

# Women in diasporic communities tell their stories. A generational perspective.

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## Introduction

This paper has its focus on women and their lived experiences of migration. Special attention is devoted to whether the media may be used as a means of empowerment and its significance for social, cultural and religious purposes and participation. Also, implications for exercising citizenship practices, both in the homeland and in the “new” country are highlighted. The paper is based on an in-depth study with migrant families living in Sweden, implying interviews and observations in home-settings. A narrative perspective is taken in the analysis of two women’s perception and interpretation of daily life and especially their talks about internet practices. Furthermore, their media practices are analyzed from a generational perspective, by comparing two cases; one young woman (teenager) and one mother with three children concerning issues related to recognition and civic culture. We will by using this strategy make a contribution to intersectional research and the issue of generation as a subcategory of gender.

## The cultural and local national context of the study

Initially, we will make a brief introduction of migration policy and debate from a Swedish perspective, as migration looks very different even from such a small corner of the world as the Nordic countries (see Eide and Nikunen in press for an up-date). The foreign-born population of Sweden totals just over 1 million (11 percent). These persons are from a vast range of sending countries, at first as labour immigrants from Finland and Southern Europe (1949-71). Next, there were refugees and family reunification from Third World countries (e.g. Chile) (1972-89). The most recent immigrants (from 1989) are asylum-seekers from South Eastern Europe (e.g. former Yugoslavia) and the Middle East (Syrian Christians, Kurds, Palestinians) as well as free movement of professionals within the European Community. The war between Iraq and Iran led to a substantial migration of young people in opposition to the Iranian regime. Although asylum seekers were usually young men, family and children entered into the picture through the family reunification processes that would be initiated once an asylum seeker received his/her residence permit. The increasing number of asylum seekers from these regions, and family members who were entitled to reunite in Sweden once one member had received a permanent residence permit, was a source of constant concern to the government. It grew difficult to find accommodation to house the refugees, and the government worried about

the increasing costs of the resettlement programmes. Another concern was indications of growing xenophobic and racist reactions among the general public in the mid-1980s. A drastic measure was taken in 1989 to reduce the intake of refugees by no longer accepting general humanitarian grounds for entitlement to settle. Only refugees in the traditional sense of the Geneva convention would be accepted. One consequence of this change of entrance policy is that accepted refugees and their families more often than before during the 1970s and 1980s suffer from traumatic experiences of war, ethnic cleansing and torture. This measure reduced the flow of non-European migrants temporarily. However, the breakdown of Yugoslavia and the wars that followed displaced hundreds of thousands of persons. Due to the networks that had established earlier between Yugoslavia and Sweden, Sweden became one of the destinations for those who managed to leave the country. By the late 1990s the bulk of the refugee intake had shifted to Iraq (Westin, 2002). As for the Swedish official policy of migration it is aimed towards integration (Westin, 2003) and the melting pot ideology has fade-out (Elias, 2008). In other words, in official policy the idea of assimilation is rejected. Instead the word “integration” is used, as it is assumed to represent an open society, where immigrants and minority groups are regarded as partners in developing their new homeland together with the majority group.

It is within this context, the project *Media practices in the New Homeland*, from which the present paper is based, had its starting point. Furthermore, fieldwork with migrant families was carried out in 2004 and 2005, thus in the wake of 11<sup>th</sup> September and the supposed involvement of the Al Qaida movement and the subsequent war in Iraq. These events put focus on religion and have led to increased tensions between the Muslim world and the Western Christian world.

In the following we will initially present the theoretical foundations of our project, by explaining some central concepts and how they are used in the research literature on media and migration so far. Crucial concepts are *citizenship* and *civic culture* as well as *recognition*. These concepts constitute parts of the overall framework for the project. In this particular paper we will add the concept of *generation*, as a sub category to gender, because we will focus on how stages in life are related to identity formations in the process of migration and “getting access” to a new culture. The paper’s empirical part is based on a close-up study of interviews with two women; one teenager and a mother of three children.

The concept of citizenship is traditionally, e.g. within jurisprudence and political science, tied to the issue of national identity. From an overall societal perspective, citizenship and civic participation are mostly discussed in relation to issues of integration and the functionality of the Swedish democratic system, such as voting in the parliamentary elections. However, in the last parliamentary election (2006), a significant portion of citizens with an immigrant background did not vote, which some would consider a threat to our democratic society (Statistics Sweden, 2007). This is assumed to be problematic, as residents with an immigrant background comprise 11% of the overall population, and the segment of youngsters within the immigrant community constitutes 25% of all youngsters under 18 in Sweden (Westin, 2002). Most agree that such a lack of participation in the democratic process is related to

marginalization, ethnic discrimination in the job market and Swedish immigration politics (cf. Dahlstedt, 1999, 2002). Furthermore, there is a significant risk that adults' marginalization will be passed on to and influence their children.

## **Recognition and gender**

Following the famous work of Charles Taylor (1994/2003) on the politics of recognition, we claim that identity formation and citizenship are tied to whether a group or person is recognized or not in a society. One can never be a full-fledged citizen unless one has also achieved recognition. Exclusion and discrimination are effects of non-recognition. Taylor stresses that non-recognition can cause harm resulting in a kind of oppression and consequently lead to a false and restricted life situation. Some feminists, claims Taylor, advocate that women in patriarchal societies have been forced to adopt a negative image of them selves. They have internalized a picture of themselves as inferior persons. So even if some of the objective obstacles for development disappear, they might still be incapable to take advantage of potential opportunities.

Nancy Fraser (2003) has continued in the footprints of Taylor and the idea of the politics of recognition. She introduced the "identity model", which has its origin in Hegel's philosophy and the idea that identity is constructed in dialogue through a process of mutual recognition. According to Hegel, recognition is an ideal mutual relation between two subjects and mutual respect to each other. This relation is constitutive to the subjectivity: one can only be a subject through recognizing another person and also at the same time be recognized by the same person. In brief, the outlined identity model is a prerequisite for being a participant in a society and for civic culture.

Citizenship in the true sense of the word is based on the politics of recognition. By now introducing the idea of civic culture, we open up for a broader view on what citizenship can mean, a view that is based in people's everyday lives and their encounters with their near surroundings.

## **The idea of civic culture**

In this project everyday life and the private sphere set the point of departure for understanding people's media use (see Silverstone, 1994) and their interaction with the surrounding society. "The world of everyday life is not only taken for granted as reality by ordinary members of society in the subjectively meaningful conduct of their lives. It is rather a world that originates in 'thoughts and actions, and is maintained as real by these'" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 33). Thus, everyday life is the dominant site for making sense of the world and of ourselves. The taken for granted, the intersubjective (shared with others) and the ordered (both spatially and temporally) are features of everyday life, originates in people's language, thoughts, and actions. Everyday behaviour and thoughts create routines and rituals, thereby providing us with what Giddens (1991: 44) would call ontological security.

According to contemporary sociological and cultural research on citizenship we should not only focus on public arenas of politics when examining citizenship but also to people's mundane everyday activities like thoughts, talks, activities, which in turn have implications on the macro politics. It is about connecting intimate and domestic spaces with the public, the home with society, the local with the national. It is also about asking the question 'What are the practices that link private action to the public sphere, beyond the obvious act of walking down to the polling station to cast a vote?' (Couldry 2006: 324). And here the media and internet in particular, are looked at in detail and their role of acting as mediators for creating and maintaining the agendas of social life and politics of the society at hand. This paper is thus a contribution that is linked to the debate on a 'cultural turn' of civic agency in the public sphere (Dahlgren 2006); focusing on the blurring of borders '[...] between the public sphere of political life and the material world of the household' (Fenton 2007: 180). The latter, i.e. the private space, [...] relates in significant ways to both physical and symbolic forms of interiority: the interior space of the self (i.e., human psychical and emotional life) and the interior space of the home (Fenton 2007: 181).

Dahlgren (2000: 321) has emphasized the importance of general knowledge of culture and citizenship for participation such as understanding of different discourses in the public sphere as well as the ability to express ideas and thoughts. Also the term representation as used by Stuart Hall is of relevance. According to Hall (1997) representation involves the production of meanings that take place through languages, discourses and images. Representation is in other words connecting meaning and language with culture; how to use the language and other symbols in order to express something meaningful – a process that is far from simple and without problems. Hall (1997) talks about how the process of meaning-making depends on what system of concepts we have, which in turn makes it possible for us to understand the world. Two persons, whose mental maps differ will in other words perceive the world in different ways and might also run into difficulties in communicating with each other. Furthermore, the classical work of Bourdieu (1991) on language makes us attentive to the relations between language, power and politics. Thus, various linguistic practices are always linked to power (i.e. resources and competences) and to a person's position in society (in terms of e.g. economical and cultural capital).

In the attempt to gain more knowledge about media's role in the so called 'cultural turn' of civic agency as described above, Peter Dahlgren's (2003) so called civic culture analytical framework will serve as our main theoretical point of departure. It is a model that specifically examines the relations between political involvement and people's media use:

[...] takes as its starting point the notion of citizens as social agents, and it asks what are the *cultural* factors that can impinge on the actions and communication of people in their roles as (multifarious) citizens. Civic culture [...] is anchored in the practices and symbolic milieu of everyday life [...]. One of the assumptions there is that for a functioning democracy, there are certain conditions that reside at the level of lived experiences, resources and subjective dispositions that need to be met (Dahlgren 2003: 152).

With the idea of civic culture Dahlgren describes the process of becoming a citizen, i.e. how ‘[...] people develop into citizens, how they come to see themselves as members and potential participants in societal development’ (2003: 153). This process of becoming is examined firstly through six interrelated dimensions: values, affinity, knowledge, practices, identities and discussion:

The media as institutions that shape so much of our symbolic environment, that provide resources for information, and for interactive communication, become salient – in different ways – at each of the six dimensions (Dahlgren 2003: 160).

*Values* is the first dimension in the model; if any democratic society is to survive it must be anchored in democratic values in the daily life of ordinary people such as equality, liberty, justice, solidarity. We can here add the idea of recognition as a central part of this value system. One may here look at how media represents these democratic values and the perception of them by viewers, readers etc. As for *affinity*, Dahlgren (2003) stresses the need to develop a minimal sense of belonging to the same social and political entities. Trust becomes a key word in relation to other people and authorities. To be able to communicate and to gain *knowledge* and understand current affairs in society is fundamental for any democracy and Dahlgren here talks about the need for linguistic and cultural proximity. *Practices* and *identities* are two additional dimensions in this framework of civic culture. While the former involves different practices (to give a traditional example - attending meetings) that recur over time, giving additional personal and social value for the democratic ideals, the latter stresses the affinity between citizenship and identity. Lately, digital and social media gained in interest when it comes to practices and how these are becoming part of people’s political practices. Concerning the dimension identities, Dahlgren alludes to the subjective aspects of citizenship, thus being part of a person’s identity and daily life i.e. that in order to act like a citizen we must also feel like one. A statement which urges us to look at the multidimensional nature of citizenship (e.g. political, civil, social, economic, diasporic, cultural, sexual and ecological) rather than as a homogenous concept (Isin and Wood, 1999). The final dimension in Dahlgren’s analytical framework of civic culture is *discussion*, which is seen as a type of meta-category for the other dimensions. Without any discussions or ordinary daily civic talks the abovementioned dimensions are not to be realized. Thus, formal political discussions should not be examined in isolation but rather in the contexts of formal and informal talks and how these are interrelated and affected by each other. While the suggested model may not cover all the complex web that builds up a so called civic culture, we find Peter Dahlgren’s idea useful as a working tool.

In this particular context, we will also add the categories of *gender* and of *generation* in order to understand how stage of life/age is related to citizenship and civic culture.

### A gendered and generational perspective

In line with Sreberny (2005:246) we argue “that a gender lens is crucial to the articulation of a more holistic analysis of global issues that includes the democratization of communication, the communication of democracy, and the emancipation of the world’s women”. This will in this paper be done by a close-up analysis of interviews with two

women with origins in the Middle East and how they use the media, especially internet as means for citizenship and recognition. Sreberny (from 1998 quoted in 2005) claimed that: “ Women have long recognized and utilized the power of new technologies, including the Internet, e-mail, and fax, together with older media such as print, “snail mail” and the telephone to build networks of solidarity around events and issues, potentially connecting grassroots women’s organizations to centers of decision making and facilitating the participation of ordinary people not only in local and national civic politics but also in global issues as members of transnational social movements.” This was also confirmed in our project, as almost all women participating in the study frequently used various media for keeping in touch with family and friends as well as for information seeking, regardless of ethnic origin. Due to very rapid development of broadband in residential suburban areas, most people have Internet access, regardless of socio-economic conditions.

The reason for choosing these two women was that our study indicated that women with Muslim background from the Middle East articulated more worries about discrimination and exclusion than other informants in the project. Practically all of them reported on being exposed to such processes. It was apparent that these women had to struggle for recognition as Taylor (1994/2003 and Fraser (2003) described this process. Sreberny (2005) somewhat later said that “is essentially about mutuality – a dialectic through which one is recognized and knows that the other recognizes one. We hear each other, exist together, coexist”.By a close-up analysis of people who have gained formal rights, such as a legal citizenship, the process of recognition still seems to be vivid.

As pointed out, the women in the present analysis are in different stages of life. The concept of generation is in this context used to better understand families in the process of transition, where parents and children are in different stages of life. We start from the position that the definition of a ‘child’ and ‘adult’ is socially constructed (Alanen 2001). Thus, these concepts have different meanings in different cultures. This may create generational tensions in family life when you are facing a new culture. The concept of generation also has a temporal dimension, which stretches from tradition over to modernity and thus is a matter of cultural change. Children and adults may cope with the process of cultural change differently, which may lead to family disputes and conflicts. We can, for example, expect that the children’s gaze is more directed to the future and that they are more integrated in the Swedish society than their parents or at least are striving towards integration. The question is: What is the role of the media in this coping process.

The story of Jasmine (and her sisters) is illustrating young women’s aspirations and thoughts about their future. The story of Samar is more complex, because it also includes her struggle for building her own family in the new country. By making this choice of comparison, we will demonstrate that one should avoid generalizations about the category “gender”. Women’s lives can be quite shifting depending on their personal circumstances, which often is neglected in research about migration issues. There is a tendency to believe that a certain category such as “migrant women” is homogeneous (Hellgren, 2008:92). But in reality it is not.

## Migrant women tell their stories: methodology

The analysis presented here is based on results from a three-year project entitled 'Media practices in the new country'<sup>1</sup>, which aims to highlight the role and utilization of the media in families (mainly with children in the ages 12-16) with an immigrant background. In total, 75 persons took part in the project, involving 16 families and three focus groups, in an educational setting, with origins from countries such as Greece, Kurdistan, Iran, Lebanon, Somalia, Syria, Turkey and Vietnam. The participating parents were either studying, looking for a job, on the sick list or had occupations such as busdriver, working at a factory or store, interpreter, and preschool teacher. We met during our fieldwork informants who came to Sweden in the mid 80s to those who arrived a couple of years ago. Rather than just examining one specific ethnic group or comparing certain groups, the project aimed to highlight the experience of cultural change (Gillespie 1995) or cultural journey, a journey that has often been compelled by war or political reasons. And special focus was thus on the role of the media in this process of construction, reinforcement and reconstruction of identities.

Each family in the project had their own story to tell about the reasons for coming to Sweden and how their cultural journey was experienced and is experienced today. This trip has been physical, moving from one place to another, but also emotional and cognitive. The journey to Sweden may be ended but another one has started – one's life in Sweden. Their cultural encounter involves the process in which people try to create meaning and deal with various cultures in daily life and where migrants often are forced to go through a 're-socialization' in their attempts to adjust to a new culture (Stier 2004). To grasp this journey and the migrants' lived experiences in Sweden the project has had a media ethnographic approach. This approach has also features of so called life story research that tries to capture the essence of personal narratives as they appear to be politicized, structured, culturized and socialized (Goodley, Lawthom, Clough and Moore 2004). Life stories represent an epistemology placed in the hermeneutic tradition with an interest in the private, individual and subjective nature of life rather than the public, general and objective. The aim is to understand how people attach meanings to their stories that can be analyzed within various theoretical frameworks, for example post structuralism.

Besides narrative interviews the study entailed field observation and photo-taking (among the children). In our project the families were visited about two times in their homes but in order to get access to the families a network of gatekeepers were developed with whom we had contact for about two years.

Drotner (1993) proposes a media-ethnographical approach in order to capture the contextual character of media use in relation to the audiences' everyday lives. The focus

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<sup>1</sup> The project was funded by the Swedish Research Council (2004-2006).

is here on a specific group of people rather than a certain medium. By studying peoples' media use in contexts such as home, work or school one can see how media use is an active process rather than a passive one.

### **The interview context- a narrative approach**

That we use language differently in various contexts (here the interview context) is seen in the work of, for example, Bakhtin (1986: 60) on 'speech genre'. The interview context in the project might also have had the opposite affect, to give the impression that the informants were not immigrants and wanted to be perceived as Swedes without any experiences of racism and discrimination. This might represent what Billig (1992) calls 'moral methodologies' and impressionability, of how the interviewee constructed a view from 'how things should be – the norm'. The latter case is of course much more difficult to discern and analyze its influence on the interview talk. We have in this study focused on families with migrant background and positioned our informants into a discourse about citizenship, in the sense that we have initiated a discussion that to some extent circulates around the issue of how to get access to Swedish society and how to learn the Swedish language (however not only. Other issues were discussed as well). In other words, an agenda is set by us, the researchers. But we also have to say that this agenda was perceived as natural among the informants and was often brought up by them selves. The informants were very occupied by getting access to the Swedish society by learning the language and be updated on local and national events.

Most of the interviews took place at home and they were all recorded and transcribed. By being given the opportunity to see the families at home we got to observe media access, current media use but also the representation of the homeland, one's religion in the home, which became an important complement to the interviews and gave additional contextualized data. Stating that we wanted the informants to tell their stories does not of course mean that these stories are a pure reflection of an objective reality or a fixed mental image, quite the contrary. While being out on the field we as researchers stage a scene which is constructed by certain contexts and by people's different frames of references. The informants' stories were, for example, partly constructed by how an informant positions him- or herself in relation to the interviewer/researcher with a Swedish background and the interview context. There were, for example, occasions when the discourse 'we and them' were evident in the talks and where the interviewer were labelled as 'you Swedes'. That happened, for example, in the story of Samar (see below).

The interviews started normally with: "Tell me how you ended up in Sweden". This start of the interview evoke memories and emotions and turned out to be a good beginning as the informants very much liked to tell their stories about leaving their home countries and the reasons for that and how they finally reached Sweden. In some cases the informants actually seemed to prefer to talk about their past and present lives rather than discussing the media and their media practices. Sometimes we even felt that we got an almost therapeutic role. However, we tried to resist giving advices and stayed to a role as listener.

The various interviews varied in character as they were based on open questions in order to get a conversation like character and therefore the result vary a lot. Some were extensive as people liked to talk about their lives, others were scanty. The older generation, the parents, could come up with quite detailed narratives that had little resemblance with an ordinary interview. Samar's story has some parts that are extensive and detailed descriptions of her life as a mother and about her professional career. Yasmine's story, on the other hand, is not so detailed and has more elements of question-answer type of dialogue. This frame is more representative for younger people in the project as a whole.

### The story of Samar

Samar had no intentions to move from Syria. She had a well-paid job as an engineer in Damascus, travelled much and had parents and friends in Syria. In 1992 however she visited her two sisters in Sweden, where she also met her husband (with origins in Iraq), who had at that time been living in Sweden for 8 years. Samar comes from a family with 6 sisters and one brother. Besides the ones living in Sweden and Syria, she has a sister in Germany and Dubai. The decision to move to Sweden was not an easy one and she knew from her sisters that it meant to start over from scratch.

- I knew it would be difficult but I never thought it would be this difficult. It was really tough. [...] Yeah, it was not an easy decision but as it was a difficult situation with politics, he (the husband) couldn't move to Syria, he is not allowed to live there. There were many disturbances between Syria and Iraq 92-93 so it was not that easy, he couldn't move there. [...] So the only option was that I moved here. I live here.

Samar emphasized how difficult it was to come to a new country and that she had to start from the very beginning, despite that she had a good education in her country of origin (Syria). She also formed her own family during her first years in Sweden. She gave birth to a daughter and a son. Now eleven years she and her husband had one more child. In the excerpt below she focuses her narrative on mastering the new language.

- When I came, I knew how much I can do and what I should do. The first step for me was to learn Swedish but I became pregnant about two weeks after, after we got married so it was a little bit difficult for me, felt ill and we had it very tough the first four months. But still I started the school in order to learn Swedish, SFI, at that time it was allowed to smoke indoors, they had a smoking room, and that was the worst thing I could do, to smell smoke, I could barely be there.

*But how did it feel to learn Swedish as it is completely different compared to...*

- I have actually studied Swedish at home. I never attended any school, I studied at home by myself. I borrowed books from the library, sat and worked. But I spoke English with everyone the first five years.

Exclusion from the society makes it more difficult to learn the language, especially articulating and talking the new language. She emphasised the lack of Swedish friends as one explanation for this:

- But still my problem today is to pronounce things correctly, I understand everything, I have read much but I am not satisfied with the pronouncement. But I think you understand what I am saying. Plus I have not got any Swedish friend. You know, it is very difficult to get a Swedish friend.

During her first years in Sweden, she rather preferred to speak English than Swedish:

- Much English outside the home and I built my family during these five years. I had my daughter and then my son. So I, I thought that during these five years I concentrate on...

The process of language acquisition coincided with family formation and she here made a choice to strengthen the ties inwards to her private sphere, rather than the public sphere of the Swedish society. But Swedes, she said, are not particularly open to migrants. She claimed that the Swedes ("you") set the boundaries for what is accepted, here addressing the interviewer, and thus clearly aware about the dichotomy of "we" and "them".

- I feel that, you draw the line from the beginning. When one meets an immigrant with dark hair, directly one keeps a distance. You do not understand, what's this, you are scared. But in the beginning one doesn't understand this, one thinks 'they don't like me', one is being put off and I had many friends in my country so one feels 'no, me too, I don't want to', I think the first initiative should come from you, you are at home.  
*Yes...*

- You don't have any difficulties.

*No.*

- But we are coming here, we have it very difficult. We want to understand things, how you live, how things are. Here it is very difficult and a great difference between your culture and our, so this combination one must understand first then one can dare to make a step.

After the first years of struggling with language, Samar had aspirations to start working. By means of her own network of friends with migrant background she successfully found a job in a school as teacher for children with special needs:

- Yes, and it felt really nice. I succeeded to have children with difficulties and special needs. It went really well for me and I thought 'Ohh, I can continue to work'. [...] and I thought it was great fun to work with children, and children with special needs, really enjoyed working with them.

The teaching experience led to an interest in working with children and she decided to apply for a university education in social work, an education of four years of study. But she was only admitted at a university far away from her home town, which made it

difficult to accept this position, as she could not stay away from her small children all day long:

- But as my children were small I thought 'No, I don't have the heart to travel to Lund'. When they call me here in Helsingborg I can go straight to the nursery but from Lund it's very difficult.

Therefore instead of taking a college degree, she stayed to work in the school where she had been a supply teacher, now as a home language teacher:

- But I continued my work and in some way I managed with it. And then I stayed at the same school. It was Gustav Adolfsskolan. And there I collaborated very well with the teachers and got a permanent job there, they wanted me. [...]

In the next passage Samar told the interviewer her view of inclusive processes into the Swedish society and how she was accepted and supported. She expressed a relief that she finally felt a kind of recognition after years of struggling with getting "access" and finding her place in the new country:

- No, I have a colleague, they are very sweet and we have worked together for several years. They came to see me several times and my manager, she really liked me, she thought that I struggled much in this country. That I deserved something better. She has visited me several times. She supported me really much when we going to continue our studies. I needed, I had to have the right qualifications to become a teacher, I didn't, I needed this subject, what's the name...

Still, in order to become a qualified (certified) teacher, she had to have a degree in "pedagogy". At this point, Samar gets support from the university, and a supporting female teacher, so that she can continue her studies at distance through an Internet platform. She expressed strong gratitude and stressed the importance to have a supportive environment. However, during this period she spent much time at home and she got more isolated again with the effect that her Swedish deteriorated. Her contacts with Swedish society became limited to occasionally visits to the health service or parent groups or that she sometimes spoke Swedish with her children, who were fluent in this language. However, the media apparently also played a role in the process of getting access to the Swedish society. Samar lined up a number of daily papers, local and national. And she also pointed to the importance of advertisements.

An important tool in this knowledge process of getting access to the Swedish society is to use both Swedish-English and English-Arabic dictionary:

- No, most of the time it was in English and then I could ask my sisters about a word. But I have used the dictionary much when I studied. When there was a difficult word and I couldn't find it in the Arabic-Swedish dictionary but first had to look in the Swedish-English and then English-Arabic and then I found the word and if you have a compound word, they are really difficult 'what is it they want', 'which word is it'.

When the interview was conducted, Samar was on maternity leave again, and therefore once again somewhat isolated from the society. She stressed that the media, especially television and Internet, became more important in this situation, for example for watching the news and reading Swedish local and national newspapers. But media practices were tightly intertwined with her private family life as parent and mother of an infant.

- So when he is asleep I have some little time. Sitting by the computer and starts searching. I also look at Swedish books, need to fresh up the memory...

*By watching TV, one can at least hear Swedish...*

- It's not so much. Most of the time it is movies that are translated to Swedish, therefore I am much better in reading.

*Then to listen...*

- To talk.

*You are more used to the text...*

- Yes, I am much more used to the text. I know English and they talk English and I read but do I read right or wrong I don't know but know I know what wheel means but how one is pronouncing it I don't know when just reading it.

Transnational television (satellite television) was mentioned as a comfort zone when she was homesick:

- Yes, it sometimes feels that one is longing home so it cools down the emotions if one watches.

*But you said that one longs home. Are you then watching any special programs? Or is it, there is also music channels...*

- Yes, there are music channels but it depends. Sometimes during the day I'm tired and have no energy to work and it is not nice weather outside 'what should I do' so then I switch on the TV and watch something that is shown that moment. But we have one month where we have a little special with programs, it is Ramadan when we fast then we like to watch TV as we all eat together the same time, we are watching the same program and it can be series and stuff like that, and it feels that we are home during this period. Want to have this feeling 'I am home' during Ramadan.

[...]

- It is much movies, doesn't have to be religious. It is more about the feeling that we celebrate all together, that one is not alone. One sits here just the four of us. I have Christmas curtains for my children and things like that but it is a special time for us too.

Preferred transnational channels were *Al-Jazeera* and *Al-Arabiya* but also Arabic newspapers on the Internet, which were used for being informed about news and events in Syria through a site called *Alamin* ([www.alamin.com](http://www.alamin.com)). By this site one can also be informed about central issues of everyday life such as issues related pregnancy:

- Yeah, then you go there and one can link to the others. When I was pregnant I read much about the pregnancy, how children develops every day, every month and all this. There are sites everywhere, American, English, French, one looks and each channels has a link to others.

But when she was wearing her last baby, she also could understand, which she highly appreciated, Swedish information about these matters:

- [...] but it was rather fun this time when I was pregnant with Hadi as I could read Swedish much better so I used it. It was a delight to know everything, my belly, how he lives. Before that, they talked but I didn't understand. I didn't understand but now I do, it was really great to know these things.

Samar stood out as a competent Internet user. She developed her ideas about the various Internet services: MSN that was used for chatting with friends and relatives in other places of the world such as the US as well as with family in the home country. She and her friends tried to find time slots when they all were able to meet due to different time zones. She also used the Internet for other purposes such as paying bills, sending e-cards e t c. The telephone was preferred for talking to her mother. Also in other interviews, we have found that the telephone often is used for talking to the older generation as well as for private conversations and to discuss more sensitive issues. Her husband, as a refugee from Iraq, also visited chatrooms on the Internet, particularly for political discussions and voting in Arabic.

- Either you can call or one sent MSN or e-mail.

*Can you give an example of any question where he has logged in and chatted?*

- Most of the time I am not with him but I can see when he 'if the computer is on then I would like to send what I think', what they think, when they should vote in the homeland so then the question becomes what it should be, they want here in Malmö to have a place, so the Iraqis should go there but they were not allowed so they went to...

After a break in the interview because the youngest child was crying, it continued by a talk on maintaining bonds with the home country. The first question picked up a thread that was discussed earlier in the interview concerning disruption and dissociation.

*- But do you feel that the children are split in any way?*

- No, I think that we are more split compared to the children. As it is more a focus on here, I think. Because when we go to the homeland it doesn't feel exactly as the homeland and here isn't home either so it is...

*So you mean that when you travel to, for example, Syria, you don't feel that it is your homeland?*

- No, many changes are taken place when one is not there so it doesn't feel the same sometimes. As they have changed, time is also passing by there, they change things when we are not there.

The final part of the interview discussed issues related to religion, tradition, norms and values and how one stays in touch with the former home country on the local level. On question of the importance of religion, Samar claimed that religion is important, although she was not considering herself as extremely religious:

- Yes, as we believe in God, we are Muslims and we try to raise our children as much as we can. This you can do, this you can't do. There are things that one absolutely cannot do, there are things which one can discuss. To eat pig meat is not allowed and that is something my children has learnt from early years so I don't think this is a problem. To take a shower with all the other girls when one is naked is not allowed when you are a Muslim so she has learnt that ' I can take a shower with underwear'. My son has also done this. It both applies to boys and girls, not just my girl. And when I go out to take a shower I am wearing my towel.

The family also participated in the local Arabic community to some extent. Samar's husband with origin in Iraq was very active there, in the "Iraq house", before Saddam Hussein was overthrown. But after that, his interest in this community decreased.

- We had the Iraqi house here and they were really active before regime. The regime of Saddam had fallen but now they are not so active but before it was mainly daddy and Sarah (the oldest daughter) who joined an activity. But Syria, from Syria there are not many, we are too few, but there are some from Palestine, Lebanon, all together.

*It's more of an Arabic community...*

- Yes, and it is not many families that we meet, we are too few at the Syrian association of culture but we meet. They (the children) also have their friends.

*But it's more that one is having an Arabic community rather than a Syrian one?*

- Yes, it becomes more of an Arabic community.

## The story of Yasmine and her sisters

The next story is drawn from interviews with a family who had three daughters, one of whom, Yasmine, twelve years old, was interviewed in more depth. She was related to the previous informant Samar, who is her aunt. She was the youngest sister of the three. The parents came originally from Syria, and the father was of Palestinian decent. The father first came to Sweden to study at the university, and he met his wife who was on holiday. Both parents had high education and worked as a teacher and interpreter. Yasmine and her sisters were born in Sweden and had lived there their entire life. They said they were Muslims, and the norms and values of Islam were important to follow. Even if they did not pray on a daily basis, the sisters said that they turned to Allah when they had problems. Otherwise, the family lived according to the norms of a Western modern lifestyle.

They mixed both Swedish and Arabic in the home, but the parents preferred that they all spoke Arabic. The parents encouraged their daughters to watch Arabic (also Swedish) news together and to be updated on events in the Middle East. In this way, the parents could explain difficult words or dialects to the children. It also became a way to discuss crucial social and political events in the Arabic world among the whole family on a daily basis. Both parents stressed the need to read or watch news, and they themselves read several Swedish and Arabic newspapers. Similar encouragement to read news on the Internet was not seen. The older sisters read the local newspaper and different evening papers on a daily basis. Yasmine, the youngest, might take a look at *Aftonbladet* (Swedish tabloid) on the Internet, but this did not occur so frequently. The Internet was also used to search for information, e.g. for schoolwork or for finding musical entertainment. They downloaded music (mainly American and Arabic) from the site *Mazzika*. However, they avoided news information in Arabic, at least in print, whereas television was preferred often assisted by their parents' translations and interpretations:

*I thought then, considering the Middle East and Syria, do you read any specific Arabic newspapers?*

Sahar: No.

Amber: No.

Yasmine: No.

*Is there any particular reason for why you don't?*

Sahar: Because it's really difficult, the Arabic in the newspapers. It's not everyday language.

Amber: Uh huh.

*A lot of factual terms and such maybe.*

Sahar: Exactly. Yeah, it's like, what's it called (says something in Arabic) in Swedish?

Amber: Like standard Swedish.

Sahar: Right, it's not like everyday language like when you talk. It's something else.

*Then how do you find out about what's happening in Syria?*

Sahar: We sit with our parents and they explain.

*Then TV is an important medium?*

Shar: Yes.

Yasmine: Yes.

Amber: Yes.

[...]

*But that's not how you search for information about Syria?*

Amber: No.

At one point, the conversation developed around the concepts of 'longing' and 'belonging'. The family made regular visits to their parents' homeland Syria, where the family had an apartment. One of the sisters said: "It's interesting to see all your family. Get some warmth and but what's most important is seeing your family, of course. Definitely." But the girls basically perceived Sweden as their home. Still Yasmine reflected that she could think of moving to Syria "Maybe not right now, but when I'm a little older". Her sisters were of the same opinion, but might consider it after their university studies were completed, perhaps "Start a business or something". However, when asked about their reason for starting a business in Syria, it turned out to be purely commercial. Thus, they had mixed feelings about whether or not they would live in Syria in the future. And they also expressed some ambivalence about their ethnic identity: "It's natural but you don't really know where you belong because when you're here in Sweden, you feeling 100% Swedish, we are Swedes but also not, do you understand. Our appearance maybe..." And when they were in Syria, they longed for Sweden and their life there. They saw themselves as something 'between', but Sweden was perceived more as their home as they had spent most of their time here. Thus, again the importance of locality was evident. Language is a marker for belonging and captures cultural, emotional and social ties to a group. Being a full member of a community requires the same language. Yasmine's parents were anxious to keep the Arabic language (all parents in the project emphasized the importance of their children knowing their mother language) alive within the family, but she herself stressed that she has difficulties understanding Arabic. (This was very common among the young informants in our project.) Yasmine took home language lessons in school and also privately on Saturdays. She, herself, expressed some ambivalence regarding language preferences. Swedish was easier for her and her sisters than Arabic was: "But Swedish is easier to understand. Maybe you're in Syria and talk to your cousins and maybe you don't understand everything, it's like that sometimes".

Internet was frequently used by the three sisters, mostly chatting on *MSN*. They kept in touch with their Swedish friends as well as with relatives in Syria. On Yasmine's *MSN* chat list, she had primarily relatives (mainly cousins in her age). The conversations were generally in Arabic, and they often centred on daily life and ordinary things. Sometimes they were supplemented by a web camera and microphone. The interview with Yasmine

once again confirmed the frequent use of *MSN* among youngsters and that it seems largely to have replaced the ordinary telephone for communication between friends. *MSN* appeared to be a more pleasant way to communicate. She also talked about how she had more than 80 persons on her chat list, and that it was no problem to chat with several people simultaneously, which could be one reason for preferring *MSN* to the telephone. Yasmine, however, was careful to avoid chatting with strangers and revealing any personal information. Therefore, she had decided not to be a member of *Lunarstorm* (the site is now turned down). In the case of Yasmine and her sisters, they did not make acquaintances with new people through global searching (surfing). They preferred chatting with friends they already knew before or perhaps chatting with a friend's friend or with someone whom they had met in real life. For instance, none of the sisters used public chat rooms, a function generally quite rarely used among the youngsters in this project.

### **On the importance of generation as an intersectional category**

There are obvious similarities between Samar and Yasmine on the surface level in terms of prevalent social categories such as family and education. Both women came from middle-class families with Muslim background (as mentioned they were relatives). There were also striking similarities in terms of media practices. Both expressed an interest in media and used a number of media sources for various purposes and particularly the Internet with its access to chat rooms and *MSN* had a prominent place in their lives. However, we will here focus on the differences, as we find that their thoughts and reflections about everyday life appeared to be rather different, something we believe are associated with generation differences and particularly the fact that Samar had her own family with children and husband as well as the fact that she moved to Sweden as an adult, whereas Yasmine had lived all her life there. Although Yasmine expressed some worries about her Arabic, it did not appear as a serious obstacle and her Swedish was fluent. Samar on the other hand, talked in detail about her struggle for getting access to the Swedish society. She articulated her difficulties to master the new language such as pronunciation and talking properly and she described that she at times had felt isolated from the society and her problems of being accepted. Samar had a strong feeling of being "the other", especially when her children were small. But she also presented herself as a fighter, not willing to give up her aspirations of finding a new identity as a teacher. She took courses on the university level and she had acquired a job that she was satisfied with. Recognition was not obvious to her and she had to work for that. She seemed to be trapped in the role of being a mother and trying to become a professional as well, a situation that is common to women of today, in general. It was apparent that the role as citizen is probably seen differently depending on an individual's special migrant situation. To be first generation versus second generation makes a big difference and your stage in life, such as being a teenager versus being a mother also makes a difference. In other words, behind the category of "migrant women", we can find quite dramatic variations in how life appears.

The cases discussed in this paper touch upon several aspects that are vital in the debate on citizenship and participation. In an increasingly transnational world, with growing mobility and global media, some researchers have criticized the distinction of 'here and there: "Fixed

binary orientations and identities, which refer to categories like ‘here’ and ‘there’ are far too one-dimensional”, has been claimed by Moser and Hermann (2008:76). But our findings clearly show that it would be a mistake to totally dismiss the ‘here-there’ dichotomy. The two chosen cases also show how each family has their own story to tell and that an ambivalence relation is seen to ‘here and there’. While Sweden may be perceived as one’s home; being geared towards participation in Swedish society as far as one’s rational selves were concerned. Emotionally, however, these women may have their hearts in their parents’ homeland, especially in terms of bonds of friendship and kinship. Parallels can here be drawn to the concept of ‘fragmented citizenship’ (Wiener, 1997); acknowledging the potential distinction between the notion of belonging and the more legal aspect of nationality. Decision-makers in Swedish society mostly care about the process of integration, as if all immigrants plan to stay or are in the same life situation. But some residents do not intend to stay on a permanent basis. They are sometimes forced to stay in the new country as refugees or in diasporas, but have their hearts in their home countries. These people may instead try to preserve their affiliation to their homeland, either in terms of official citizenship or an imagined citizenship. They are perhaps nursing a plan to return in the future or a dream of creating a new homeland, an “imagined community”, to use Anderson’s words (Anderson, 1983). Still others are actually seeking a future in the new country. Naturally, in all these cases, participation and citizenship have different meanings.

The two cases also illustrate how parents may feel isolated because of unemployment and language difficulties, whereas children and young people are involved in a process of integration, mainly through participation in school and various leisure activities. In the conversation with Yasmine and her sisters, talk about moving away from Sweden – back home to Syria was reflected on. This option seemed to cross their minds from time to time, a finding that is also confirmed by other interviews from the project. Moreover, the Internet appeared to be a convenient space for such reflections, as you can chat with likeminded people in your home language and compare everyday experiences in the countries of migration. Sweden was not regarded as the ultimate goal of migration. This was confirmed from other families participating in the project as well. More predominant was an open attitude towards the routes one may take in life. This type of “floating lives” can according to Sinclair and Cunningham (2001:9) be seen as a “...third space for cultural strategies to become active forms of resistance to domination and marginalisation”. Migrant youngsters are aware of their inferior position as a minority group, which is why they strive towards a change and ‘getting away’. This is manifested, for example, in their high ambitions for the future or in their thoughts about moving to another country to accomplish their life goals; which might indicate a transnational citizen life in future. Similar results have also been observed in previous research with migrant children in this age group, which is in a transitional period from childhood to adulthood (cf. Passani and Rydin, 2004). Samar, on the other hand, took for granted that the new country was the final place to stay. Motherhood, she was raising three children, had changed the direction of her professional career completely, from an engineer towards the role as a teacher in primary school. For Samar security and proximity seemed to be values of importance.

It is evident that the media, and especially Internet is used as a discussion arena, a place for negotiation and exchange of ideas. For Samar the Internet was used for distant education as well as for chat with family and friends. For Yasmine it was used for talk about everyday matters with likeminded youth, both within the local community and on a global level through transnational connections. As for the latter, this is done by chatting with friends and relatives from one's own or parents' homeland. When it comes to young people, they are forming and maintaining networks that constitute interpretative communities representing youth culture in general, but also representing the special issues of interest to migrant children. They, themselves, make up the agendas and the rules for participation (i.e., they reject being too personal or remaining in chat groups with too many unknown visitors). In these networks, young people are the actors and 'beings', and they can speak loudly about their situation in the "new" country and parents' homeland. The example, of Yasmine, shows how "there" becomes an important aspect, not so much in direct relation to the former homeland (or country of origin), but in terms of how she positioned herself in Swedish society and how she looked for peers with the same immigrant background in Sweden. By finding likeminded people with similar experiences, a collective identity was created and maintained. Thus, she searched for other young people on a local level, who shared her double bonding or hybrid identities. One crucial "tool" for this bonding was to communicate in one's mother tongue language. Language and ethnic origin become a guarantee for security and a feeling of solidarity, and thereby constituting a platform for young people's negotiations of their identity as Swedish citizens.

As have been stated, Yasmine and her sisters were obviously very preoccupied with the fact that they are different from their Swedish counterparts. They identified themselves as the "others". For these girls, the Internet became what Dahlgren (1991) called the alternative public sphere for peers. This new space, which is largely created by the users themselves (at least its content, while the structure and rules of conduct of a website may be designed by a commercial company), may cause young people to feel more like participants, and thus the idea of 'top-down' information is not applicable. Besides the fact that members have their own homepage with personal presentation, the community contains various discussion groups in which topics such as religion, philosophy, and happiness are discussed. *MSN*, on the other hand, was the modern telephone for these girls. Studies of chat discussions indicate that language online has both similarities to and differences from written communication (e.g., Hård af Segerstad, 2002). And one may wonder whether this will have any future implications for various forms of political communication among politicians, the media and the public (e.g., its content, who is communicating and transmission flows). Scholars within this field have started to explore the Internet's potential for political participation, and have coined terms such as 'electronic democracy' to stress such forums for opinion formation (for a critical discussion on this matter, see Karakaya Polat, 2005). The Internet may serve as an alternative public space in which the user has the power to choose his or her information or images. By means of the Internet, the informants could move beyond the dominating political and cultural discourse in society, discourses in which the national media participate. The need for multiple publics and multiple voices is vital in any living democracy and for creating spaces of participation. These subaltern counterpublics may

enable marginalised groups to form communities and voice their views to wider publics (Fraser, 1992).

## Notes

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