

TALK ON THE MEDIA'S ROLE IN CREATING OTHERNESS AND EXCLUSION: *Discursive Identifications and Public (dis)Connections*

Abstract

In this article, we examine how media coverage of migration issues and portrayal of migrants are reflected upon and talked about among families with migrant backgrounds living in Sweden. To date, most Nordic media research on migration has focused on studying media texts, such as representations of migrant and minority issues, rather than on media uses and practices. However, the present study is based on a discursive and contextual approach to media reception, implying in-depth informant interviews, mainly in people's homes, supported by observations and field notes. Attention is directed towards the informants' readings of certain media texts, with particular emphasis on their views concerning the media's role in the creation of otherness and exclusion. Key issues like "truth" and media objectivity, cultural imperialism, non-ethical Western journalism exemplify how symbolic exclusion operates, which in the long run may have profound implications on people's connections to a shared public world.

Keywords

Media readings • migration • discourses • exclusion • identification

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1 Introduction

Among media scholars, there has been a strong interest in studying the portrayal of minorities and people with migrant backgrounds, especially in newspapers and television news. The attention paid to these issues can be seen against the background of increased worldwide migration, not least in Europe. A historic landmark that has influenced discourses connected to migration in the Western world – and Muslims in particular – is the events of 11 September 2001. These events constitute a kind of cultural image or point of reference, which at present is part of the overall "map" people use in navigating a shared reality (Alasuutari 1999b: 88). Research has revealed that the general picture of the media's coverage of migration issues is one with negative connotations, such as problems, deviance and conflict, as will be discussed below. In this article, however, we contribute with empirical data on how laymen – in this case, people with migrant backgrounds – express their views and conceptions of Swedish media, with a focus on television and its construction of otherness and exclusion. There are two crucial questions: What specific discourses are expressed in the informants' talk? What forms of dominant, oppositional and negotiated readings are taking place?

Notions of media representations constitute a part of the informants' discursive, everyday lives and have significance for

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citizenship objectives and participation, not least for processes of inclusion and belonging. Couldry (2006: 327) has coined the expression *public connections* to denote the media's role in promoting a common "we" in the public sphere. He claims that "most people share an orientation to a public world where matters of common concern are addressed, or at least should be." In any democracy, it is vital that all members of a society take part and connect themselves to the public world, which increasingly is taking place through various mediated means.

Previous European studies on representation reveal that people with migrant backgrounds are underrepresented in the media; when they are given a mediated space, the content mostly concerns being a migrant and issues, often problematic, dealing with the immigration process per se (see, e.g. van Dijk 1987; Löwander 1998; d'Haenens Beentjes & Bink 2000; Brune 2004; Madianou 2005; Olausson 2006). Looking more specifically at Nordic research on media representations, a review article by Brune from 2008, summarizing Swedish research on news media (primarily newspapers and television), confirms these findings. Reporting focused on "waves" of immigration and "invasions" of asylum seekers (Brune 2008: 338). Hultén (2006), who studied Swedish print media, found that news coverage of immigration and ethnical relations has increased

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considerably but that the topic of “problem orientation” remains. This tendency has been evident in Norway and Finland, as well. In the Finnish news media during the same period, there has been a focus on more administrative issues concerning immigration (Pietikäinen 2000). This could be explained by Finland having a shorter history of migration than other Nordic countries (Horsti 2008). A review by Christiansen (2004) presents several Danish studies that confirm a generally negative picture, for example, that Danish media represent immigrants as being excluded from the national “we”, indicating that ethnic minorities are not accorded full citizenship. Such negative and problem-oriented representations of immigrants in the national news in Denmark may, according to Christiansen, lead to increased tensions between ethnic minorities and the majority population. She holds that national media seem to contribute to further marginalization, rather than compensate for it, and finds no real sign of change. Andreassen (2011) makes a comparison between Danish public service and commercial media; she asserts the idea that media plays a role in the process of “social cohesion” in a society. Her conclusion, from the presentation of a number of examples, is that commercial television may be more inclusive in terms of staffing their programmes with people characterized by ethnic diversity as compared with public service television. Furthermore, Andreassen suggests that news media present spaces that are more closed, representing middle-class values, formal education and traditional knowledge. She points out (2011: 178) that the genre of entertainment, such as music and dance shows, is more inclusive of people of colour than other types of programmes in Western media culture, whereas quiz shows, such as Jeopardy, are geared more towards a celebration of participants with “fingertip knowledge”.

Negative media portrayals of migrants can be seen as examples of what Bourdieu (2001: 1-2) labels symbolic violence, which means that symbolic capital through, for example, communication, is used as means of power; consequently, this may reinforce an institutional and structural form of discrimination (Kamali 2005: 31-32) and lead to public disconnections (cf. Couldry 2006: 327). Such images develop by means of the media’s discursive power apparatus; from journalistic practices and mechanisms such as generalization, dichotomization and trivialization (Kamali 2005: 35).

The power of the media to set agendas for discourses can also be connected to reception theory and the construction of the implied reader and assumed interpretations as well as assumed effects on behaviour, attitudes and opinions. Proceeding to audience and reception research, we find that studies of minorities’ media habits and practices have not been prioritized even if they are increasing in number (e.g. Gillespie 1995; Hargreaves & Mahdjoub 1997; Barker 1999; Qureshi & Moores 1999; Cottle 2000; de Bruin 2001; Tufte 2003; Madianou 2005; Peeters & d’Haenens 2005; De Leeuw & Rydin 2007; Nikunen 2011).

Nevertheless, there are few studies that have focused on minorities’ talk on dominating media discourses or, for example, their articulation of experiences of otherness. This article is based on the project “Media practices in the new country”¹, which has resulted in a rich body of data (interview transcripts and field notes) covering various topics and aspects of media usage embedded in talk about life in general, especially the informants’ life in a new country (for example, media usage for learning a new language) (Sjöberg & Rydin 2011). We have also analysed how the informants use various media, and the Internet in particular, for information seeking and keeping in touch with their home countries (e.g. Rydin & Sjöberg 2010).

2 Methodology

In total, 75 interviews were conducted in two separate settings. The primary setting was the private homes of 16 families who had children in the ages of 12 to 16. In all, 60 children and adults were interviewed in their homes. For the most part, they were interviewed individually, but they were also interviewed in pairs or together with family members. Often, a family was visited twice. We accepted an interview context that, to a large extent, was set-up by the families themselves since the interviews took place in the informants’ homes. We strived to make the situation as comfortable and relaxed as possible. Under these circumstances, we had to risk that the children might feel restricted as regards expressing thoughts that were critical of their parents’ morals and values; nevertheless, we perceived that the climate in the families was open and relaxed and that the children and the parents were open-minded in the sense that they sometimes argued and disagreed with each other. The second setting was a school, where a group of 15 adults (parents) enrolled in adult education participated in focus groups. The main methodological approach, however, was the so-called informant interview (Lindlof 1995: 170), in which a person (or a family) is interviewed over a long time in an open, conversational atmosphere. The length of each interview varied from one to three hours; in addition to social acquaintance with the family around a coffee table or dinner. We took field notes after each visit in order to gain a more thorough understanding of the informants’ everyday lives and cultural contexts.

A thematic interview guide was utilized to give the informants the opportunity to talk about themselves and their perception of cultures and identities more broadly. Thus, the interviews opened up for discussions wider in scope than media usage. The informants came from countries such as Greece, Kurdistan Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Somalia, Syria, Turkey and Vietnam. To gain access to the field, a network of “gatekeepers” (Aspers 2007: 114) was established through several months of contacts and meetings with various migration associations and authorities. We consulted the gatekeepers as they provided crucial information for the design of the project and to establish a trustful relationship with the informants. Together with the gatekeepers’ assistance, we tried to get a sample of variation in terms of class, gender, religious, cultural and educational background, job status and family type. This revealed, for example, that few of the participants had an academic background. The common denominator was that all the adult participants had made a cultural journey, a journey that had often been compelled by war, political reasons or romantic relationships. The project’s aim was to question and move beyond taken for granted group labels by letting the informants’ voices be heard and by highlighting their descriptions of daily life while acknowledging the existing processes of objectification (including media) in society, which may affect the informants’ self-ascription.

This article applies a discursive approach to reception research, stressing the social construction of reality. This also includes the interview context itself, creating a specific type of knowledge and discourses. We did not initially bring up discussions about otherness, but as white middle-class media scholars, our presence contributed to a certain positional stance, whereby a situation of “us and them” was unavoidable. The following is an example of how the researchers, seen as representing Swedes, are positioned as “you” during an interview:

I feel that you draw the line from the beginning. When one meets an immigrant with dark hair, one immediately 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.

We see this type of positioning not only as an outcome of the research setting itself but also as a reflection of dominant societal discourses and personal experiences of otherness and exclusion. From the body of data (i.e. the transcribed interviews), we have categorized all salient statements, reflections and arguments related to the issues of the media's portrayal of migrants and the media's coverage of migrant issues. We placed an emphasis on Swedish television channels, which were a primary concern in the interview extracts for the present analysis.

3 A discursive approach to reception research

The present study is inspired by Stuart Hall's text-reception theory as well as discursive approaches to media research. Alasuutari (1999a: 6) argues that reception research shall consider the cultural context and the social discourses in which the reception process takes place: "to get a grasp of our contemporary "media culture", particularly as it can be seen in the role of the media in everyday life, both as a topic and as an activity structured by and structuring the discourses within which it is discussed." A gradual shift in reception research has taken place, from an interest in those mental processes through which media content is perceived and interpreted (and its effects), to the social embeddedness of the media user. Applying a discursive approach to reception research stresses the social construction of reality; this emphasizes how social and cultural frames, formed by language, require people to share certain set of norms, values and behaviours, which, in turn, has implications on how daily life is regarded. In this context, one can talk about the formation of the so-called interpretive repertoires (Potter & Wetherell 1996: 137-139).

In reception research, the complex interplay between text, context and reception has often been inspired by Stuart Hall's influential work on interpretative frameworks (1980). While the ideological meaning of a media text is accepted in a so-called dominant-hegemonic reading, it is questioned in an oppositional reading; in a negotiated reading of a text, some views are accepted and others are questioned. By bringing semiotics into the study of communication processes, the model suggests that media produce meanings in social and cultural contexts, which include everything from the broader ideological discourses in a specific society to a person's unique personal histories, experiences and knowledge.

Thus, discourse becomes a central concept with its emphasis on context, linking meaning-making processes and media readings to issues related to ideology, power and knowledge production in society. The concept of discourse has been given various meanings and definitions, but a common feature is to describe discourse as "a certain way to talk about and understand the world" (our translation) (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000: 7). Stuart Hall's interpretation of Foucault states how a discourse "governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others" (Hall 1997: 44). Various dominant institutions and actors in society advocate a dominant discourse, and in his fieldwork in segregated

Southall in London, Baumann (1996: 192) states that this type of discourse could be characterized as: "For so-called immigrants and ethnic minorities, it represents the currency within which they must deal with the political and media establishments on both the national and the local level." Thus, various prominent discourses float between various spheres on both the macro and the micro levels (Fairclough 1989: 77ff). Another aspect that has relevance to the present analysis is what Foucault labels "regime of truth". To Foucault, it is of less value to prove the truth of a discourse; instead, the focus should be on exploring whether a discourse is perceived as true as well as its actual consequences. "Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements" (Foucault 1980: 131). In the case of media representations, as will be seen in the later analysis, various types of ethnocentrism and nationalistically mediated discourses experienced by the informants exemplify such regimes of truth.

4 Creation of the "immigrant", a generalized cultural image

According to the informants, Swedish media – and television in particular – contribute to essentialism in that all persons with a migrant background are placed within the discourse of "immigrant"². Referring to Swedish society at large, Darvishpour and Westin (2008: 16) state, "In the concept of immigrant, as it has come to be used in Sweden, social exclusion is built in. In one sense, being an immigrant means being non-Swedish; in a deeper sense, it means being nobody" (our translation). The informants assert that this mediated essentialism through the discourse of "immigrant" affects not only how migrants look at themselves, Swedish society and Swedes but also how Swedish people perceive immigrants and immigration. Thus, for the informants, the media undoubtedly has the power to influence society and its inhabitants, thereby, as some informants explicitly say, reinforcing existing discrimination and racism in society. In our study, this generalized media image of immigrants was a salient feature. The informants stated that media reinforce the idea that migrants are all the same, an image associated with negative issues. The following is an example of an oppositional reading from one of the informants:

I think TV in Sweden shows mostly the negative things about immigrants. It doesn't matter which land they come from. Its discrimination, and it can also affect people negatively, Swedes too. Then maybe they think everybody's like that. It's not true; everybody's not the same. (Man)

Another informant goes further and develops her thoughts on this issue to the wider consequences of exclusion and citizenship:

I want to say, well, when we watched TV news about somebody for some crime or something, they say, 'okay, he's an immigrant,' but many of them, they're born here. Maybe they have an immigrant background, say grandma or grandpa, doesn't matter. They came here to Sweden like 30, 40 years ago. Many are born here, so why do they say, 'immigrants do this, or immigrants don't do that'? If they're born here, they're citizens and everything, but just because they have different names or something. So, well, maybe I react this way because I think that if somebody is born in a country and is a citizen, then he belongs to that country, not a foreigner. (Woman)

The essentialism of media, whereby people with immigrant backgrounds are disfavoured, is evoking considerable stress among the informants as it affects their daily life – how they are met and perceived. One female informant mentioned how she fears the news coverage every time a major crime takes place. If an immigrant is suspected, all people with immigrant backgrounds are affected:

Well, if there's, you hear it if something's going on, like a murder or something, so they think, 'it's an immigrant that's done it' until it's proven that it wasn't an immigrant. If it wasn't an immigrant, 'oh, we can relax'. (Woman)

In these examples, it is evident how the informants position themselves within the discourse of "us and them": "we can relax", "they think", "they are born here" and "Swedes too". That media generalize and treat all immigrants the same as also mentioned by the children:

Yes, for instance, the news, they say, like, 'all black children,' you know, 'aren't good for the school, blah, blah, blah.' (14-year-old girl).

5 "Arabs and Muslims are terrorists"

Arab families, in particular, emphasized their dissatisfaction with the Swedish media and had seriously reflected on the media's role in affecting opinions and attitudes. They often had a critical stance towards mainstream Swedish media, which was not surprising, for it was these families who talked a great deal about racism and how Muslims are discriminated against on a daily basis. However, it is important to note that this critical stance did not imply that Swedish media were not consumed (see further Sjöberg & Rydin 2011). Relating to Hall's (1980) research on various reading positions, there are examples of oppositional readings, whereby the reader reflects on the dominating ideology of otherness as portrayed on Swedish television.

For example, a father discussed how racism in Swedish society also could be found in the media, creating an image of Muslims as a homogenous group with only negative features:

Some mass media, they don't work for peace, you see, they work more for segregation than for integration. I'm talking, I hope you don't misunderstand me, I'm not talking about Swedes. I'm talking, you know, part of society goes by the mass media, right? And there are many who've met before they were so kind and nice, but today they're completely different.

Again, I can say we're here in Sweden, but we don't live like the Swedish society. We live what George Bush says, what the US says about the world, about Muslims, Arabs, and terrorists. We live with the mass media today, unfortunately.

The 14-year-old son agreed with his parents, stating that it has become a popular style worldwide to perceive all Muslims as terrorists:

What you just said, is it the news that gives the wrong picture?
Yeah, it usually gives the wrong picture, for example, well, like now it's like the style, like wearing jeans. So it's just like what papa said that George Bush said, 'now Arabs and Muslims are terrorists.' So it's become the style over the whole world that, like, well, Arabs and Muslims are terrorists. You could say it's become a style.

According to this family, the Swedish media is governed by American cultural and political values, a kind of imperialism, they claim, which provides a distorted picture of the Middle East. This family, as well as other informants, pointed out that the media has contributed to an anti-Muslim and xenophobic discourse in which all Muslims are seen as terrorists after September 11. The family's line of argument can be related to van Dijk's research (1988) on how news as discourse reproduces existing and dominating structures and concepts in society, thus maintaining an "us-them" discourse, corresponding to various forms of oppositional readings among the informants in our study.

Another example illustrates how a woman felt offended when she took notice of a news story in which immigrants are depicted as "them", apparently less developed citizens whom have to be taught basic skills, such as cleaning and taking care of their personal hygiene:

I've never reacted. Before this, I haven't reacted. Afterwards, I started to react a lot to documentaries like that. There was, when an immigrant group came from, I don't know which country it was. Now I don't remember at all, oh well. So they took them up to Kiruna [a Swedish city in the far north]. I think it was because there was more room there, empty apartments. And then they showed interviews with the staff helping this group when they arrived, and they said, 'we had to teach them how to wash themselves, how to do the dishes, how to use dish soap.' I just held my head and thought, 'My God, are there cleaner people than those who live down there?' I mean we're not living in the Stone Age, not even down there.

In these discussions, statements were made concerning journalists' eagerness to find something sensational, and – owing to their lack of knowledge of how things really are – a biased and discriminatory image of immigrants and their homelands (see below) is given. According to informants, there is a lack of knowledge among journalists (and Swedes in general) regarding, for instance, Islam and actual living conditions among Muslim families. It was once again mentioned how the discourse "us and them" marks the media content, leading, in turn, to triviality, generalization and othering.

6 Portrayal of homelands and cultural values

Other talk of news media portrayals of migrants on TV was related to pictures or descriptions concerning the informants' homelands. In those cases, when they found that homelands were portrayed as less civilized than Western countries, rather than showing more nuanced descriptions of homelands, such stereotypical media images formed oppositional readings among the informants:

Can you give an example, something more concrete?

Mother: I don't remember any concrete things, but it's like that. I've had that feeling many times on different occasions. If they want to talk about Syria, you know, then they show a donkey or a poor man sitting on the street or something similar.

Daughter: Poor houses.

Poor houses?

Daughter: I mean the areas themselves.

Mother: But when they talk about another country, then you see the nice streets. We have nice streets, too, of course, nice houses in Damascus, but they don't film them.

Because that's the picture we get to see...

Mother: Yes, exactly.

Furthermore, informants felt offended by stereotypical portrayals of migrants in fictional television programmes. They mentioned how actors with immigrant backgrounds usually played the owner of a pizza place and how their accents were made fun of instead of showing successful immigrants with positive features. Similar lines of thought could be seen among the children:

Yeah, like ads on TV, it's usually a picture like that with a mother and her small child. The kid's covered with flies around its head and all. And you know, there aren't only colored people who are poor and need help. There are white people, too, who also need help, who aren't so rich and all. But they, you know in films like that and all, it's always colored people.

All together, such portrayals reinforce feelings of inferiority, or, as Darvishpour and Westin (2008: 16) would say, of "being nobody". The examples of media talk also illustrate how the media is perceived to take an ethnocentric point of view, whether inadvertently or deliberately, in relation to people with migrant backgrounds.

Besides one's homeland being portrayed as poor and miserable, another topic among the adult informants was the Western style of living (norms and values) shown on Swedish television, which was not considered as providing their children with a positive example. Daun (1994: 29), when studying the typical features of Swedish basic values, makes the conclusion that "Basic to the formation of values is that people tend to hold on to the familiar, to an already given environment and type of life they are used to. Values are one part of personal identity" (our translation). Talk concerning discrepancies in norms and value systems exemplify what Alasuutari (1999b: 98) has come to call ethical realism, whereby media content is evaluated according to the extent to which it provides proper ethical models of life. Views on sexual behaviour provide a striking example:

Do you think there's a difference, I mean Swedish?

Yes, not just a little—there's a big difference. On Arab channels, for example, sorry, for example, they don't show sex, well, but unfortunately on Swedish channels, they show [sex].

There's too much nakedness?

Yes, exactly nakedness, everything. I want to tell you one thing—the first to us is religion. ... Religion and tradition, it's almost the same in that way, anyway, especially on this situation. In our Islam, it's forbidden, for instance, that I see her [daughter] when she's naked, looking at her is forbidden. (Woman)

Adults primarily raised these discussions on rules of living and morals in relation to one's religion and culture. It was clear that parents and children did not always share the same opinions on what constituted a good programme. For example, one mother described how she tried to get her 14-year-old daughter to watch television programmes with educational content or programmes from her parents' homeland rather than Swedish and American series filled with "violence and sex". The statement, "That's nothing for you," got the reply, "But all young people watch it, so why not me?" To summarize, the parents took an oppositional reading position in moral matters here referring to their religious beliefs and culture in the homeland, whereas the children seemed to take a preferred reading position that corresponded to the mainstream value system of Swedish society as well as youth culture values.

7 "We get to suffer with them": seeking alternatives

Even if freedom of expression in Sweden was highly valued among the informants, some informants – in particular, citizens from the Middle East – were sceptical to the objectivity of Swedish media.

You know this picture they give, mass media plays a big role but sometimes it plays a negative role when it comes to portraying reality in the Middle East. ... They [Swedes] think that they [Palestinians] are barbaric. They don't have anything to – they just think, 'kill people', you know. It's not like that. For example, they don't give this picture in reality. Why should people do this? They will sacrifice their life for their country. Swedes never understand this. They'll never understand it because it's something that's a part of these, you know, and the mass media they – 'well, it's the terrorists. Look what they do. Five poor Israelis have died.' But how many Palestinians have died on the other side? (Man)

According to this informant, the Swedish media has difficulties in representing the full complexity of the conflicts going on in the Middle East; indeed, the media are even perceived as partial in this respect. The informant did not trust the Swedish media and could not identify himself with how events are portrayed there. He took a very clear oppositional reading position, and, as is seen in the excerpt, the discourse "us and them" was explicitly stressed with statements such as "Swedes never understand this", reflecting experiences of disconnections in society.

To be familiar with events in their former homelands, informants with, for example, origins in the Middle East, chose transnational satellite channels such as *Al-Jazeera* and *Al-Arabiya*, most of which were trusted. The following is one example from a discussion about *Al-Jazeera*:

It sees the truth, *Al-Jazeera*, and the naked truth. If people here don't care so much that they don't want to see the whole truth.

You mean the other channels?

I mean here. The public doesn't want to see the truth. They don't want to see death, for example, or they want – We get to see them. We get to suffer with them. When you, for example, read sometimes in *XX*³ [a local daily newspaper] – I don't know if you've seen it. It was big news that talked about Israel, how many houses were pushed down, but we got to see the pictures. We got to see the children who lived outside, the girls crying. We got to see the blood running on the floor, so when you read about it in the newspaper, it's not exactly like when we see it, right?

But then you mean that Al-Jazeera gives the correct picture?

Yes, exactly. And the difference is that here on *Al-Jazeera*, for example, we wouldn't watch *Al-Jazeera* if it was exactly like the other channels because we want to see what's happening with our relatives, but here in Sweden, nobody cares if, well, if you see a lot about Israel or about Palestine. (Woman)

Al-Jazeera and *Al-Arabiya* stood for preferred reading positions among informants of Arabic origin and can be seen as an outcome of the feeling of exclusion and public disconnection experienced through Swedish television. With expressions such as "they don't want to see the truth," "we got to see the pictures" and "here in Sweden nobody cares," the feeling of public disconnection, to use Couldry's

(2006: 327) term, is evident. The mediated public world is divided between “us and them”, which results in a lack of understanding and living in two different worlds, or, as Foucault (1980: 131) would have expressed it, looking at the world from different ideological horizons with their own “regimes of truth”.

Al-Jazeera is seen here as providing a true image of reality and as portraying people of the same religion and nationality as the informants; however, some took a critical stand on these types of channels. Although those informants who brought up Middle Eastern issues during the interview had a predominantly positive attitude towards *Al-Jazeera*. This channel presented an alternative and seemed to address people with migrant backgrounds from a different perspective than Swedish television. For Arabic migrants, the channel signals recognition of setting, scenery and programme presenters, evoking feelings of identification, inclusion and public connection. Among our informants, the fact that the channel reports directly from a specific country and that comments are given by ordinary people, with the same origin as themselves, on the streets was seen as evidence of the channel's great credibility, which invited preferred readings. Madiano (2005: 533) used the expression “symbolic exclusion” to signify this position of majority media. Hence, reliability becomes a key factor in whether or not viewers will identify with media content (Auter, Arafa & Al-Jaber 2005: 195). Once again, the possibility to identify oneself with the content, newsreaders and journalists was stressed; it is important to feel familiarity, to feel sympathy, to find out what is happening with friends and relatives in ones homeland (i.e. aspects often absent in Swedish news).

8 Belonging and identification

The need for identification and belonging was a common topic for discussion in the interviews. The informants expressed the opinion that viewers' own personal experiences in the new country should be reflected more in TV programmes, and that Swedish television would be more appealing if more people with immigrant backgrounds participated in the programmes; thus, there was a wish for more diversity. According to the informants, this is achieved not only by directing specific programmes at people with an immigrant background but also by increasing knowledge and understanding of today's diverse Sweden among the entire population, including media producers. Despite there being a need for more targeted programmes on Swedish television, this may also be problematic. According to some informants, a division between Swedish programmes and programmes for minorities – in particular, multicultural/diversity programmes – would risk reinforcing the existing segregation in society. Others stressed the importance of programmes in minorities' own languages for news and important societal information. Still others asked for entertainment programmes representing diversity for promoting inclusive processes and reflecting a diverse society as well as addressing a wider audience. Andreassen (2011) used the programme *Idol* as an example of an entertainment programme representing a broad spectrum of actors from a variety of ethnic groups competing on equal terms. In our study, informants specifically mentioned the television series *The Knife in My Heart* (*Kniven i hjärtat*). The fictional programme portrays the brutal reality of life for immigrant youth and their families in a suburb outside Gothenburg, and many parallels were drawn to the viewers' own personal experiences. Here is an excerpt from an interview with a mother:

When I saw the series the first time, I recognized much from my own experiences, my oldest son also ran into troubles, so I recognized some parts that they showed 'ohh this part I recognize, my son has done the same thing.'

This woman took a preferred reading stance, implying a desire of identification (cf. Livingstone 1998; Gauntlett & Hill 1999). According to Hall (1980: 130), there is often a lack of equivalence in the communicative exchange in relation to a specific content and its lack of meaningfulness to the “reader”. Nevertheless, fiction and drama could play a role in creating such a communicative exchange in the reception process – an exchange influenced by, to use the reasoning of Barker and Andre (1996: 34), two ways of understanding realism: naturalism and emotionalism. While the former is based on whether or not a viewer thinks something portrayed in media can happen in real life, the latter depends on the extent to which a programme can be related to the viewer's own life and personal experiences. Thus, the series *The Knife in My Heart* was enjoyed due to its high extent of portrayed natural and emotional realism. According to the informants in our study, more effort should be invested in hiring people with immigrant backgrounds not only as producers but also as participants in the broadcast output as a whole. This refers not only to series, news and soaps but also to films and music programmes like *Idol*. The informants mentioned the latter in positive terms because it often represented people of ethnic identities other than Swedish (cf. Andreassen 2011). Furthermore, as previously mentioned, the ability to recognize places and current societal issues is a decisive factor in constructing belonging and inclusion in media coverage.

9 Conclusions: Discursive identifications

As discussed initially, Nordic media research has generally focused on textual analyses of, for example, programmes to study representations of migration, refugees, racism and xenophobia. In this study, we have focused on people with migrant backgrounds and their talk concerning media representations on these matters, paying specific attention to Swedish television. During these conversations, it was apparent that the informants were concerned about the Swedish media's role in the inclusion/exclusion processes. They were familiar with a variety of media discourses: national (Swedish), transnational and from their homelands. The informants' discourses dealt with all kinds of recognitions and emotional attachments to media images and reportages. These experiences, coupled with a personal journey of cultural change, have likely contributed to an ideological sensitivity that made the participants in this study observant of portrayals of migrants as well as media representations of social and political events of relevance to them. Fairclough (1995: 14) defines ideologies as “propositions that generally figure as implicit assumptions in texts, which contribute to producing or reproducing unequal relations of power.” An important question here becomes how people position themselves in relation to the various public discourses they face in encountering the media and in society in general. Hall (1997: 60) stated, “We take up the positions indicated by the discourse, identify with them, subject ourselves to its meanings and become its ‘subjects’.” In other words, in media readings, the informants position themselves in relation to how migrants and minorities are portrayed and mediated in migrant discourses. While critical voices often demurred to Swedish television, indicating oppositional reading positions, less of this was seen when discussing media from the homeland or transnational/exile media, where preferred reading

positions seemed prevalent. Among informants from the Middle East, in particular, transnational media such as *Al-Jazeera* provided a true depiction of reality, although some objections were raised against exposure to too much violence. Transnational media seemed to be important to overcome the feeling of being the “other”, for confirming ethnic identity, and for providing local information of relevance. Swedish news media, on the other hand, was not conceived of as particularly alert either in reporting news relevant to minority groups or in creating the potential for identification – not even the public service channels, despite their multi-cultural/diversity mission.

The ideological sensitivity seemed to work differently in different media discourses, and one might talk about various ideological horizons (Nohrstedt 2007: 11). Involving ideological representation of reality and which are being articulated in the production of media and media representations and in the reception (positioning) of these media texts and their discourses. Thus, according to Nohrstedt, a certain ideological horizon enables us to see certain things (i.e. including specific discourses), but it also prevents us from seeing other things (i.e. excluding specific discourses). Looking at the world through a certain ideological horizon may work as a type of “regime of truth”, as Foucault (1980: 131) would have expressed it. In many respects, the ideological horizons are probably different for people with migrant backgrounds as compared with the majority population within a national context – in this case, Sweden.

The implications of this study on a broader societal level can be related to the Swedish official policy of integration, which is a key word in the Swedish official and public discourse on migration and refugee policy. For example, Hellgren (2008: 81) claims that Sweden as a multicultural society is a myth, but ideally, the transformation of Swedish society should be geared to “a project of mutual integration, in which the ethnic majority and various ethnic minority groups collaborate and together construct a common social community” (our translation). However, according to the informants, the mainstream media’s discursive (hegemonic) power is strong in maintaining exclusion and symbolic segregation rather than being inclusive and promoting mutual understanding. The negative and biased media portrayal of migrants positions them as “the other” in Swedish society; consequently, their gaze is geared towards an oppositional reading of mainstream media texts. This is problematic, especially as Swedish public service media has an obligation to follow a diversity policy combined with the ambition to reflect and even “mirror” a diverse Sweden. Scholars within media and journalism studies have long emphasized the need for national media to reflect the diverse nature of society; they have also stressed that people with immigrant backgrounds should not only be media users but also, to a larger extent, be working as media producers (Sreberny 2005; Olausson

2006), as well as actors and programme presenters in order to contribute to a more diverse staffing of programmes (Horsti & Hultén 2011; Rydin 2013). However, there seems to be a long way to go before these ideas come to fruition. Finally, in light of the findings from the present study, the idea of civic culture advocated by Couldry (2006: 327), which implies that media has a role in creating an arena for citizens to “share an orientation to a public world where matters of common concern are addressed” appears to be a utopian thought.

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Notes

- 1 Full title: Media Practices in the new country. Children, Youth, Family and Ethnicity. The project was funded by the Swedish Research Council (2004–2006).
- 2 In the project “Media practices in the new country”, the word immigrant is only used when being uttered by other researchers or the informants in the project.
- 3 All families involved were assured that the material would be confidential. Including in which cities they lived.

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