DMM ECREA annual conference: “Digital Fortress Europe: Exploring Boundaries between Media, Migration and Technology”

30 and 31 October 2019, Brussels, Belgium

About the conference

The panel will take place within the Diaspora, Migration and Media section (DMM) of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) annual conference. The two-day conference “Digital Fortress Europe: Exploring Boundaries between Media, Migration and Technology” intends to provide a forum to reflect on the relationship between media, migration, and technology. The conference will take place at the Palace of the Academies in the centre of Brussels on 30 & 31 October 2019. You will find all the information on the ECREA website: https://www.ecrea.eu/event-3235026.

About the panel

Panel title: “What do we say to migrants throughout their journey? Official communication strategies between spaces of origin, transit and destination”

Press analysis shows that editorial processing volume on migration issues continues to increase. It attracts constant and complex media coverage. These questions – beyond being topical – are essential to the constitution of public opinion and public policy. The issue of migration and exile is an important matter of speech and communication, hence it is essential to analyse communication in this area. So far, and even more since the “refugee crisis” in 2015, researchers in media and communication have shown an increasing interest in the representation of migrants (Bonnafous, 1999) in various discourses (political, media, voluntary, etc.). Some researchers have analysed media content and/or media frames (Chouliaraki et al., 2017; De Cock et al., 2019), others the discursive construction of terms used to name the protagonists (Baker et al., 2008; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008; Canut, 2016; Calabrese & Mistiaen, 2018). If some sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists -particularly interested in migration narratives- have focused on language practices within the relationship between institutions and migrants (Blommaert, 2001; Beneduce, 2008), fewer studies in this area have concentrated specifically on the discourses towards migrants themselves. However, beside what is being said about migrants, it seems increasingly important to question what migration management bodies (e.g., state institution, NGOs, international organisations) actually do say to migrants in order to try to influence their own behaviour. Indeed, since the 1990s, so-called “information campaigns” and awareness-raising activities have been funded by Western governments in third countries for the purpose of reducing emigration before migrants reach their national borders (Nieuwenhuys & Pécout, 2007; Pécout, 2010; Carling & Hernández-Carretero, 2011; Oeppen 2016).

On the one hand, images of suffering migrants and deaths happening through the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea have become tools to govern the mobility of sub-Saharan Africans, with the aim for the European Union to “inscribe in potential migrants’ subjectivities the borders that it fails to control on the ground” (Heller, 2014). On the other hand, asylum seekers and refugees have become suspicious of information provided by official authorities, and tend to turn towards alternative sources which they consider more reliable (Gillespie et al., 2016, p. 56). Studying communication strategies towards migrants seems therefore crucial, especially as many of them experience “information precarity” through their journey, a concept referring to “the condition of instability that refugees experience in accessing news and personal information” (Wall et al., 2015, p. 1). Paradoxically, migration further enhances the need for information as individuals often lack specific knowledge about the functioning of national institutions and/or the official language of transit and destination countries. As a result, this inequality of access to linguistic-communicative resources (Blommaert, 2001) reinforces the power asymmetry (Spire, 2007; Goffman, 1968) which characterizes the relation between migrants and the official bodies with which they are in contact throughout their journey.
The precise aim of this panel is therefore to discuss the various communication strategies which are directed towards migrants and/or asylum seekers, between their country of origin, transit and destination. Discussions will include questions regarding: What do we say to migrants? Who says it? For what purpose? Through which channels? And in which context? Beyond the specific messages, it is also the entire “relation of communication” (Wolton, 2018) which connects official bodies and individual migrants that we aim to question. We will therefore welcome all contributions that focus explicitly on official discourses towards migrants and/or asylum seekers, as well as the perception and reception of such discourses by targeted populations. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the issues raised, we wish to expand discussions beyond communication studies, and we will especially welcome submissions rooted in sociology, political science, anthropology, social psychology and more broadly social sciences.

Proposal submission procedure
Conference languages: English

Please submit a 500-word abstract in an anonymized MS Word file only (other formats or non-anonymized documents will not be considered) per e-mail to ecreamm@gmail.com and Amandine.Van.Neste@ulb.ac.be. Please mention “Submission Brussels Conference-panel What do we say to migrants” in your e-mail subject.

Timeline
- 22 February 2019: deadline abstract submission
- 15 April 2019: notification of acceptance
- 10 May 2019: opening of registrations
- 1 July 2019: publication of final programme
- 15 September 2019: closing of registrations
- 30-31 October 2019: conference

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- Irati Agirreazkuenaga, University of the Basque Country, ECREA DMM vice-chair
- Melis Mevsimler, Utrecht University, ECREA DMM young scholars representative
- Leen d’Haenens, KU Leuven
- Alexander Dhoest, University of Antwerp
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