Travelling types. Deterritorialization and reterritorialization of/in minority space(s).

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In the course of the last century, within the context of Basque and Galician semiotic landscapes, families of vernacular types become enregistered as social emblems (Agha 2007) indexing the respective national communities and territories. I have argued elsewhere (Järlehed 2015) that we are currently witnessing a shift of orientation in the use of vernacular typography from a marker of nationalist ideologies and politicized identities to metacultural displays of symbolic capital in the context of tourism, urban theming and place-branding. The ideological tension emerging between these two orientations illustrates the central role performed in contemporary minority nation-building by the discursive interaction of ‘pride’ and ‘profit’ (Duchêne & Heller 2011).

The aim of this paper is to further examine how the two interrelated processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization are operating in the discursive and ideological framing of vernacular typography in public space. General notions of vernacular typography – as ‘homemade’, ‘local’ – often presuppose some kind of direct link to a specific territory, community and identity. However, such letterforms are mobilizable semiotic resources echoing former trajectories and connectivity, and they are always involved in deterritorialization and reterritorialization, leading to a restructuring of power and ‘orders of indexicality’ (cf. Blommaert 2010).

Thus, assuming that vernacular types can and do ‘travel’, in this paper I examine how the movement of typographic resources through space, time and language interact with the continuous contestation and recreation of ‘minority’ (space, language, community). Drawing on illustrative examples of typographic choices and events from the Basque and Galician cases, I suggest that the constraints for conceiving vernacular typography as mobilizable and part of globalized flows are as much ideological and economic as media-technological (e.g. that they are perceived as ‘inadequate’ for the screen) and formal-esthetic (e.g. that they are perceived as ‘rustic’).

Keywords: ideological framing, vernacular typography, deterritorialization/reterritorialization.