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LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117  
221 00 Lund  
+46 46-222 00 00



## Media and Migration through the Lens of Mediatization and Transnationalism <sup>1</sup>

Magnus Andersson <sup>2</sup>  
Malmö University, Sweden  
magnus.andersson@mah.se

### Abstract

In present paper, the debates around mediatization and transnationalism constitute the backdrop for a discussion on the media and communication practices among Swedish expatriates in the Netherlands and forced migrants from Bosnia in Sweden. The complex relationship between (transnational) identity, place and mobility is studied at three intersections between media and migration: (1) creativity and connection-making, (2) The boundaries of mediated freedom and (3) the transnational production of locality. The paper stresses the importance of a contextual and non-media-centric perspective (see Morley, 2009); it is in agents' daily activities - where media practices and social practices are interwoven with each other - the interplay between processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization take place.

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<sup>2</sup> Magnus Andersson (PhD) is a senior lecturer in Media and Communication Studies at Malmö University. His main research interest is the post-disciplinary crossroads between Media Studies, (Human) Geography and Cultural Studies where he has conducted studies on mediatization in relation to the countryside, migration, everyday life and 'the home'.

# Media and migration through the lens of mediatization and transnationalism

## Introduction

*What is fixed and what is mobile in processes of mediation, migration and identification?*

There have been many 'turns' in social science in recent years, which have affected media and communication studies in different ways. Both the so called spatial turn and the mobility turn have intensified the discussion about the relationships between identity, place and mobility (Easthope, 2009; see also Hannam et al., 2006; Falkheimer and Jansson, 2006). The idea that identity is embedded in a dialectic relationship has a long history. In different perspectives, disciplines and research field identity has been expressed through concepts of duality: roots and routes (Gilroy, 1997; Clifford, 1997), dwelling and travelling (Clifford, 1992), hearth and cosmos (Tuan, 1996), fixity and flow (Cresswell, 2006), "space of flows" and "space of places" (Castells, 1996: 378), local and cosmopolitan (Hannerz, 1990), place and mobility (Easthope, 2009), 'flow speak' and 'socio-cultural thickness' (Bude and Dürrschmidt, 2011) and deterritorialization and reterritorialization (Tomlinson, 1999: 148-9). In the present paper, these diverse debates, unified by this binary relationship, constitute the backdrop for a discussion on mediatization and transnationalism; two processes which concern agents' disembedding as well as re-embedding processes. With point of departure in agency and the lived practices of everyday life, I argue, in accordance with many of the sources above, that identity is not about 'either – or'; a strong local identity, for example, does not prevent identification with mobility or global communities. Identification processes have no limits in this sense. In addition, identification processes are not only multiple, a central argument of this paper is that specific identities are elicited by and constructed through specific social practices and spatial contexts. In this regard, the media are vital since they bring about work of imagination (Appadurai, 1996; 4) and they create interplay between absence and presence (Silverstone, 1999: 151). Yet, they are not boundless.

As several media scholars have argued, the spatial aspects of media are brought to the fore by migration and transnational mobility (Karim, 2003; Aksoy & Robins, 2003, 2010; Robins & Aksoy, 2006; Georgiou, 2006, 2010; Tsagarousianou, 2007; Hepp, 2009; Moores & Metykova, 2010; Metykova, 2010). Space and mobility are the links between mediatization and transnationalism. The spatial aspects of media can be traced to Harold Innis (1951/1964) and his followers in the Toronto school (among them, Marshal McLuhan). Another trace, less technology-centric and more socio-culturally oriented, derives from Raymond Williams and his concept of "mobile privatization" (1974), which formed the basis for spatial interest among media scholars in the 1990s (Morley, 1991; Spigel, 1992; Moores, 1993; Silverstone, 1994; Scannell, 1996). Subsequently, these thoughts have evolved into what has been called a spatial turn within media studies (see Morrley, 2000, 2007; Couldry & McCarthy, 2004; Falkheimer & Jansson, 2006; Berry et al., 2010).

Correspondingly, mobility has been relatively sparsely addressed within the field of migration studies. Tim Cresswell (2010: 18) argues that the 'push' and 'pull' of places has traditionally been the implicit point of departure for migration theory, which entails a focus on places rather than mobility. This is the background of the emergence of a transnational perspective: a critique towards considering nations (or other geographical entities) as socio-spatial containers. With its stress on "sustained linkages and ongoing exchanges among non-state actors based across national borders" (Vertovec, 2009: 3), the perspective may, in certain respects, be seen as corresponding to the spatial turn within media studies.

Bringing the perspectives of mediatization and transnationalism together provides the basis for elaboration on the complex relationships between identity, place and mobility. My arguments are put forward through scrutinizing three diverse intersections between media and migration: (1) creativity and connection-making, (2) the boundaries of mediated 'freedom' and (3) transnational production of locality. These intersections are studied with a contextual, grounded and non-media-centric approach, which somewhat paradoxically creates better circumstances for understanding the meaning of the media. As David Morley puts it, "we need to 'decentre' the media, in our analytical framework, so as to better understand the ways in which media processes and everyday life are interwoven with each other" (2007: 200; see also Hepp, 2010). Such a perspective provides opportunities to illuminate spatial aspects of the media and their meaning for agents' creating of routes and roots (see Clifford, 1997).

The arguments of this paper are anchored in two different sets of field studies. The spring 2008 I regularly visited a Bosnian community centre in the city of Malmö in Sweden. Besides observing the activities at the centre and chatting to some of the visitors, I conducted twelve interviews with frequent visitors. In the autumn 2009, I spent some weeks in Amsterdam (the Netherlands) where 12 individual interviews with Swedish expatriates were carried out in different public settings. In both field studies, the interviews were set up as informal conversations circling around the interviewees' experience of mobility, media and identification, with a particular focus on different forms of transnational/border-crossing practices and media practices.

The empirical data is heterogenic in many ways; the difference between forced and voluntary migration cannot be overemphasized, especially not in relation to identity and social space. Nonetheless, these differences are not my main interest in this paper; instead, I focus the *similarities* provided by the residency outside one's country of origin, the experiences of mobility and deterritorialization, and of being the cultural 'Other' in some respect. I do this in order to grasp the meaning of media and mobility – without letting power out of sight completely. Moreover, in line with a transnational approach, I am not interested in ethnic differences, but how agents construct ethnic identities through everyday practices (Povrzanović Frykman, 2010).

After this introduction follows a theoretical account in which mediatization and transnationalism is discussed and merged into a framework. The succeeding sections are empirical accounts focusing the three mentioned intersections where 'agency', 'boundaries' and 'grounding' constitute some kind of keywords. The paper ends with a forward-looking discussion on non-media-centric media studies.

## Mediatization and Transnationalism

How can we understand culture and identity at present, if not through mobility, immediate and mediated intersections and juxtapositions of difference? How can we understand situated identities, if not through the practices that interconnect or interrupt human action in and across places? (Georgiou, 2010: 17).

In this quote, Myria Georgiou summarizes the interests of an emergent sub-field which can be called transnational media studies. The foci of the field are transnational connections and the mobility of people living – involuntarily or voluntarily, temporarily or indefinitely – outside their country of origin. The relevance of the field can be drawn from Arjun Appadurai, who argues that “electronic mediation and mass migration mark the world of the present *not as technically new forces* but as ones that seem to impel (and sometimes compel) the work of the imagination” (1996: 4, *emphasis added*). Hence, Appadurai tones down the importance of technology. The technological development within media and communication has, of course, been important to foreground space, but we should remember that social practices cannot be deduced from the technological virtues of the media (see Morley, 2007). This is to say that the scrutinizing ‘deconstruction’ of media technology, which is associated with (Canadian) medium theory, (German) media theory and studies of web 2.0, might be relevant when saying something about the medium but might be less relevant when it comes to general social, cultural and spatial transformations. To grasp the latter, we need an approach that recognizes the role of agency in the articulation of the symbolic and the material and does not make a sharp distinction between ‘virtual’ spaces and ‘real’ spaces and between the global and the local (Hepp, 2009; Crang et al., 2007; Christensen et al., 2011). This is an approach that considers the interplay between the socio-cultural and the technological: how technology is always socially and culturally embedded. In order to delineate the theoretical framework for such a socio-cultural and contextualizing perspective, I will in the following sections describe my take on mediatization and transnationalism.

### *Mediatization*

The concept of mediatization has a long history within social theory in general and media studies in particular (Habermas, 1987; Fornäs, 1995; Thompson, 1995). Recently, after some years in the periphery, the concept seems to be back on the agenda, although it now is articulated in a more explicit socio-cultural perspective (Jansson, 2002; Silverstone, 2005; Hjarvard, 2008; Krotz, 2007, 2008; Livingstone, 2009; Lundby, 2009; Hepp, 2010; Jansson and Andersson, in press). In connection with the comeback of the concept, Friedrich Krotz is one of the leading figures in this ‘second phase’ of the concept. He claims that mediatization is a meta-process on the same level of abstraction as, for example, globalization and individualization (2008). In line with most of the 1900s classical sociological theories, Krotz considers communication as the foundation of all human action, including the relationship between individuals, communities and societies. As such, communication is not unaffected by the historical development of the means of communication, which has meant a diversification of technologies, range of outputs, functions and uses. The intensified media development has changed not

the communication, but *the preconditions* for all communication. This process, as Krotz puts it, is “a man-made one” (2008: 23). Communication - and thereby the means of communication (i.e. media) – is crucial for individuals’ construction of selves and life-worlds as well as for the constitution of societies and their institutions (Krotz, 2007, 2008). In this way, as Hepp (2011) argues, the concept works on a dual level, partly as a panorama, offering an overview of societal institutions, partly as everyday concretization through the mediatized life-worlds. It is the latter level that is reachable for empirical research.

Thus, in the context of this paper, media engagement is studied as a connecting practice with potential of being deterritorializing as well as reterritorializing. Furthermore, the media are considered as an inextricable part of everyday life: a dimension of the social world rather than a distinct phenomenon. This in turn means that no specific media technology is highlighted. Instead, the stress is on the ways different media are intertwined in varied ways with agents’ other social practices, activities and interactions (see Silverstone, 1999, 2006; Livingstone, 2009; Hepp, 2010).

### *Transnationalism*

In recent years, scholars from different disciplines have been criticizing research on migration for reproducing a methodological nationalism and for using an “ethnic lens” which, according to Glick Schiller (2008: 3), may obscure “the diversity of migrants’ relationships to their place of settlement and to other localities around the world”. Instead, transnationalism has been advocated as an alternative; a concept that according to Basch et al. can be defined as “a process by which migrants, through their *daily life activities* and social, economic, and political relations, create social fields that cross national boundaries” (Basch et al., 1994: 22, *emphasis added*; see also Pries, 1999; Wimmer & Glick Schiller; 2002; Jackson et al., 2004; Ley, 2004; Povzanović Frykman, 2004; Glick Schiller, 2008; Vertovec, 2009). A transnational perspective affirms identification processes as multiple and heterogenic (Walsh, 2006: 270; Georgiou, 2010: 20). As transnational agents, migrants are continuously dealing with multi-stranded social relations and creating connections between different places (Watters, 2011). Agency and locality are further stressed by Katie Walsh, who claims that “[g]rounding research on transnationalism is about recognizing that it is locally lived and produced, with particular people ‘making their daily lives across worlds’ [Lamb, 2002: 323]” (Walsh, 2006: 270).

These two aspects of transnationalism – agency and local context – are particularly relevant bringing to the fore in this study. Firstly, the focus on transnational practices in everyday life implies that agency is more important than vague, homogenizing categories like ethnicity and nationality. Making agency a starting point becomes a way to steer away from methodological nationalism as well as methodological individualism (see Morley, 1997). All migrants, as Smith argues, are

socially and spatially *situated* subjects – i.e. as members of families; participants in religious or locality-based networks; occupants of classed, gendered and racialised bodies; located in particular nationalist projects, state formations and border crossings. It is from these historically specific social locations that people act back upon structural economic conditions and thus, in the oft-used phrase, make their own history (Smith, 2005: 236).

Yet, a focus on agency is not unproblematic; it requires a recognition of individuals' "multi-positionality" (ibid: 237), where different positions are connected to different contexts and practices.

Secondly, with an explicit point of departure in everyday life, transnationalism may flesh out the discourse on networks, flows and deterritorialization, a discourse which sometimes is criticized for its "fluffiness" and its technophilia (Bude & Dürschmidt, 2010; Cresswell, 2010). Transnational social networks are, of course, a significant aspect of transnational life, but it should not extinguish interest for other aspects of everyday life. For example, it is important to recognize the meaning of phenomena with immobile associations, such as borders, places and material things (Cresswell, 2010: 18). It brings us back to the dialectics of disembedding and re-embedding within identity construction: while paying attention to agents' engagement in disembedding communication technologies and transnational social networks – we should also, as Bude and Dürschmidt remind us, recognize the "socio-cultural thickness of territoriality" (2010: 488). According to them, there is an overemphasis on deterritorialization processes – what they call "flow speak" – which runs the risk turning into a (naïve) theory of limitlessness, in which space has lost its social meaning and co-presence is all there is (ibid: 483).

Yet, it is important to bear in mind that the 'thickness' of everyday territory is not essential; through practices of different kinds, agents may very well turn culturally 'thin' territories into thick ones. Routinized media practices are just but one example of such place-making practices (Andersson, 2006; Moores, 2006). In other words, mediascapes are a resource that agents can use for different purposes. The global connectivity is an offer, but media practices may also 'thicken' local territories, i.e. invest them with meaning. Such a perspective puts agency in the limelight and causes Bude & Dürschmidt to introduce the concept of "lived selectivity" (ibid: 484). This can be related to what Savage with colleagues (2005) call "elective belonging", a concept they develop in relation to people's socio-culturally reflexive attachment to place in a globalized era.

### **Creativity and connection-making**

Contemporary mediascapes are no longer *solely* discursive resources to get informed, keep updated and be amused. In addition, today's mediascapes represent a field for expression of creativity and innovations, where people to a great extent are their own media producers (Jenkins, 2006; Leadbeater, 2008; Merrin, 2009; Knobel & Lankshear, 2010). David Gauntlett claims that we are witnessing "a shift away from a 'sit back and be told' culture towards more 'making and doing' culture" (2011: 8), where television is emblematic for the former and web 2.0 for the latter. The signs of this paradigmatic shift, it is argued, can be seen in many contexts, ranging from on the one hand the global media industry where many of the new enterprises has a history where a playful (and nerdy) idea has turned in to a commercial service, to, on the other hand, agents' adjustments or modifications of already existing services or texts, with the purpose of making life more comfortable – or fun.

The transnational contexts in combination with the new mediascapes are a breeding ground for everyday creativity. The affordances of the new media seem to suit mobile people for whom

transnational, border-crossing communication is part of everyday life. In that respect Dana Diminescu (2008) argues that the earlier paradigmatic figure of “the uprooted migrant” has been replaced by a new figure: “the connected migrant”.

Focusing on creative agents in everyday life, there are several examples of ‘little DIY-tactics of the habitat’ in this study. Several of the interviewees take advantage of the malleability of the new media, and appropriate them to suit their present life circumstances. These practices represents a wide range, from rather trivial example such as creating your own music lists through downloaded material and turn your computer into a music machine, or connecting the computer to the television screen in order to facilitate the viewing of YouTube clips. There are other more advanced activities. Some of the expatriates have made a special set up on their computers in order to bypass the regulations of restricted access to *SVT\_Play* – the digital on demand service of the Swedish Public Service company – which require a Swedish IP-number for a great part of the programmes. Such knowledge, someone tells me, is spread through word of mouth in the otherwise weak community of compatriots.

The practices of one of the interviewees come very close to Gauntlett’s and others description of the new creative DIY-culture. Lars, originally from Stockholm, is in his late 30s and lives in the Netherlands since almost ten years. He has long professional experience within IT-industry, an experience he has recently turned into an enterprise of his own. His interest in computers and technology has affected the way he maintains his social network. While many migrants all over the world have appropriated Skype as a way communicating with families, distant friends and professional contacts (Wiles, 2008; Metykova, 2010), Lars, as a dedicated technology enthusiast, gets annoyed over the many flaws of the programme:

God, I really hate Skype! Do you know why – it’s simply not good. Let me tell you why. There is an old *open* protocol called SIP, free of charge, which many companies use for building whole infrastructures. And then there is Skype, which is a *closed*, delimited and controlled protocol. [...] In my home I have made my own set-up, a ‘box’ between my telephone and the computer which connects the calls to a ‘voice-over-internet box’ in Germany, which connects the call to for example Sweden – for free. If someone in Sweden wants to call me they just dial my Swedish telephone number, which via my German telephone provider, reach me in my home in Holland. [...] In this way it’s cheaper for me to call a Swedish cell phone than calling someone in the neighbourhood.

I think it is fair to say that the driving force behind this innovative “hack” is as much Lars’ interest in technology and problem solving, as it is his needs communicating with his social network. Lars expresses that he really enjoys technical challenges, in professional as well as private life. Hence, playfulness is part of the background to his creative telephone set-up. Lars is well aware of the DIY-culture and its ‘take’ on open source and innovations; he mentions for example how he has written an instructive log for how to implement a set-up like this at home, which has given him great response from other actors in the DIY-digital culture.



In the heated debate on media engagement, linked to “media studies 2.0”, arguments have been raised that the new media environment has changed not only the mediascapes, but also the basis for the relationship between media and agency. ‘Old’ theories of media and mediation have become more or less obsolete (Merrin, 2009; Gauntlett, 2011). It goes along the implicit assumption that the new media are malleable and therefore associated with creative agency, while old media are static and therefore associated with inactivity. Without denying that the technology has increased the opportunities for people to shape the technology, it is important to not deduce the scope of agency from technology. Creative transnational connecting practices are not reserved for neither a creative middle class of the western world, nor the new media.

There are other forms of creativity in the sphere of connectedness - evoked by completely different social circumstances. One such example, beyond the new media and the creativity of the wealth in the West, is the activities of ham radio operators in besieged areas, which some of the Bosnian migrants have experience of. Dajana is one of them. She is born in a town close to what now is the Serbian border, but she has lived in Sweden in more than 15 years. At the outbreak of the war back in 1992, she lived in Sarajevo, due to university studies. In the besieged Sarajevo there was no telephone or electricity, which prevented her from getting in touch with her family in her hometown. Desperate to find out what had happened to their families and friends she and her friends turned to the ham radio:

One night we were listening to the ham radio with... it’s difficult to explain, but when you don’t have electricity, you can use a bike [to generate electricity] and then you can listen. And I heard my parents, they were in Sweden and they were searching for me! Then I had to find a radio amateur to get in contact with them, which I finally did, and I found out that my mom was in a terrible state, not knowing anything about me in the besieged Sarajevo.

Ham radio operators played a key role in Bosnia during the war. As mediators, in the true sense of the word, they passed messages between the inside and the outside of besieged areas, which contributed to many reunions of families and friends. Situations of scarcity and human suffering may lead to innovative practices. This excerpt stresses the importance of agency in these issues and, above all, that creative uses of technology must be contextualized since it is expressed very differently in different contexts. The two examples – the creative use of a bicycle driven radio receiver and the appropriation of an old computer protocol – show that there are many impetuses behind agents’ creativity when it comes to pushing the limits of the affordances of the media. These are revealed with an approach focusing contexts rather than technology.

### **Media technology and spatial emancipation**

The routes of the migrants in this study have provided large transnational networks, which are constituted of old and new friends and acquaintances. These diffused social networks are maintained through e-mail, msn, telephone, Facebook (or other social network services) and occasional meetings. Interesting to note is that these networks are not, as is often assumed, bi-national, i.e. constituted of people from one’s country of origin and the host country one resides in. These networks are rather

multinational, with friends, family and acquaintances spread all over the world. Quite typical is that expatriates, who are often just temporarily residing outside their country of origin, have made international friends along their route, while the forced migrants have seen how family members, old friends and neighbours were scattered around the Western world.<sup>3</sup> In general, these spread-out networks mean that the interviewees have great knowledge about life circumstances in different places. The Internet has meant a lot to keep the contacts, since international phone calls are, or at least used to be, relatively expensive.

Edna is one example of someone who has formed bonds to several places. She grew up in Berlin, but moved to Sarajevo to enter the university when she was 17 years old. During the war, 1992-95, she worked for a German media company and 1995 she and her husband (who partly grew up as a “Yugoslavian” migrant in a Swedish city) moved to Sweden. Hence, Malmö, Berlin and Sarajevo are central nodes in her life-world; she is familiar with these cities and they mean something special to her. While residing in Malmö she regularly travels to both Berlin and Sarajevo, and she watches Bosnian, German and Swedish television almost on a near-daily basis. She listens to Bosnian music at home, and has daily contact with her family through e-mail and phone calls. Thus, her life-world nodes are sustained.

Stina’s biography is different. She is of similar age as Edna and currently lives in The Hague. Previously, she has resided in different places in Sweden, Germany and USA. She enjoys the vagabond lifestyle and she, as she puts it, actively avoid taken-for-grantedness. Asked about what she appreciates about the expatriate lifestyle, she stresses that she is not expected to blend in, which she likes. In a way, she is floating rather than being immersed. Her geographic journey has provided her with a large social network, which she maintains and develops mainly through so-called social media.

Stina and Edna have several things in common: they are both well-educated and having jobs that they enjoy. Further, they have both travelled extensively and share a cosmopolitan outlook, which provides them with broad horizons and confidence to express their opinions. In that sense they possess what Jansson (2011) calls cosmopolitan capital, which in their case is invested in several cultural settings, meaning that social life and current affairs from different national contexts make sense to them. In a way, they juggle several maps of meaning in their everyday lives (see Hall, 1990; Hannerz, 1996).

But there are differences in their life experiences and circumstances. Edna has a traumatic past, and has been forced to migrate. She describes the struggle in Sweden to learn the language, the culture and how to deal with authorities. In spite of extended university studies and professional experience (within broadcasting), her first years in Sweden was marked by unemployment; she then got a job as a cleaner. Today, she works at the information department of a large company. At the moment, with small children at home, she prioritizes family life, making her parental identity to a paramount one. It means that her normal global horizons are temporarily diminished. Although she still follows current affairs in

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<sup>3</sup> This is illustrated by the fact that all Bosnian interviewees have relatives living in another country than Bosnia and Sweden.

Berlin, Sarajevo and Malmö, she does not engage in them as much as she used to. Furthermore, due to her experience of war and war journalism, she limits the range of media output for her and the family:

I watch the Swedish news on the telly regularly, but there are a lot of other programmes I don't want to watch, or rather – I don't have the strength to watch them. It's a lot of arms and conflicts in many films and series, and I still have many bad memories: relatives who I still don't know if they are alive or not... Then I prefer comedies or something light.

This illustrates how television is involved in the regulation of horizons; through selection of programmes, one can shrink the world and keep bad memories at bay (cf. Andersson, 2008). Hence, watching television is not always a deterritorializing practice, it depends on the context. In Edna's case it is a question of lived experience and being a parent of small children. It could be argued that this is a consequence of mass media with their rigid form of communication leaving no scope for flexibility for the audience. At first sight, such an argument would further be enhanced by Stina's account of her use of Facebook:

When you have lived in and worked at many different places, as I have done, and have lost laptops and filofaxes, you can't keep track of people's e-mail addresses and phone numbers. That's one good thing about Facebook: you don't have to wonder if you have your friends' latest e-mail addresses, which country they live in today and where they work nowadays. You see, these are persons who move to different countries every second year, and keeping up to date with e-mail addresses and phone numbers is really hard work. [...] Facebook is super; it supports the way my friends and I lead our lives.

In this way Stina uses social media to further enhance her deterritorialized lifestyle in which everything seems to be fluid. As a consequence her social relations are to a large extent mediatized (see Wittel, 2008).

However, social contextualization is important with regards to deterritorialization in relation to old and new media. First and foremost, technologies create neither sociality nor transnationalism. Communication technologies may certainly create the preconditions for transnational practices, but these have to be negotiated and aligned into the settings of everyday life; this is true for Facebook, as in Stina's case, as well as violent TV-films, as in Edna's case. To fully comprehend media technologies and their consequences, we have to understand the users and their socio-cultural biographies (Miller, 2011: 216-17). This is further illustrated by the interview with Mila, a woman in her 40s who was born in the Bosnian countryside, but has lived in Malmö for the past 15 years. Mila has recently become unemployed after a long sick leave due to a bad shoulder acquired in her earlier employment as a cleaner. During the past year, her teenage daughter has taught her to use the computer, which Mila both enjoys and consider as a valuable skill when searching for jobs. Now she writes her own mail and she has also found a Bosnian social forum:

The other day I was sitting behind the computer. I popped in to this Bosnian forum and I wrote a greeting to my friends down there [in Bosnia]. Suddenly, I was addressed by a Serbian woman: 'Hello, do you remember me?' It turned out that we had worked together in the early 1990s, and now she wanted us to become friends again – just like nothing had happened! I was very upset and logged out immediately. I was thinking 'where were you when I needed help?' My husband and I were sacked in 1992, and we managed to live without money until 1994. My former colleagues, among them this Serbian woman, didn't lift a finger to help! She was also one of the people who threw out my parents out of their apartment. 'Out' she told them without even looking at me...

The associations between digital media and freedom or unlimited reach are not self-evident. The link is conditional and depends on sociocultural resources, competences and experiences from earlier life stages. Experiences of war reduce the mobility in transnational mediascapes in different ways: television images may elicit tragic memories and social media may lead to unwanted encounters. Hence, virtual worlds do not necessarily represent sovereign social worlds of emancipation since social friction is often reproduced. This finding supports the argument that the distinction between 'the real' and 'the virtual' is often overplayed. The two realms mutually influence each other: "each feeds into the other in a subtle, complex, and continuous interplay" (Crang et al, 2007: 2408; see also Berg, 2011). This complex interconnection between symbolic, social and material aspects is the theme of next section.

### **Reterritorialization and the transnational production of locality**

As a third conjunction between media and transnational mobility, I want to highlight the local territorial context and the intersections of online and offline territories, which in many cases coincide with the ascribed binary between the local and the global (Crang et al., 2007: 2406). I want to do this by moving from the well-researched areas of media and deterritorialization to the less studied field of media and reterritorialization and stress the importance of the media in processes – and practices – of socio-cultural thickening (cf. Bude & Dürschmidt, 2010). As the anthropologist Martijn Oosterbaan puts it, "By studying both offline and online worlds of migrants we gain insight in the ways in which actors contest and produce locality amidst and through the cultural flows" (2010: 98).

Recently, this idea has been picked up by media scholars, very often as a response to, and critique towards, spatially uncontextualized theories of (new) media – theories in which space is annihilated (McLuhan, 1964; Meyrowitz, 1985; Castells 1996; Virilio, 2000; Manovich, 2001; Diminesco, 2008). As Christensen with colleagues put it: "territories – understood as socially produced spaces with certain rules for inclusion and exclusion – do not vanish or become less significant through the expansion of networked media and increasingly ephemeral flows of capital and information" (2011: 1). As a consequence there is a retrieved interest in the territorial local context and processes of reterritorialization. That is, how media and communication practices mark – as well as are marked by – the territories of daily life. Andreas Hepp justifies such a focus with: "[i]t is at the localities of the everyday world that [translocal] communicative space becomes concrete" (2009: 329). Furthermore, these aspects of spatial contextualization have been illuminated by studies emphasizing how media

practices are truly *glocal* (Robertson, 1995): global *and* local in character *and* consequences (Morley, 2000; Tsagarousianou 2001, 2007; Moores, 2008; Andersson, 2006, 2008; Georgiou, 2010; Christensen, 2011; Jansson, 2009, 2011). A common denominator among these studies is a geographical perspective that conceives place and space as processes and as constituted of social interrelations (Massey, 1991, 2005). Such a perspective acknowledges that media are not only used (consumed and produced) within everyday territories but also plays a vital role in the constitution of the territories, be it the home, or the city one resides in (Jansson & Falkheimer, 2006; Tsagarousianou 2001: 159; Hepp, 2010: 331).

To further elaborate these processes of reterritorialization I will use the accounts of two interviewees with different backgrounds, both of whom, nevertheless, share several experiences and skills. Both of them have 'street wisdom'; they are very familiar with the city they reside in. In addition, they have considerable knowledge about contemporary mediascapes, providing them with a conscious, but still relaxed, attitude to the opportunities the media provide.

Mirna is a student in her early 20s, and she lives in a flat in Malmö together with her parents and brother. She was born in Bosnia, in a village close to the Croatian border. Although she was only four years old when the family took refuge in Sweden, she has clear memories from the tough journey. Today, the family is settled in a culturally diverse neighbourhood near central Malmö; more than 60% of its inhabitants have roots outside Sweden. It is a neighbourhood Mirna likes a lot and feels 'at home' in. Her circle of friends consists mostly of former schoolmates from upper secondary school who live in the same neighbourhood. Her closest friends have roots in Macedonia, Serbia and Bosnia, and there are many other nationalities in the wider circle of friends. All these aspects contribute to Mirna's wide social experience of globalization. She thinks Malmö is a fantastic place to live, especially considering its cultural diversity:

My sister is married and lives in XX [a town in the middle of Sweden]. She says that it's very different to Malmö – much more problematic if you have a foreign name. I don't think I ever could live in a place like that. I mean, in Malmö there are no such problems... There are many Muhammeds here, the most common name in the world, and no one finds it strange. Of course I've heard people say that migrants ruin everything and things like that, but I feel that it's we who make Malmö what it is, which is kind of cool.

A similar attitude towards cultural diversity is expressed by Harriet in Amsterdam. She is around 30 years old and was born in the countryside in the southern Sweden, but she has resided in Amsterdam for the past six years, where she works as a freelancer within the media industry. She lives in a flat in central Amsterdam in a neighbourhood she describes as socially and ethnically mixed, "but with a slightly middle class touch." She leads an outgoing social life with friends from large part of the world. That is one of things she appreciates about Amsterdam: "I like to have friends from 10 different countries, which I have here, and which is less probable in Sweden. [...] Everything is better mixed here, I think, although the racism is kind of bubbling here as well."

Mirna's and Harriet's accounts attest to the explicit and implicit presence of media in all aspects of daily life. This is particularly salient when they each talk about everyday spaces and their social lives. For example, when Mirna talks about her home, she mentions how her parents listening to Bosnian web radio every day; how she and her brother often connect the computer to the television screen and watch films together in the living room; how she likes to fall asleep watching an episode of the American TV-series *Friends* on her laptop in her bed, and how she usually does her homework in her room, with occasional breaks for reading her friends' blogs and uploading her own pictures on a social network site. She also describes how she very easily gets stuck in front of the computer watching clips on YouTube and suddenly realizes that it is in middle of the night. Harriet expresses similar points about her home, which in her case is associated with, among other things, watching television, especially Dutch and international news programmes, reading two Dutch newspapers and checking Facebook when she takes a break from work.

When Mirna and Harriet talk about their social relations, they do not always distinguish between chats in cafés, mail correspondence and messages on Facebook. Their sociality is spread, maintained and intertwined through several communication discourses. It can be argued that this pattern challenges an implicit, but common (rationality-based) assumption that local networks are based on interpersonal communication, while mediated communication is used for 'non-local' (for example transnational and global) purposes. Instead, the 'local sociality' in this study is a fabric of mediated and non-mediated communication. Furthermore, the mediated local communication involves a potential to empower and strengthen social relationships since the electronic mediated communication provides the possibility of attaching reference material that, may very well contribute to mutual understanding:

[My friends and I] send music to each other, but it's hopeless to send moving images. Maybe you try, and 'If it crashes you have to download yourself'. But we send each other a lot of tips and links to YouTube or sites where you can download stuff. (Mirna)

My British friend, who is journalist, and I e-mail each other a lot. He might send me an e-mail saying, 'Have you seen this news item in *the Guardian*?' or something like that. Usually it's funny stuff about Sweden or... I read it and you could say that we sort of share the news or share experiences. [...] It's fun because he is sort of saying, 'This is how we in Britain see Sweden' (laughter). (Harriet)

These communication practices are an inseparable dimension of the city. It is in the streets, parks and cafés of Amsterdam and Malmö Mirna and Harriet hang out with their friends. It is in these localities the discussions about music, film and the media take place. These are the social relations Mirna and Harriet think of when they express their affection for Malmö and Amsterdam respectively. This sociality makes them feel *at home*, where home is understood in a material, symbolic and imagined sense (see Silverstone, 1994; Morley, 2000; Georgiou, 2006). Hereby, 'the home' is linked to questions of identity and identification (see Georgiou, 2010: 26) – as the spatial aspects of identity. However, in this respect it is important to acknowledge the multiple character of identity, evoked, not least, by the transnational context. As Stuart Hall puts it:

The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent 'self'. Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously shifting about. If we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or narrative of the self about ourselves (Hall, 1992: 277).

The implication of Hall's statement is that different identities are related to different time-space contexts. 'The home' as support for 'feelings of belonging', is in other words not a singular place. This can be related to people's meaning investments in everyday spaces, in which certain spaces are connected to certain imaginations, identifications and practices. This in turn means that in their everyday life people pass through – voluntary and involuntary – many different situations and contexts, with the implication that their identifications are constantly shifting.

Applying this perspective of identity and identification on Mirna and Harriet reveals an ambivalent, or rather manifold, relation to identity. As described earlier they do identify with the cities they dwell in respectively. In addition, both of them bring national identity to the fore in the interview. This does not necessarily mean that national identification is important: in transnational lives/contexts it seems as if nationalities are always close at hand, evoked by social life, media representations and, not to mention, the interview situation per se. For example, they both described how in social settings they are often asked questions about Bosnia and Sweden respectively, but seldom their place of origin. Mirna and Harriet are both ambivalent to national identities, shifting between different positions:

I'm not Swedish, I was born in Bosnia – I have my roots there, and I'm proud of it. But at the same time, I'm a Swedish citizen and used to the way of life here. I have many Swedish friends and I get along very well with them. I do not feel discriminated or feel as an outsider because I'm from another country. But at the same time, I *am* from another country; it can't be overlooked. While in Bosnia I feel ... it is back and forth, of course... at the same time as I feel 'Oh, I'm home', the people there [in Bosnia] can say things like 'Oh, look at them, they're from Sweden'... It's almost like you're not Bosnian anymore. (Mirna)

The reason I like [Amsterdam] is the international atmosphere. In that sense Sweden is a bit isolated from the rest of the world. [...] I've noticed that when you move abroad it's like you go through different stages. In the beginning everything is fantastic: 'This country is wonderful!' sort of, and different things keep you busy all the time. Then you reach a second stage when everything sucks and your home country seems ten times better in all respects. Right now, I have reached a stage where I see pros and cons with residing in both countries, but the advantages for staying here still outweighs [the disadvantages]. Yet, discussing these questions in Sweden is impossible because the frames of reference end at the Swedish borders – end of discussion! When I for example say 'In Belgium it's like that...' or 'Many in Paris think that...' and so on, they're just sitting there [saying nothing]. (Harriet)

Individuals are constantly negotiating identities, surrounded as they are by cultural flows and social and mediated representations which are offering identifications, frameworks and scripts – at the same time as their everyday life is unfolded in the local, material settings. The above quotations underscore that identity is never singular: place and mobility; here and there; the present and the absent, are not contradictory in the construction of identities (see Easthope, Butcher, 2009, 2010; Watters; Gustafson, 2009; Wiles, 2008).

However, noting that identities are multiplied raises another question: what brings these identifications to the fore, or, put differently, how do agents create ethnical identities (Povrzanović Frykman, 2010)? In line with the overall argument in this paper, my suggestion is to look at the context of everyday life since, as Katie Walsh puts it, “identifications are materialized in particular spaces, objects, relationships and bodies” (2006: 276). Considering Mirna and Harriet and their national identification in this regard, different practices and contexts are involved. Mirna, for example, describes how her feelings of being a Bosnian is connected with particular spaces and practices, for example arriving to Bosnia (which she has not done very often), practicing folk dance in the community centre, watching football on television or listening to music: “When I hear a [Bosnian] song, which can’t be translated, I think, ‘Thanks God I’m Bosnian and understand this!’”. Mirna also describes how when it comes to moral issues she may vacillate between different standards, which according to her derives from the clash between her Bosnian upbringing and her present social life in Malmö. This involves, for example, questions about relations to boys and respect for other people.

The situation is different for Harriet: the visits to Sweden are not what evoke her ‘Swedishness’. They have rather the opposite effect, justifying, in retrospect, the decision she once made to move abroad. Instead, it is the social climate of Amsterdam that sometimes contributes to her re-construction of her Swedish roots:

I sometimes miss the core values of Sweden [...] I’m moulded by the Swedish way of life; I stand for many of its values. All of that is me: what Sweden represents, certain behaviours – the shyness and politeness, being cautious, being secure, as opposed to the Dutch manner, which is very loud and frank, almost blunt [...]. You have to be quite cocky to live here.

When asked what she means by the “the Swedish values”, she talks about the welfare society and general view on politics, emancipation and equality, which she sympathizes with.

These examples, in which national identification is evoked by – or created of and through – very different practices and contexts, underscore the construction process behind identification. This is particularly salient among transnational migrants, since their lives are constituted of “multi-stranded social relations”, which in different ways link the diverse places of their biographies (Watters, 2009). It illuminates the multi-contextuality of transnational lives in mediatized societies. This multiplicity, as



Watters argues, “enables migrants to construct and perform ‘patchwork’ identities that express a variety of ways of living, and not only those practices involved in moving across borders” (2009)<sup>4</sup>.

### **Discussion**

This paper describes how diverse transnational identifications are linked to particular contexts, spaces and practices, which transcend categorizations of ‘the real’ and ‘the virtual’ and offline and online territories. The analysis is not comprehensive, but outlines a feasible direction for research in the field of transnational media studies.

Summing up the arguments concerning the intersection between media and migration, I want to stress the importance of contextualization. A contextual approach reveals and illuminates several things: the intricate interplay between media affordances and the scope of agency; the interlinking between ‘old’ and ‘new’ media and the integration of symbolic and the material realms in the social world; and the mediated sociality of the local, which in turn is a component of the construction of the local. In addition, contextualization is a way of illuminating the mediatization of life-worlds: how mediation processes and media practices are integrated and ubiquitous in everyday life, in the city and in transnational spaces. And lastly, contextualization enables the comprehension of migrants’ “multi-positionality” (Smith, 2005) and “patchwork identities” (Watters, 2011).

The stress on contextualization within media studies concurs in part with David Morley’s plea “for a materialist and non-media-centric media studies” (2007: ch. 7, 2009, 2011). It could be argued that focusing on media’s fitting into the contexts of different everyday lives and on media’s relationships to other (network) structures – instead of scrutinizing media per se – becomes more important the longer the mediatization process proceeds. The reason for this is that the interrelation between mediated and ‘non-mediated’ practices will become more and more complex, at the same time as it will become increasingly taken for granted by agents. These tendencies are already demonstrated by the transnational migrants in this study. Consequently, one of the questions for the future is what the mediatization process means in terms of social and cultural stratifications. Of particular importance is that this question is addressed within a transnational perspective, that is, beyond methodological nationalism.

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<sup>4</sup> John Watters’ article, from an online journal, lacks pagination.

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