

Media & Citizenship

Transnational Television Cultures Reshaping Political Identities in the European Union

LEONOR CAMAUËR

Media & Citizenship is an EC-funded, seventh framework program project, which investigates the uses of television by Arabic-speakers in seven EU countries from the perspective of citizenship and participation. The countries include Cyprus, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the UK. The project runs between 2008 and 2011.

In Europe today, many debates on migration and citizenship are coloured by either concerns with Islamic fundamentalism or Arabic groups' alleged low levels of integration. In many cases, these communities' use of Arabic-language media is criticized within this context. While it is clear that these groups, in contrast to ethnic minorities in past decades, have now access to the vast transnational media space of Arabic-language channels, what is much less known is the degree to which Arabic-speakers use both these channels and national (European) and transnational channels, and the ways in which the media use influences the groups' understandings and experiences of citizenship.

The main aim of *Media & Citizenship* is therefore to produce empirical and comparative data (quantitative and qualitative) on Arabic-speakers uses of television in the seven countries and to investigate their understandings of citizenship as derived from both their media use and their views on the citizenship tests used in several of the investigated countries. Based on this data, the project will also prepare policy recommendations. It is worth noting that previous to this project there were no rating data for Arabic groups in European countries since media use of minorities is seldom included in market surveys. More specifically, the project will provide:

- a quantitative investigation of the use of television by Arabic-speakers, which includes use of both Arabic-language and national (European) language media (this will be the first large scale investigation at the European level),
- data which allows for comparisons between Arabic-speaking groups in EU countries,
- a qualitative focus group study dealing with media use and its relationship to understandings of citizenship among Arabic-speaking communities,
- Arabic-speakers views and evaluations of citizenship tests as regards their media content,

- public meetings with Arabic-speakers where preliminary project results are shared and discussions on media use and understandings of citizenship are carried further, and
- a documentary highlighting the project's main results.

Broadly speaking, the project is based on theories of citizenship, the transnational public sphere and transnational media. Among other things, the project strives to expand the conventional Habermasian understanding of the public sphere as a single space solidly anchored in the nation-state and regards the transnational public sphere as a more adequate conceptualization of contemporary communication flows.

The *quantitative study* comprised two components. The first was a *questionnaire* which gathered information on Arabic-speakers gender, age, education, preferred channels, etc. This component worked as a filter and preliminary recruitment procedure for the second one, the *media diary*, as it identified watchers of Arabic-language television. The diary measured the use of Arabic, national (European) and transnational channels. Those who filled in the diaries provided information on what they watched, when and for how long. Both components were administered in all countries but Cyprus. Some 400 respondents per country answered the questionnaire and approximately 100 per country filled in the diaries. The results of the quantitative study have been processed by a data analyst working from Bielefeld.

The *focus group study* aimed at providing more detailed knowledge on Arabic-speakers' television use and the ways it relates to understandings of citizenship. Notions of participation and experiences of inclusion/exclusion were dealt with as well. Six focus group discussions were conducted in each of the seven countries (four to six participants per group), three female and three male groups. The groups were also formed taking age/generation into account. The focus groups were conducted by research assistants who spoke both Arabic and the majority language of each country and received pertinent training before the interviews. Some preliminary results of this study have been published in a recent issue of *Journalism* (2010, vol. 11, nr. 6).

The *citizenship study* consists of two components. The first maps the legal frameworks of immigration and citizenship in each of the seven countries, and these are also related to the supra-national/European level. This part also includes the analysis of citizenship testing regimes in the countries where the tests are applied. Preparation materials and related policy documents are also examined with a focus on their mediated elements. The second component consists of a Public Engagement Event organized in each country, with participants such as Arabic-speakers and others, including for instance media practitioners, analysts and scholars. During the workshops, preliminary research results were shared and participants were asked to reflect upon their understandings of citizenship at both national and European levels (legal aspects and testing regimes) and the ways in which they believed that the media shape these understandings.

One of the main preliminary results of both the quantitative and the focus group studies is that there are no indications of a withdrawal into an exclusive use of Arabic-language channels.

The transnational research team includes scholars from five universities: Myria Georgiou (London School of Economics and Political Science, UK), Ingrid Volkmer (Bielefeld University, Germany), Fayçal Najab and Chamia Ghanjaoui (Sorbonne Nouvelle University, France), Leonor Camauër (Örebro University, Sweden) and Christina

Slade (Utrecht University, The Netherlands and City University London, UK), who also coordinates the project.

The research team works with the support of an Advisory Board which includes scholars and media practitioners from both the public and private broadcasting sector, and transnational media organisations, including those belonging to Arabic-speaking communities.

Additional information can be found on the project's public site, where each of the seven involved countries has its page in its own language. Preliminary reports, accounts of project activities and video clips showing material from the Public Engagement Events held in the different countries in 2010 can also be accessed through this site: <http://www.media-citizenship.eu/index.php?lang=en>

