures on Latin Americans migration to the UK as, presumably, they are included in the 'other' category of the 2001. However, guest estimates from Latin American countries embassies and community centres suggest that currently there are between 700,000 to 1,000,000 Latin Americans in the UK (<http://www.untoldlondon.org.uk/news/ART40460.html>) with one research which was undertaken in May 2011 estimating the population to be 186,500 in the UK, of which 113,500 were in London (<http://www.geog.qmul.ac.uk/docs/research/latinamerican/48640.pdf>).

The lives of Latin American migrants' in Britain reveals a diversity of trajectories and histories of migration as well as a complex picture of structural disadvantages, exclusion and inequalities working at different levels across the 'group'. It includes Latinos/as originating from a wide range of class backgrounds, from professionals and an urban bourgeoisie, to villagers from the least developed areas of Latin America. In other words, they are stratified by class, education, occupation, religious affiliation, cultural interests, urban or rural background, and so forth. Therefore making them a very diverse diaspora that are constituted as much in difference and division as it is in commonality and solidarity.

In this respect, most Latin Americans in Britain organize themselves in associations based on strategic alliances and on 'ethnic minority' identification which provide a network of support and culturally shared meanings in circumstances of struggles and difficulties of immigration. Some of these associations do not seem to have a political remit; they work to facilitate the migrants' lives in the new country – providing legal advice and informational resources –employment opportunities, language courses and so on – and promoting social events to celebrate their cultures and to maintain their identity. They function as everyday spaces to reaffirm cohesion and continuity and to hold firm processes of disintegration and change in the

'community'. Nevertheless the groups' differentiation - embedded in their daily lives - such as class, gender, education, religion - are reflected in their disagreement regarding their own perception of themselves as 'diasporic' subjects. This agreement on views of their 'subject position' is also perceived in their different relationship with media.

'Emerging' Latin American Identities

"In England we are likely to identify ourselves as Latin Americans first, and then to say the country we come from because people see us as 'Latinas'. But, we only use this identification when abroad as it does not make sense when at 'home'". Peruvian woman

Latin Americas' negotiation of a 'diasporic' identity highlights the two-sided character of ethnic identities; the 'social categorization' aspect which refers to external identification placed by people and institutions with power to label and classify others; and the 'group identification', the product of self-identification based on shared meanings and experiences of belonging, an identification that groups use often to organize and understand themselves. The first relates to the power of external forces – such as state and government – on ethnic groups, the second relates to the proximity between people sharing the similar lived experience, meanings and solidarity (Jenkins, 1997; Karner, 2007).

The label 'Latin American' refers to a multitude of identities since Latin American encompasses a large and diverse geographical region, with different histories, languages, cultures, and political systems. This politics of naming ethnic categories often ends up being a strategy of oppression and levelling of differences and cultural diversity – as much as delineate them – and is a legacy of colonial times.

Identity here is deployed as a category based on contingency, 'subjects-in-process' whose identities are drawing on the 'resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being' (Hall, 1996:4) and positioned within historical, economic and cultural contexts. For Hall, identities are constructed 'within, not outside discourse' that is, in discursive practices – of daily-life which are the manifestation of

specific modalities of power, thus the making of difference and exclusion. Identity is therefore, formed not on a single but a multiplicity of identities and differences and on the articulations between the fragments or differences (Isin & Wood, 1999). In that respect, identity is a political concept, and while it is not new, at present it responds to the historical problem of agency of individual and group ‘identities’, which are formed not against difference but in relation to difference.

This proposition suggests that it is not possible to think of Latin American identities as fixed and essentialised outside relations of power but rather as engaged in a dynamic and constant process of negotiation of identities in-making with emphasis on the subject’s agency. This highlights the complexities of social identities, the relationship between individuals and the contexts they live in, the way they conceive and symbolize the world, and the structural positions and cultural histories that shape peoples’ history. Social identities provide a tool to seeing and acting in the world, conform and resist it as well as negotiate one’s subject position in the intersection of multiple ‘axes of power’. The multipositionality of Latin Americans’ identity is reflected and reconfirmed in their everyday experiences, including their cultural practices. In that respect, the media is a contested cultural space in which meaning and representation of identities and the everyday are constructed.

Moreover, Latin Americans in Britain are constitutive of a ‘new’ diaspora, in what Schiller et al (1992) call ‘transnationalism’ – the formation of social political and economic relationships among migrants that span several societies. They are composed of networks of migrants whose “activities and patterns of life encompass both their host and home societies” (1992:1). Clifford’s formulation of diasporic communities suggests that they maintain a imaginative tension with national spaces and identities, building public spheres and forming collective consciousness that transcend national boundaries and form alliances with similar others elsewhere (Clifford, 1997 [quoted in Harindranath, 2007]). Thus a diasporic, transnational perspective situates Latin Americans in relation to a multi-dimensional ‘web of connections’ (Gillespie 1995:6) between – Latin Americans in South America, in various parts of Britain and Europe, and the USA. Here we also have a crucial intervention from Vertovec (1999:147) who argues that diasporas are a type of ‘consciousness’ or ‘state of mind’ informed by an ‘awareness of multi-locality’ and include forms of cultural

production and reproduction facilitated in part by new communication technologies. Brah also points out an important aspect of the diasporic experience when discussing the 'diaspora space' which "is 'inhabited', not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. In other words, the concept of 'diaspora space' includes the ...intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put' (Brah 1996: 209 quoted in Karner, 2007:81). The implication of this formulation is that the daily experiences of diasporic subjects are part and parcel of the lives of the indigenous/local people potentially avoiding the risk of them being marked as the 'other'. Most Latin Americans living in Britain thus include these three features of diaspora: transnational social relations; a type of awareness that is both local and global, and modern forms of cultural practices through which ethnic identities are negotiated. The transnational experience of Latin Americans' migrants have become if not prevalent, certainly a familiar social type.

I would suggest that for Latin American migrants, their diasporic identity is valuable to negotiate the complexities of migration and to understand the dynamics of moving across both the British and Latin American cultural spaces. Although their diasporic Latin identity in many ways might reinforce the fluidity of post-modern identities based not on 'singular' but on 'hybrid' identities (Clifford, 1994; Bradiotti, 1994; Bhabha, 1994). These various sorts of 'both/and' identities are pervasive of the migrant experience which in turn might be useful for Latin Americans to challenge tradition, and to understand their process of translation across cultures and boundaries (Morley and Robins, 1995). However, celebration of multiple identities which has recently come into vogue – for example, as multiculturalism – has produced both universalist and particularist responses (see Habermas, 1998; Huntington 2004; Calhoun, 2007). One of the responses in this heated debate is that this construction of 'new', hybrid identity, living in the limbo of a 'in-between' or 'third culture' may not be relevant to the experiences of each and every Latino/a because of their different attachments – religion, ethnicity, gender, age and class – that are "situated practices of place and the lived experience of history' (Michell, 1997: 534). In addition, the view of diasporic identities as breaking away from traditional forms of identification such as ethnicity, place of birth, and religion may overlook the significance of these

particularist bonds in the process of identity negotiation of the diasporic subject leading to a new form of ethnic absolutism (Anthias, 1998: 561).

The tensions of Latin American identities negotiation suggests that while there is a shift in the way cultural identity is perceived it is too precipitate to interpret this as the dismantling of the ethnic imperatives across a range of identity, and to treat the new agents of ‘diasporic space’ as unproblematic throwing out their investments in the resources of ethnicity politics. (Brah, 1996). More importantly, the focus on hybrid identities might overlook the material reality of everyday life of Latin American groups, the hardness of their diasporic experience which can be doubly marginal: in one respect, it is marginal in relation to the country and culture of origin, and in relation to the mainstream identity of the British culture.

This process of duo marginality is reflected in their narratives: what action to take to be pro-active and surpass feelings of alienation and exclusion to become part of the social fabric of the new ‘home’ as well as a tactic of resistance to multiple types of subordination that they are subjugated to:

“rather than staying at home” (in England)feeling sorry for myself, I decided to retrain and went to college to get a qualification which, hopefully, will help me to get a job here or there (home) if things do not go according to plan! I can not be just a housewife any longer...”
Chilean woman

The subtext here seems to be about agency, playing with the choices available to her. In some ways, this highlights the different social conditions experienced by Latin America women in Britain. These differences, particularly of class, gender, and education, have been fundamental in defining how to experience a syncretic identity while retaining a sense of their distinct identity. In a sense, it is also a negotiation to open up communication with the new home while maintaining a sense of loyalty to homeland. Her behaviour, albeit inadvertently, also cross-cut and subvert ethnic-national boundaries, creating a conflict of ethnic boundaries (Barth, 1969) between one’s homeland heritage and one’s diaspora or ‘minority’ condition in the ‘translocal’ environment. Furthermore, this example might illustrates that when discussing ‘diasporic identities’ one is not necessarily essentializing that identity or looking for

‘particular’ diasporic forms of behaviour but engaging with the multiple identities of the individual, not only with the position of the social orders they belong. Therefore, individual and cultural identities are concurrent constrained by multiple structures of power and involve individuals’ self-awareness, self-consciousness and agency.

Transnational and Diasporic Media

In the present discussion I do not want to enter into an in-depth theoretical discussion of the media and diaspora field but in order to understand how spaces of media diaspora – national and transnational – might shape the cultural and political experiences of diasporic Latin women, I need to concisely position the debate on what constitutes ‘diasporic media’ as social actors.

According to commentators on international communication, there is a shift taken place towards a transnational media order which is “remapping media spaces and involving new media practices, flows and products” (Chalaby, 2005:). The proliferation of diasporic and transnational media results from several social and political factors: immigration and multiculturalism, the global flow of media, capital, and the reconfiguration of the media landscape facilitated by the deregulation and liberalisation in communications, the proliferation of cable television and the explosion of sites on the World Wide Web. The accessibility of these technologies has advanced cultural diversity and heterogeneity across diasporic communities. Moreover, the confluence of these factors has allowed for diasporic groups to use the potential of diasporic media for the affirmation and articulation of their cultures and as a way of reaffirming difference (Gilroy 1987). Diasporic media is understood here as social actors that are located in the multiple public - national and transnational - spheres where they are paramount in the articulation of minorities struggles for social, economic inclusion and cultural and political recognition.

Diasporic media like any other media are not homogeneous, they range from commercial to non-commercial enterprises, or a combination of both; a number are both produced and consumed by diasporic members; some are produced outside the diaspora. They are both locally and globally produced, and consumed by diasporic and

migrant groups next to others national and global mainstream media. Diasporic media are sites permeated by local and global forces and conditions thus creating one of the many 'heterogeneous dialogues' related to globalization (Appadurai, 1996), and becoming part of as 'a complex form of resistance and accommodation to transnational flows' (Howley, 2005: 33). These 'public sphericules' (Cunningham, 2001) are defined by the identities of their audiences and might challenge essentialist notions of community. That is, diasporic community, through its socialization around media events, is, to a degree, constituted through media (see Hartley and McKee, 2000: 84). They are alternative public spheres, which provide not only entertainment but, potentially, counter hegemonic views of current affairs and a proactive agenda of positive intervention in the 'public sphere'.

Diasporic media vary in their political and social aims, management, professionalism, communicative strategies, media technologies, nature (commercial or not) size, and lifespan. They may represent a specific community, defend particularistic identities, and mediate a group's participation in national and transnational public spheres, thus functioning to create and sustain transnational communities and networks of diasporic groups, particularly in locations where they are minorities. They might be minorities in the host countries while at the same time part of a wider imagined community with whom they have a common culture, language, and history. Furthermore, 'diasporic' media address those audiences both in their particularity, and also in the universality of their (imaginary) cultural existence (e.g. Brazilians in London share commonality with Brazilians in the USA). Taken together in their diversity, diasporic media constitute an important element in the communicative landscape of diasporas not only for their re-imagining of the self and belonging within and across spaces but for their struggles for pluralistic representations (Bailey et al, 2007a).

Nacify (1993) categorize the diasporic media landscape into three types: 'exilic' television function to create new solidarities within the community and to mediate identity negotiation, positioning themselves in the 'spaces of liminality' where they 'struggle for authenticity and identity, deterritorialization and reterritorialization' longing for the homeland stabilized individual subjectivity and cultural identity, while

raising contradictions, uncertainties, and insecurities; 'minority television' which is produced by indigenous minorities 'located here and now, not over there and then'; and transnational television which combines programmes produced in the homeland with those produced by different transnational commercial media corporations catering for specific ethnic groups. (Nacify, 1993: 165, 347)

The main users of diasporic media are those who are in a continuous process of cultural negotiation, i.e. migrants who are living dual lives; who have homes in two countries, speak more than one language, and whose work and family ties involve frequent transnational travel. (Portes et al., 1999: 217) Their reasons for using these media vary from sustaining a bond with their home countries or connecting with the new country, reconfirming the multipositionality of their diasporic home and its connection to numerous publics' (Georgiou, 2006:90) to simply engaging with the pleasures and ordinariness attached to media consumption to overcoming social and cultural exclusion through the process of identity negotiation, which the diasporic media partly facilitate. Most importantly, consumption varies within diasporas according to their different generational, gender, linguistic, and ethnic differences, and distinct reasons for migration. Likewise the media practices of diasporic groups are not only constituted of 'diasporic media', they have a quite diverse 'staple media diet' (Bailey, 2007b).

The space of transnational media might be considered as 'contact zone' for diasporic groups, providing them with transnational bonding – transporting them to home as well as bringing home to them. Pratt (1992) describes contact zones as 'social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination'. Her concept describes contact of two cultures with clear hierarchy, and subjugation relationship. This might be the case with transnational media. However, she refers to a space where people who are usually separated geographically - meet, create and establish regular relationships. Her perspective stresses the interaction dimension and the manner by which subjects are defined in and by their relationship with others and, I would add, to their relationship with media. Classic colonial contexts limit the analytic scope of "contact-zone". If we will stress the cultures or spatial imaginations that interact - we

will perceive symbolic spaces that are not necessarily physical - or colonial in the territorial sense. This modification of Pratt's contact-zone directs us in looking for "diasporic space", "no diasporic space" and contact between them. This contact may not depend on concrete common ground, it may be found in interactions about meanings and in personal encounters. Cultural contact-zones may indeed be colonial however space - physical or metaphoric - may be contested wherever it is constructed. In terms of transnational media, it could be suggested that they are spaces of transnational and cross-cultural encounter, sites of creativity, discussion and representation, and a space for cultural dialogue and translation where imagination guides its constant social construction of space (Shields, 1991). The same imagination guides the constant social construction of space (ibid), and contributes to processes of imagined communities (Anderson, 1991).

For Appadurai (1996), the power of transnational media resides in its ability to produce transnational imaginaries capable of creating and sustaining new forms of transnational publics. Comparing these new transnational media forms to the powers of print capitalism in creating the imagined communities of the nation-state (Anderson, 1983) Appadurai suggests a similar development of alternative types of modern identities that connect individual and social groups to new types of transnational cultural formations.

The diasporic symbolic communicative space generated by transnational media provides a complex cultural sphere where cultural identities are articulated by what Schlesinger's calls an 'audio-visual space' (in relation to European identity), that needs to be understood in combination with an analysis of cultural identities as they are not oppositional terms (cf. Schlesinger, 2000). Morley and Robins propose that in the context of globalization a new 'electronic space' has been created which is a "placeless geography of image and simulation" (cf. 1995).

The literature on media and diaspora (Naficy, 1993; Gillespie, 2000; Sreberny, 2000; Sinclair and Cunningham, 2000, Christiansen, 2004) seems to suggest that hybrid cultural expression is part of the very day routines of diasporic subjects in which the diasporic, transnational media provide the links to maintain new kinds of long-distance imagined communities, and consequently sustaining identities and culture. A different take on transnationalism is offered by Aksoy and Robins (2003) who have argued that

this assumption is based on a ‘national mentality’ with its categories of community, identity and belonging which overlooks new possibilities of transnationalism. Based on their research on Turkish-speaking groups in London, they point out that media consumption is determined socially rather than by ethnicity. For them, the television experience of Turkish audiences is related to its ordinariness, familiarity, and everydayness – ‘banal transnationalism’. They also point out that Turkish television is as an agent of ‘cultural de-mythologisation’, i.e. the ordinariness of Turkish television, of bringing the everyday of Turkish life to them works to demystify ideas of the homeland. (Robins and Aksoy,2005; Aksoy and Robins, 2003). This in turn leads to the argument of ‘de-Ethnicization’ developed by Milikowski. Her analyse is centred on how the Turkish satellite television could further ethnicization or de-ethnicization of Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands, and argues that Turkish television ‘de-ethnicizes’ rather than ‘ethnicizes’ viewers’ perception of cultural difference. While “ethnicization refers to the formation of social boundaries created to protect ethnic-cultural heritages, de-ethnicization refers to the ‘undoing’ of such boundaries” (Milikowski, 2000:444). In this construct, the concept of ethnic-cultural boundaries related to pos-immigration ethnicity is paramount to clarify how different groups establish their own subjectivity and dynamics. (cf. Milikowski, 2000) In this paper I work with the assumption that cultural and media practices are constitutive of both processes of bridging and bounding diasporic groups across transnational nodes of relationships as well as demystifying essentialised and fixed notions of identity and home.

The Media in the Making of a Latin Identity

- **Representation**

The dynamics of Latin American women’s articulation of a ‘diasporic’ identity – reflexivity or absence of it - through the media has several layers of mediation. It might be identified for example in the issue of western, particularly British media representation and commodification of a ‘Latin’ identity which prompt them to question what is presented as the ‘norm’ (Britishness) while rejecting the particularist, essentialist representation of their ‘otherness’. The celebration of ‘Latin identity’ emphasises their ‘difference’ and extend their vulnerability both in the realm of the material and the symbolic. The stereotype of ‘Latin women’ is in place,

represented as 'exotic' and 'sensual' as, for example, in adverts (tourism), film, and music. This is not simple an issue of a particular audience engagement with such representations – interpreting, contesting, or accepting them. It is related to the wider ethos and practices of mainstream media producers, its relationship to immigrant audience and the importance – or not - of these media message to them in terms of producing accepted hegemonic common sense meanings which are not necessarily voicing immigrants' view of the world. Mainstream media representation of immigrants is always involved in an ideological process since representation is a construction of reality. What is taken for granted as 'common sense' about immigrants, or in this case Latin American people, is not 'natural' but has been historically defined and recognized as evident (Hall, 1992). It could be suggested then that the signifier 'Latin' and its mainstream representations have been marking them and, ultimately potentialising their perception of 'otherness' and displacement in the new 'home'. It could also be argued, that these stereotypes work as a form of 'rituals of exclusion' of alterity (cf. Sibley, 1995) which can be expressed by 'their' consumption as 'exotic' in various commodified forms. The issue of the exotic body is coupled with that of the racialized body, the mixedness of her body. In relation to Latinas, the exotic functions as a mediator of racialized sexualities both in the popular and experiential spaces of mixedness. The label of 'mixed-race' reinforces a mark of difference through a binary opposition between white and non-white which reproduces the superiority of 'whiteness'.

This way of thinking, which reproduces the vestiges of racism, and is in turn reproduced by mainstream media, "limits the Latina's voice to the demand for inclusion in an order of representation marking her as 'other'". (Schuttle, 2000:71). Moreover, they also face the demands inherent to women living in patriarchal societies, Hispanic or of some other cultural heritage, where the body of a woman is over determined by a masculine orientation in social symbolism (Alcoff, 2000) in which the Latina body belongs to the nation-state, to the patria. At the same time, her position of a displaced subject living in a third culture gives her a new signifier, becoming free to engage (or not) with more individualistic western values yet still represented as an exotic sexual body. As a subaltern subject – at least in term of gender and ethnicity - Latin women have to negotiate their identity constantly in the

midst of a complex of stereotypes that include masculine-dominant expectations as to what a woman should do with her body, in addition to undertaking another whole set of negotiations with respect to what a woman will do with her own aspirations. The conflicts of identity in formation here points out to the importance of local cultures, in this case the 'new home', in the articulation of diasporic subject's consciousness as well as the recognition of the disjunction between that of dominant ideological discourses existent in mediated practices – media – and the immediate experience of diasporic women.

The politics of representation inherent in stereotypes then highlights two important aspects: a Eurocentric perception of difference which support western's value system over others, and the racial element of the politics of cultural difference – marking them as 'Latin' while homogenizing their different cultures. The representation of Latin identities as internally coherent and unified prevent the possibility of a dialogue and encounters, and encourage the dichotomy of 'we' and 'the others' (Benhabib, 2002). However, if we understand the ways in which selves are subjectified as occurring within complex relations of power/knowledge we can ask how we might think of Latin women embodied experiences of mixedness, often perceived as undesirable and impossible positions of strength and potential, as spaces of challenge, rather than of political evasion (Foucault, 1980, 1984, 2000). Foucault's account of subjectivation suggests that although we are always constrained by the discursive regimes – including the media – in which we are induced to become (racialized, gendered) subjects, the instability of the field of power, the interaction between techniques of domination and techniques of the self, allows potential for resistance and subversion. This means that although Latinas' choices about who they might become in the 'diaspora space' are to some extent limited by the discourses available to them, they still have the possibility of subverting or resisting these, and thus challenging dominant ideals of, for example, 'race' and gender. The challenge for them lies in reconciling cultural commonalities and continuities with great internal diversity, and the cultural context in which Latin American identities are constructed, experienced and negotiated.

This conflict of identity suggests that it is in daily social interaction and meaning-making of 'ethnic narratives' (also through media representation) that the category

'Latin' is created, imposed and quite often internalised by those labelled as such. This reinforces the significance of the process of external social classification and internal group identification emphasized by Jenkins (1997).

However, this external classification might be used by Latin women according to their convenience without signifying that their culturally shared, practices are not important to maintain their self-identification as someone from a particular culture (Brazilian, Peruvian and so on). In other words, the diasporic consciousness of Latin American women is not only about internal-external categorizations, it is also about the possibility of obtaining a 'sense of attachment elsewhere, of feeling global' (Clifford, 1997) and it is about imagining and re-imagining their existence in a transnational space where the particular and the universal coexist. In this respect, we could suggest that the British television – as well as transnational media - as part of Latin Americans' media experience provide Latin women with an understanding of British and global cultures and work as a way of comparing them to their own culture so to chose the representations of the world they see important to them in their identity negotiation process or living experiences. For example, by looking at fashion trends, how women perform different and more liberating roles than the traditional ones the Latinas are used to, which in turn become topics of conversation among them. These banal, everyday practice of conversation might work as spaces to reflect on their own experiences of oppression which could be contested by the development of 'tactics' of survival, as "set of practices...that are not in themselves subversive, but they have a symbolic value which is not to be underestimated: they offer daily proof of the partiality of strategic control and in doing so they hold out the token hope that however bad things get, they are not necessarily so. In other words, tactics operates primarily on the plane of belief" (Buchanan, 2000:89). One could suggest that the everyday practice of watching television might give ideas and commodities provided by the dominant socio-economic order in unexpected ways, hence allowing for the construction of autonomous meaning, the exercise of agency and the possibility of symbolic resistance. Thus while some women may be empowered by retaining home traditions, they also negotiate new roles, re-constructing themselves as independent and 'bread winners' breaking some of the rules of patriarchy reproduced from home. Some of these women have improved their social world by participating in the

political, economic and social spheres and widening their roles – from housewives to students, professionals, and activists. This highlights the complex interactions of gender, class, religion and migratory histories in the biographies of Latinas as well as the possibility of resistance to the process of exclusion (Brah, 1996). In their new identity position Latinas are capable, though not without tension to negotiate the external power structures that exclude and oppress them as well as sometimes to reconcile their new roles with the traditional ones.

The issue of media representation – as signifying practice - of Latinas and their media practices highlights the ‘pick and mix’ process of formation of a hybrid identity which demands a negotiation between the past and the present as part of the migration experience. Perhaps their media practices have played a role in facilitating this process as mainstream media – British and transnational - have provided them with new ‘ways of life’ which, in this instance, question and encourage them to rethink their traditional roles brought from ‘home’.

The complexities and tensions of the diasporic condition of Latin American women’ identities is constructed not exclusively on the basis of the nation-state and ‘homeland’ - ‘either/or’ - but on multiple identifications as ‘and/and’ (Sreberny, 2000), the sense of fit and no-fit, difference and sameness, belonging and longing, and continuity and discontinuities in ‘transnational networks of emotional, economic and cultural connections’ (Georgiou, 2006:49) A diasporic, cultural identity is after all a “matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’ belonging to the future as much as to the past and subject to the continuous play of history, power and culture” (Cornell [2000] quoted in O’Neill, 2007).

- Latinas using media

As ‘diasporic’ audiences, Latinas negotiate their position from a ‘third space’ (Appadurai, 1990) which accommodates an ongoing process of imagination as well as cultural and political negotiation between different hegemonies – home and abroad This is important for understanding the ways in which diasporic groups, through their own differences, choose their media experiences, and engage with media texts – mainstream and alternative – given that there seems to be an undeniable connection

between the textual interpretations and social situations of viewers/readers. Similar to all audiences, the Latinas' audience is critical – they appropriate the media, they interpret them and use them differently depending on context and on their position in society, in time and in relation to their cultural identities – to gender, age, class, and ethnicity. This emphasize the importance of 'the interplay between media consumption and other social factors – such as social location, social networks and so on – in the construction of social identity' (Strelitz, 2002: 473). Without essentializing them or 'belying the complexity of the cultural and social formations of such communities' (Harindranath, 2005:9) it could be suggested that diasporic audiences tend to form 'communities' bound by some degree of, common political and social interests, by ethnicity, language or/and culture, which, in some cases, produce and consume diasporic media relevant to their lives and, in the process, reveal commonalities – and differences – which might interlink them. Through this process, diasporic groups create an embedded alternative, mediated cultural space through the influences of both cultures and hegemonies, generating a unique new space for self-expression and/or resistance to discrimination enabled by 'alternative' discourses.

However, we could argue that Latinas' practices of 're-imagining' their transnational lives is, at least in part, initiated by the producer of media texts. As Sinclair and Cunningham (2000) point out, even if we accept the concept of an "active audience" who can subjectively construct the meanings of the media text, the fact cannot be ignored that the media also actively seek and construct their audiences, because "whatever collective audience preferences and desires there might be, they are still shaped commercially and ideologically as markets for certain forms and genres by media corporations" (p. 6). When we reject the presumption that audiences are "cultural dopes" (Fiske, 1987), there is no reason to assume that the cultural industries or media producers are "cultural/commercial dopes" either (Cheng, 2006). Moreover, although Appadurai (1996) has emphasised the importance of imagination in the formation of diasporic and global cultures through the media as one can live the experiences of the homeland and of different societies, in the case of the Latinas, imagination seem to have a double edge: it works to inform and advance their process

of emancipation and inclusion while, at the same time, presenting conservative and exclusionary possibilities:

“I feel that while the media help me to see a new world of possibilities as when I watch travel programmes and introduced to places I would like to visit, one day when I have money, I do not like when I see somehow a repetition of the Latin ‘macho’ culture in British soap-operas for example”. Argentinean woman

These differentiated experiences of media by the Latinas are also accentuated in relation to news in the British media. Some Latinas understand news as part of an issue that involve how marginalized -and voiceless - they are in the cultural public sphere of the host country. Again the politics of representation and of representing ‘otherness’ is of major importance here as Latin American cultures and their people are every so often shown as backyard, violent as well as exotic and different. For them there is no sense of commonality being constructed in those representations and the alternative of producing and consuming diasporic media as a political voice gain a new signification in terms of counter those dominant texts. The quest for inclusion goes beyond the simple desire to belong to the new home and extend to an engagement in a cultural politics of identity or politics of recognition, which articulates both a desire to affirm identities and to transcend them (Lister, 1997:197). Latinas, particularly asylum-seekers and refugees - are aware of their economic exclusion and lack of political and cultural recognition. Their diasporic identity becomes the basis of recognition – therefore the importance of being represented – demanded by groups excluded from the scope of citizenship. The cultural politics here refer to a quest for cultural citizenship which is not only ‘about rights to produce and consume symbolic goods and services’ (Isin and Wood 1999: 152) but also an intervention in their diasporic identity, in the way they perform and to their sense of diasporic self. ‘It is not only about redistributive justice concerning cultural capital but also about recognition and valorisation of a plurality of meanings and representation’ (idem: 152). Moreover, many Latinas are excluded from the cultural sphere on the basis of their lack of access not only to economic capital but also to cultural capital, which means much more than education but includes competence, and social and symbolic skills.

On another level, news consumption of diasporic media is used by some older women to maintain the links to ‘home’ and to feel visible. The responses to this need do not seem centred on a nostalgic wish to go back home but as a way of keeping their cultural background alive in what Brah suggested as a ‘homing desire, as distinct from a desire for a homeland’ (Brah, 1996:16). By contrast, some women felt that news in the transnational media sometimes provide a sense of isolation and distance from home as negative news reminded them of a reality they left behind, thus disrupting idealized notions of the homeland culture. The idea that diasporic media produce a sense of belonging and strength ties with their ‘homelands’ is occasionally questioned by younger women:

‘I love my country very much and miss my people but my life now is here, this is where I am growing up, learning about life, feeling the world. Media from ‘home’ makes me miss something I don’t want or cannot have right now’. Brazilian woman

The experience of watching British television particularly entertainment programmes brings ambiguous responses as there is a dynamic of withdrawal and separation of some Latinas from the British media. If broadcasting has a role in the construction of a sense of national identity, of connectivity that bind people together and create an invisible and imagined community of audience, the Latinas’ aspirations of belonging are not included. As Morley points out in relation to celebrations of national forms of broadcasting as a ‘public good’, providing a culture in common, is that British broadcasting fails to embrace the cultural diversity living in Britain, as it invites to participate only white, middle-class, English ethnic culture. ‘...we see that not everyone can feel at home in this public sphere – as opposed to feeling particularized and (at best) tolerated, as ‘others’ within it’. (Morley, 2001: 437) Yet, watching British television is still part of Latinas’ media experience as they watch entertainment and news programmes which provide them an understanding of British culture.

The media practice – watching television – as a kind of ritual is representative of the dynamic of their different media daily routine; the viewing of transnational diasporic television is for some women nothing special, it might happen at a circumstantial level as they are busy juggling many other activities in their lives –

working, studying, sharing the house-work – where watching television is not a priority. Conversely, to other women it is a social and cultural practice that congregates their families and friends, particularly to watch special programmes about their countries. On these occasions, their sense of belonging to a distant culture is highlighted but, at the same time, it is an activity in which the sameness of television is perceived, for example, in the programme formats – global standard – and types of programmes such as ‘Big Brother’ and ‘Who Wants to be a Millionaire?’, where the only difference is the language used. Thus, the appeal of these programmes is that they are about ‘home’ but also provide gratification from being familiar.

These differences in viewing of television may be related to their middle or working class background, level of education, tastes and life style. Some women do not engage in the diasporic space with the same regularity and interest as others. Their sense of mobility is within and across the diaspora but also beyond its internal borders. They recognise the value of the ‘community’ while also feeling that the experience of social encounters with local people and people from other cultures are paramount in their experience and identity formation especially to position themselves in these external spaces, as to avoid circumscribed lives created by a Latin ghettoization of the domestic and few public spaces regarded as ‘Latin’. For other women, their families have closer ties with each other and quite often socialise among themselves particularly because of what they perceive as ‘us’ - based on certain shared commonalities and an uneasiness to circulate beyond the safe zone of Latinos into the social space of British people where they are unfamiliar with British social codes. Interestingly though they show great enthusiasm in engaging with ‘others’ in their Latin spheres and somehow eager to share their different cultural traditions, music, food and dance. Their spaces of celebration of Latin culture become, in this instance, a positive zone of multiple contacts where different cultures meet to establish a dialogue based on commonalities, to enjoy the music and dance for example. Moreover, it is also a space for different generations of Latin American women to establish a sense of identification through the process of transforming and using these places to express a Latin American cultural identity and renew the sense of belonging. That is to say, Latin cultures contribute towards the (re) construction of a collective identity, based on an ‘imagined community’ but also open possibilities for

those reticent Latinas to cross cultural spaces and experience the ‘new home’ as their home where there is not only difference and exclusion but solidarity in commonalities. The internet and websites consumption by Latinas is diversified according to their subject positions. It could be suggested that the place-transcending of the internet facilitates the creation of ties through space and reduce the separation between here and there, negating place which can strengthen a sense of ethnic and diasporic identity. However, they also use websites, including Latin ones, for the purpose of not only cultural preservation and the maintenance of diasporic identities, but to support cosmopolitan, intercontinental lifestyles, consumption habits as well as political engagement.

By and large, reflecting on the question of the media role in Latinas’ lives it is possible to suggest that the ongoing transnationalism of meanings and symbols through transnational media may assist Latinas to sustain cultural border-crossing and negotiate their hybrid identity and existence (McEwan, 2004).

Final Notes

Although the arguments raised here cannot be generalized, given that each diasporic experience, in each locale, has its own distinctiveness, they throw some light on diasporic groups’ identity formation in the complex space of the daily life.

This chapter has presented the complexities of Latinas diasporic identities and experiences that have been constructed not grounded in an essentialised past, but refers to the different positions in which they locate themselves within discourses of history and culture in the present. Their cultural identity is formed out of similarities and continuity, difference and rupture. The politics of cultural diaspora in the case of Latin American women seems to follow the logic put forward by Ang, i.e. it does not “privilege neither host country nor (real or imaginary) homeland, but precisely keep a creative tension between ‘where you ‘are from’ and ‘where you’re at’”. (Ang, 2001:35) The Latinas’ everyday lives are bombarded by different media and its ideological messages of belonging and, for that matter, no-belonging, on how one should behave, what is appropriate, normal, abnormal, offering frameworks to understand the world and offering possibilities of imagining and writing new biographies. But the media

discourse is only one among numerous competing discourses of identity articulation to connect individuals to the subject position – identity – they construct. Additionally, the media do not hold power over people they interpellate. That is, Latinas chose, in particular conditions of everyday life and on the background of their identity negations, those discourses and representations of realities that they identify with and invest in those subject positions that are convenient to them, perhaps influenced by their own experience of multiple belonging and awareness of the ambivalence of their diasporic existence.

And although their everyday lives are constrained by multiple power structures and their dominant discursive practices – defining individuals by their ethnic affiliation -Latinas’ choices are made in some far more ordinary ways than those in power would think. As I hope to have demonstrated, the everyday life of many Latin women is an extremely political space in which they are negotiating and reinterpreting or subverting some cultural traditions and expectations which are grounded in historical and cultural settings. In this instance, the role of the media perhaps lies in at times triggering their, particularly of the younger women, imagination beyond constraints of gender (class and ethnicity) to grasp the possibilities of gender equality and act on those promises. Latinas’ ability to do so however will depend on their ‘material conditions and support networks as on their emotional and psychological strength to confront oppressive practices’ (Guru 2003:10). Yet, their representation in the British media – exotic, the ‘other’ - can lead to a range of different feelings from exclusion and disempowerment – conformity - to reinforcement of Latin identity –ethnicization - to engagement with the politics of recognition involving communities and the host cultures - resistance. In some ways then the media as a space of contestation have a double role; of informing and enabling as well as constraining their daily experiences in Britain. Moreover, although transnational media provides a more complex cultural sphere, it not necessarily promotes a ‘transnational identity’ as these media continue to present images and meanings that are specific of historic, economic, and cultural conditions tied to their place of production and audience reactions reflect their own responses to these specificities. Furthermore, it can be suggested that the consumption of transnational/diasporic media by Latin Americans is part of their lives in Europe, which suggest that tensions and conflicts in their active process of identity

negotiation is resolved in the ambiguities and ambivalences of everyday life and according to the material reality of their specific circumstances and internal cultural practices. I could suggest that the strategy of multiple gazes used by Latin American women to the media is perhaps useful to provide a way for appropriation of diverse cultural ideas and practices of British culture as well as cultural connectivity to the Latin cultures while allowing for comparison of different cultural worlds offered by these diverse media. The dialectical relationship of the Latinas with the media in their identity negotiation perhaps resonates with Mishra (2002) views on the contradictions and ambivalences that compose diasporic groups, they 'are not ideal, perfect community or communities but are in fact marked by strong ambiguity and self-contradiction, by a double-subjectivity, a double consciousness' (Mishra, 2002:238 quoted in Harindranath, 2007).

Overall, it seems that Latinas have used a plethora of tactics in their daily lives to negotiate a diasporic identity; sometimes engaging with the dominant discourse of British society and the media, others contesting it though engaging with alternative discourses and practices – and occasionally creating new cultural meanings to their lives which in turn has provided opportunities for transformative experiences where one fights one's way through the many trappings of 'race' and 'ethnicity'.

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ⁱ The use of 'diasporic' identity here is only a explanatory device which acknowledge the connections and intersections between gender, 'race', ethnicity, class as in practice these identities inform and shape each other in an often inextricable matrix that may blur their borders (Isin and Wood, 1999).

ⁱⁱ Home is used here in two senses; as a physical space and as a symbolic conceptualisation of where one belongs (Salih, 2001).