

Materialities of migrants' practices and visibility in urban spaces: Perspectives on Paris-Abu-Dhabi

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This presentation focuses on lessons learned from experience and the discussion of two research programs led by the author during the past ten years, which provide an empirical and original perspective on materialities as tools of visibility and interaction for migrant minorities in urban spaces. The first study, "Ethnic food trade in Paris" (COMET, program Émergence ville de Paris, 2013-2015) compares several key places of Parisian trade shaped by the migration history of the city and combines a quantitative survey of users and by-passers, in-depth interviews with shopkeepers and a qualitative analysis of "trade scenographies". The second project "Abu Dhabi Public Spaces, urban classification and social interactions" (Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge, 2017-2020), aimed to generate a corpus of systematic observations on daily practices in 14 public spaces located in the capital of United Arab Emirates, in order to understand the interaction, inclusion and exclusion processes within a population composed of 90% foreigners. The presentation addresses several common results to these two fieldworks, beyond their contextual disparities. It analyzes in particular how migrants' daily practice materialities play a key role in their visibility and social and symbolic status in public and commercial spaces. Two more specific cases will be addressed. The first one is the use by indigenous populations or other migrant minorities, of material and concrete artifacts (clothes, food items, practical accessories) to identify, name and characterize groups related to international migration. In doing so, 'things' appear as a medium to put 'words' on the realities of migration that common language often struggles to cease because of symbolic or political reasons. The second case is migrant minorities' ability to strategically or symbolically use materialities in order to take possession of a symbolic, commercial or concrete space in the city: Symbolic appropriation of micro-spaces as well as commercial scenographies with shop windows and the commercial offer.