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GUEST EDITORIAL

Immigrants, *ethnicized* minorities and the arts: a relatively neglected research area

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The aim of this article is to show the necessity to better understand the relevance of the arts in the theoretical and policy debates about immigrant incorporation and diversity in migration and post-migration cities, and also in the present phase of *ethnicized* and *racialized* social and economic relations. To do so, five domains can be considered that, taken together, constitute a general framework in which more theoretically grounded empirical research should develop: local culture, social relations and interactions, local cultural and incorporation policies, local politics and local economics.

Keywords: arts; popular culture; music; immigrant incorporation; ethnic and race relations; transatlantic perspective

The academic literature on immigrant integration and incorporation is huge both in Europe and in America. It has exploded in Europe and in the USA since the 1980s (Martiniello and Rath 2010, 2012, 2014) to cover a wide range of issues linked to the economic, social, political and cultural incorporation of immigrants and their offspring. However, there are two important problems in that literature: the weakness of transatlantic academic dialogue and the relative neglect of some topics and issues, for example the relationship between the arts and the incorporation of migrants and their descendants.

First, European migration and ethnic studies undoubtedly developed by importing concepts and theories from America, but the idea that the American and European experiences of migration were too different to be compared hindered a strong transatlantic academic dialogue. Things have changed in the past twenty years. It seems clearer today that there are also similarities between the USA and Europe in terms of migration, ethnicity and race. The historical distinction between traditional countries of immigration and nations that existed as such prior to migration is becoming increasingly blurred. The USA and Europe are both *de facto* regions affected by international migration. On both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, immigration and incorporation are hot political, policy and public issues. Old immigration policies and old patterns of integration and assimilation seem in part obsolete. This makes comparison through dialogue a valuable tool to make sense of how migration affects the two parts of the industrial and post-industrial world differently, but also of the similarities in the incorporation processes can be observed on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean (Lafleur and Martiniello 2010).

Second, it is remarkable that the first book to examine comprehensively the importance of art in the lives of immigrants in the USA was published as late as 2010 (DiMaggio and Fernandez-Kelly 2010). More recently, Philip Kasinitz (2014) examined how the US-born daughters and sons of immigrants were shaping and renewing the artistic scene of New York in domains such as music, cinema and theatre. He puts forward the hypothesis of the 'second-generation advantage'. According to him, the offspring of immigrants can rely both on cultural resources coming from their parents' heritage and from the society in which they have been socialized in order to stimulate their artistic creativity and enter the mainstream artistic scene. In Europe, two special issues of journals dedicated to the links between immigrants, *ethnicized* minorities and the arts appeared in 2008 (Martiniello and Lafleur 2008) and 2009 (Martiniello, Puig, and Suzanne 2009) and a third was published in 2014 (Martiniello 2014a). Despite these noticeable collective efforts developed within the European research network International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion (IMISCOE),¹ the importance of arts and popular culture in immigrant and *ethnicized* minorities' incorporation remains a relatively under-explored subject in the sociological and political science literature on migration and incorporation and a sort of monopoly of cultural and media studies.

What is the reason for this relative neglect by some disciplines of social and political sciences? On both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, immigrants and their offspring have for a long time been exclusively considered as workers, as mere means of production in the industrial economy or in the post-industrial service economy. Just as they were not supposed to be politically active, they were also not supposed to be interested in culture and arts, especially as producers and artists but also as consumers. With the emergence of subsequent generations in the public space, artistic expressions of migrant-origin populations and *ethnicized* minorities started to draw some attention, especially in cultural studies, anthropology and to a lesser extent in sociology. In the debates about multiculturalism, the ways in which the artistic expressions of immigrants and members of *ethnicized* minorities were changing the mainstream culture became a relevant topic. One approach was to show to what extent migrant and *ethnicized* minorities' artistic productions inspired by their experience of migration and/or discrimination were changing and enriching local cultures through processes such as artistic *métissage*, fusion and invention. Many examples can be made here: the emergence of the Algerian rai music in France in the 1980s; the emergence of a specific literature based on the various migrant experiences in Europe and in the USA; the invention of Tex-Mex music in Texas in which Spanish, German, Czechoslovakian and Mexican musical idioms were fused to give birth to a specific musical form combining local musical instruments and instruments imported by immigrants such as the accordion. Another approach was to read ethnic and racial domination in the artistic sphere as well. For example, the progressive incorporation of jazz in mainstream American popular culture was analysed in terms of white confiscation and as an additional proof of white domination in the artistic sphere, which was racially fragmented like all the other spheres of the society. The evolution of the blues is another interesting example. Over the past seventy years, it has evolved from a music played mainly by uneducated, middle-aged and elderly blacks or African Americans from the South, many of whom emigrated to northern

industrial cities where they modernized and urbanized their art, to a music mainly played by educated, young and middle-aged whites or European Americans from the North, but also from many countries around the world. This social and racial change has also been seen as a kind of appropriation of the black cultural and artistic heritage by the white majority. In one way or another, popular culture and the arts have clearly been seen as a stake in majority–minority relations by specialists of cultural studies and anthropology. Studying the artistic production of *racialized* and *ethnicized* minorities – studying African American music, Anglo-Pakistani cinema or post-colonial literature in France – has certainly been part of a process of minority identity claim-making, but most cultural studies approaches have developed simplistic views about the social and potential relevance of minority cultural and artistic forms of expression in the post-migration city.

Against this background, this editorial aims to show the necessity to better understand the relevance of the arts in theoretical and policy debates about immigrant incorporation and diversity in migration and post-migration cities, and also in the present phase of *ethnicized* and *racialized* social and economic relations. To do so, five domains can be considered that, taken together, constitute a general framework in which more theoretically grounded empirical research should develop: local culture, social relations and interactions, local cultural and incorporation policies, local politics and local economics.

At the cultural level, it is important to examine how artistic productions by immigrants and members of *ethnicized* and *racialized* minorities *change the mainstream local and even national artistic scene*. For example, how do immigrants' musical expressions inspired by their experience of migration and/or discrimination change and enrich local cultures through processes such as cultural *métissage*, fusion and invention? We mentioned earlier the examples of Tex-Mex or Tejano music in the USA and rai music in France. We could certainly mention many other examples that illustrate the mixing that occurs when musical traditions imported by immigrants and musical traditions established on a territory meet to give birth to new musical idioms that can then be associated with the identities of a particular place. South Louisiana French and Creole music such as Cajun and zydeco is a case in point. What is now seen as a distinctive feature of that state's distinctive culture and identity is the result of decades of musical mixing in a racially divided social and political environment. In Europe, the emergence of the British reggae scene in the 1970s and 1980s in the context of the struggles for racial equality also relied on the mixing of a West Indian musical tradition with British urban cultures in which the second generation of West Indian immigrants played a central role with artists such as Linton Kwezi Johnson, one of the most emblematic artists of that period in the UK. In France, the Rai 'n' B musical genre illustrates the complexity of music mixing in post-migration social settings. The genre appeared in France in the 2000s as a combination of Algerian rai music, and French R 'n' B, which is clearly imported from the USA, and sometimes of rap and zouglou music from Ivory Coast. Very popular among black and North African-origin French youth, this hybrid dance music has travelled to other French-speaking countries like Belgium. Examples can also be found in other artistic forms. In literature, for example, the work of Hanif Kureishi has contributed to transform contemporary British literature just as the work of Fatih Akin has redefined German

cinema. All these examples indicate that immigrants and their offspring as well as other *ethnicized* and *racialized* minorities do not simply assimilate in local arts; they transform the local artistic landscape and give birth to new artistic idioms that need to be better studied than they have been so far.

At the social level, the idea that artistic expressions can help build bridges to facilitate *encounters* (Vertovec 2009) between populations with different ethnic origins sharing the same city or the same neighbourhood needs to be explored and contextualized. An interesting question would be to explore to what extent and under which conditions popular music can become a means of communication and dialogue between different members of different groups to build some form of shared local citizenship or co-inclusion in the local community. Like sport, the arts can gather people but also divide people along socio-economic, political, ethnic and racial lines. In many cities, there is a tension between ethnic fragmentation and separation on the one hand and ethnic mixing and dialogue on the other. That tension also characterizes the artistic scene (Martiniello 2014b). In that context, it is particularly interesting to look at how some artistic disciplines form the social cement between urban youth from different social, ethnic and racial backgrounds from a perspective of everyday multiculturalism (Harris 2013). While parts of the urban youth are attracted to identity closure in an imagined ethnic, racial or religious group, other parts experience a post-ethnic, post-racial and post-religious condition in their normal daily activities. To them, being part of the same artistic project with other youngsters of both genders with different social and ethnic backgrounds or skin colours is just normal, for example. In my research on the social and political relevance of music in multicultural urban settings in Belgium, I have met hip hop dance crews that are totally mixed socially, ethnically, racially and in terms of religious affiliations. Young men from the third generation of Moroccan working-class immigrants and young Flemish ladies from the suburban white middle class work daily together in the same artistic project. To them, the theoretical debates about post-multiculturalism, post-ethnicity or neo-assimilation do not make sense at all. To them, ethnic, racial or religious belongings are almost totally irrelevant. The only thing that matters is the common artistic project and the cooperation necessary to make it succeed. In that sense, their everyday experiences are more advanced than many theorizations about the super-diverse society. It would be very interesting to further document these new modes of social cross-ethnic and cross-racial interactions and lifestyles in which artistic communalities seem to play a crucial role.

Another important issue is the potential *policy relevance* of arts in migration and post-migration cities. The first idea is to explore the issue of the *representation of diversity* (Vertovec 2009) in national, subnational and local cultural policies: do official cultural institutions support immigrant artists? Are local cultural policies becoming multicultural? How do migrant and *ethnicized* artists mobilize in order to change cultural policies? It also seems important to examine to what extent arts are used and could be a useful tool in local incorporation and social cohesion policies. These issues probably do not have the same relevance on both sides of the Atlantic. In many European countries and cities, the state intervenes in culture and arts through complex patterns of cultural and artistic policies, whereas in the USA, the forces of the markets are more important than the state. However, the questions mentioned

address the issue of incorporation of migrants from an uncommon perspective that also informs the process by which newcomers become – or do not – full members of a given society.

At the political level, arts can be the basis for forming collective identities and can play an important role in *social and political mobilization* (Martiniello and Lafleur 2008; Mattern 1998). We need to better understand how artistic expressions play a role in the negotiation and assertion of various conceptions of local (ethnic, transethnic, etc.) identities. We should also examine how artistic expressions today protest against and denunciate the local social and political order and also how they express support for the established local order and its mystified values. Finally, more research is needed on how local electoral campaigns might use immigrant and ethnic artistic talents and forms of expression, and also on how the artists negotiate their support for politicians.

In our research, we examined the 2008 presidential campaign in the USA. Although artists have historically been involved in US electoral campaigns, the election of 2008 seems to have given a new dimension to the presence of artists in the electoral process – be it recorded financial contributions made by the artists themselves, songs composed in honour of the candidates, or evidence of explicit support in the press or cultural events. We focused on the role that Latino artists played in Barack Obama's campaign by using different Latino music genres (from mariachi music to corrido, salsa and reggaeton) to attract specific subsections of the Latino electorate (Lafleur and Martiniello 2010). In Europe, the involvement of artists in the electoral process is less anchored in the political culture. However, using music clips in electoral campaigns is increasingly common. In a small city near Liège, Belgium, candidates for a small extreme left-wing party, *Parti du Travail de Belgique*, gained 15% of the vote at the 2010 local elections with a rap clip featuring youngsters, most of them of immigrant descent, who were running for office.² In the south of Italy, a group of irregular migrant workers in agriculture formed a music band called *Kalifoo Ground* after the killing of six of them by the Neapolitan organized crime organization, the Camorra, in 2008.³ The band toured Italy to mobilize irregular migrants and to seek support in the Italian society. These examples show that artistic expressions can play an important role in the mobilization of politically marginal groups such as immigrant and *ethnicized* minorities. They therefore deserve serious research attention.

Finally, at the economic level, the issue of the *impact of immigrant and ethnic artistic expressions* on the local economy through ethnic tourism (Rath 2006) and festivals, and also the development of a local immigrant and ethnic artistic life deserve specific study. Some cities efficiently market their ethnic, artistic and cultural diversity and see it as an asset for their economic development by attracting global visitors and consumers. Members of immigrant and *ethnicized* groups find there opportunities for cultural recognition and also for economic integration and empowerment by seizing the opportunities supplied by the market of diversity. The local economic impact of the growing industry of artistic diversity is thus another area of research that needs further development.

To conclude this overview of the five levels at which the links between immigration, ethnicity, race and the arts should develop, it is important to underline

the added value of comparative research. Comparative research helps to understand the specificities of each context and to propose generalizations about the role that arts play in the incorporation processes of immigrants and of *ethnicized* and *racialized* minorities. Finally, besides the economic and social contribution of immigrants and *ethnicized* minorities, it is also crucial to take into account their cultural and artistic contributions, which unfortunately often tend to be forgotten in the current era of economic crisis and/or transition in which culture and arts are often unfairly neglected. As the late Belgian opera director Gérard Mortier said:

Politicians believe artists and intellectuals as negligible, as a decorative frame. If all went well, we would not need artists. But the great revolutions we face scare people. They flee to materialism. So I at least am convinced that this fear there may be filled with art, science, philosophy. ... The art does not reconcile us with life, it helps us to cope better.⁴

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. <http://www.imiscoe.org>
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JREG07gYbf4&spfreload=10>
3. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Szqw0yMHP-E>
4. My own translation from the Belgian newspaper *Le Soir*, March 10, 2014.

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