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Diaspora as Social and Cultural Practice: a Study of Transnational Networks across Europe and Africa

This project focuses on the ways in which (post-)migrant artists and cultural practitioners originating from North-Africa and Madagascar are able to use complex networks across African, European and wider global spaces. It suggests that artists who create or enter such networks make use of, but go far beyond the traditional 'bi-focal', ethnically and spatially defined communities that link originating and sending countries, as studied in much Diaspora research. They follow a different logic of translocal/ transnational networking. Whilst recently there has been a plethora of research which theorises networks and flows, little empirical research has as yet emerged which studies these in closer detail, by throwing light on the motivations, personal narratives and cultural practices of migrants involved. In relation to cultural practitioners, musicians, and audio-visual artists whose livelihood depends to a considerable extent on their success in going beyond their immediate localities to perform and publicise their art, even less is known about the constituency and impact of networks. Our earlier studies have hinted that artists in the diasporic 'hubs' of capital cities interlink with cultural and social 'movements' in their originating countries for various artistic, economic, social, political and ecological reasons. Little is known about the new dynamics that bind artists and cultural agents from such cultural movements within wider European networks of similar motivations. Our proposed case-studies of Francophone artists in countries of origin, and across selected European spaces build on our own and other researchers' prior work in diasporic metropolitan centres, but follow the complexities of transnational networks beyond these clustered links. Through empirical studies of artists and cultural practitioners we aim to provide new insights into their creative practices, throw light on their identifications in their artistic and every-day life, their motivations, modes of cultural and social engagement, on opportunities or barriers within and beyond their art. Importantly, the network approach also aims for a better understanding of the artistic and wider social impact of associated local and networked social groups and associations.

The following aims are particularly relevant for a study of (post-)migrant networks in the Arts and Humanities:

- o To contribute to the development of new theories of Diaspora cutting across the Arts and Social Sciences.
- o To develop a robust and transferable interdisciplinary research framework for studying physical as well as virtual networks of migrant artists.

o To understand the motivations of migrant artists to leave, stay or move beyond their localities, especially when they bypass well-established cultural links.

o To understand the interconnection between cultural and social engagement of groups /associations within civil society, including those of (post-)migrant cultural practitioners themselves, and to evaluate their impact on a variety of cultural, social, political and ecological factors within countries of settlement and of origin