Abstract for the International Conference on ‘Artistic Practice as an Alternative to News Media’

Title: Performing Citizenship: understanding the artistic practices of UK-based migrant and refugee artists

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This paper argues that artists can reinvent citizenship as a political project and challenge formal definitions of citizenship in contexts of asylum and migration. There is a growing recognition that the classical liberal view of citizenship, which implies a vertical relationship between the state and the individual, is increasingly inadequate to articulate contemporary forms of civic engagement and collective belonging. While the normative model of citizenship (Marshall, 1950) presupposes that citizenship is an ideal status to which the excluded might be granted access, contemporary scholarship directs the analytical lens to how citizenship takes place in specific contexts and to different modes of being a citizen (Clarke, Coll, Dagnino and Neveu, 2014). Drawing upon in-depth interviews with artists working in a range of art forms, this research explores ways in which migrant and refugee artists based in the North of England are able to create new communicative spaces for enacting opposed conceptions of belonging and citizenship. While it is recognized that it is possible to pursue alternative political projects and citizenship practices beyond the state-centred arena of politics, this paper directs the analytical lens (1) to the ways in which artists can perform acts of citizenship within and across particular online and offline spaces, and (2) the possibilities of expressive culture as a way of knowing and making citizenship. The paper goes on to show how artistic practices can be a site of contestation for citizenship. It will be argued that poetic-expressive devices - such as acting and music styles, enunciation and gestures, visual styles - are as important as textuality to enable the articulation of relationships of belonging, conflicts over citizenship and claims to rights. In this context, the paper will also examine the kind of affordances digital environments can specifically offer to professional migrant and refugee artists as they attempt to reach out new audiences and opportunities for collaborative practice.

Biography

Maria Rovisco is a Lecturer in Media and Communication at the University of Leicester, UK. She has published articles on cosmopolitan cinema, cosmopolitanism and religion, and on the cultural borders of Europe and globalization. Her research interests focus on the relation between arts and citizenship, cosmopolitanism and globalization, new activisms and mediated dissent. Among her recent publications are the co-edited books Cosmopolitanism in Practice (Ashgate, 2009), The Ashgate Research Companion to Cosmopolitanism (Ashgate, 2011) and Cosmopolitanism, Religion and the Public Sphere (Routledge, 2014). She is currently working on the co-edited book project Taking the Square: Mediated Dissent and Occupations of public space.