Sex and Gender dimension in frontier research ERC annual conference

Session 3 - Q&A

Q1: In which sense could ethnography help us with understanding media if it is focused on the human capabilities?

Sandra Ponzanesi's reply: It is important not to conceptualise the Internet merely as a medium or platform with specific affordances, but to pay attention to the ways in which the digital literally comes to life through the user's participation, focusing on how people experience and contribute to the production of the digital realm.

Ethnography can help us understand digital media by situating it in particular contexts and making visible the socially diverse practices and engagements of different groups and generations, rather than focusing on the abstract capabilities of the Internet in itself. As standpoint epistemology has argued, in contrast to technological determinism or media-centric approaches, the positionality of the user of technology is important for understanding what technology does/can do/ or mean, showing the entanglements between people and machines, and subjectivity and technology, as productively discussed by feminist thinkers such as Donna Haraway (1991; 1997) and Katherine N. Hayles (1999; 2005).

So it is important to combine ethnography with digital methods and visualizations, because as mentioned, data driven results are not always useful in explaining why certain connections matter at all, or whether what we are collecting as data allows us to interpret the "digital reason" behind the "graphic reason", meaning understanding how digital diasporic affiliations and communicative strategies among networked actors operate at the intersections of machine and humans (Diminescu and Loveluck).

Q2: You mentioned that different media have a specific use according to the function within the groups (e.g. Youtube for entertainment): are the distinctions quite sharp or do some media share the same scopes? In the same group, is there any influence by other aspects (e.g. age etc)?

Sandra Ponzanesi's reply: The concept of polymedia is quite useful, because migrant women recur to different platforms at the same, selecting what is needed for specific purposes and functions. They distinguish their use according to the interlocutors, level of privacy or availability. This is very intersectional, so it varies not only per groups (though there are common denominators) but also per age, level of education, and whether they are first of second-generation migrants.

Q3: How would you compare the live sociality with the new remote forms? Does it really help in mitigating adverse emotional reactions in migrants?

Sandra Ponzanesi's reply: It does, but we have seen that is also worsen the feeling of distance and separation, making it more acute and palpable when the connection is interrupted or concluded. Migrant also use selectively their digital co-presence, avoiding at times the control of parents and family left behind, who can become invasive because of the easy of these new technologies. So, there are cases of careful co-presence as our postdoc Donya Alinjad defines it, when migrants use selectively one app instead of another to divide the spheres of connectivity, between parents and friends or homelands and hostlands.

Q4: You presented a showcase study based on the analysis in 3 cities. Do you think that there might be a serious effect of the hosting culture in the way migrants try to be connected with their homelands?

Sandra Ponzanesi's reply: Oh yes absolutely this is a very good question. The different multicultural policies in the three countries studied (UK, Netherlands and Italy) are very different and certainly impact on the ways in which the relation with the home countries are dealt with also at governmental level. The Turkish case being the most pronounced in our study.

Q5: Is there any correlation between how good is the host country with integration of migrants and how strong is the digital connection that the migrants have with their beloved in the place of origin? If so, such connections are any stronger or weaker in colonial countries?

Sandra Ponzanesi's reply: This is a great question. In studies on the digital cities a lot of efforts have been (see Germany) put in making the migrants integrated by making them digitally savvy and ready for being good entrepreneurs, and therefore 'good' integrated migrants. Trainings and facilities have been greated for them. However, despite this higher level of skills and acquired digital competencies, the connection with the home countries (and whether it offers stronger or weaker ties) is often influenced by the level of education, class and age that the migrants have as a starting point. Connection with the home countries is also often more intense for question of remittances and national reconstruction, which is for example very strong within the Somali community. From the UK there is a greater media production that directly influence the politics at home, but the connection is equally strong, though digitally more rudimentary, among Somali community living in Italy.