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MEDIATING EXILES: SAHARAN AND SAHELIAN DIASPORAS IN EUROPE

AN INTRODUCTION

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In recent decades, the transnational approach to the study of human mobility processes has nurtured different fields of social science with perspectives and approaches that have challenged so-called methodological nationalism, emphasizing practices and social relations across borders (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003). New theoretical and empirical insights have questioned the assumption of nation-state borders as a natural part of the study of social processes and the need to analyze flows and connections between places and people. Consequently, research has highlighted the role of non-governmental actors while emphasizing the necessity of transcending nation-states, borders, and localities to understand migrants' ties, relations, and processes to and of migration flows. In a more interconnected world, contemporary migration processes cannot be understood without examining global communication and the impact of digital technologies in everyday life. In that sense, scholarship has also enriched empirical studies which aim to understand diaspora experiences through a more globalized lenses (Georgiou 2013; Leurs and Smets 2018). Electronic media -radio, television and digital technologies- have covered multiple territories, reduced distances and renegotiated co-presence, i.e. that meaningful experience of feeling close to distant beloved ones through immediate caring practices and circular technological communication, allowing the construction of a sense of togetherness (Baldassar *et al.* 2016). Such opportunities have redefined belonging and collectivity for diasporic populations all over the world. Following this approach, this special issue of *L'Ouest saharien* highlights recent research in the field of diaspora studies with a particular focus on Saharan and Sahelian diasporas settled in Europe and elsewhere. The aim of this special issue is to investigate how and with what implications Saharan and Sahelian populations communicate their perceptions of exile.