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## Transnational orientations in a global media landscape: Youth, media, war and conflict

**Kurzfassung:** Der vorliegende Aufsatz befasst sich mit der Rolle der Medien für die Re-Imagination und Reproduktion (Rekonstruktion) norwegischer Identitäten und Gemeinwesen mit spezifischem Fokus auf der Art und Weise wie jugendliche Migranten Nachrichten über Krieg und Konflikt in ihrem Herkunftsland (oder dem ihrer Eltern) verfolgen. Die Untersuchung stützt sich auf Fokusgruppen von Jugendlichen aus pakistanischen, afghanischen und tamilischen Diasporas sowie auf ein online-Survey. Den drei Gruppen teilen die Erfahrung des Versuches, sich ein Leben in einem Land (Norwegen) aufzubauen, während ihre Familie und Freunde in ihrem Herkunftsland politische Gewalt und Bürgerkrieg erleben. Die Ergebnisse der Untersuchung lassen ein beachtliches Maß an Frustration und Skeptizismus gegenüber den norwegischen Medien erkennen. Die Informanten benutzen internationale Medien und Medien aus ihrem Herkunftsland in einer aktiven Art und Weise und empfinden diese oft als glaubwürdiger und relevantere Informationen enthaltend als die norwegischen Medien. Sie üben auch eine scharfe Kritik daran, wie die Medien darauf reagieren, wenn "die anderen" Opfer von Gewalt werden, und einige der Untersuchungsteilnehmer zeigen eine negative Reaktion auf die Vernachlässigung einer positiven Berichterstattung über die jeweiligen Herkunftsländer sowie auf die Feindseligkeit der Medien gegenüber Muslimen.

**Abstract:** This article reflects on the role of media in the re-imagination and reproduction (reconstruction) of Norwegian identities and communities with a particular focus on how young people within diasporas follow news on war and conflict in their (or their parents') countries of origin. The research employs focus groups with young people from the Pakistani, Afghan, and Tamil Diasporas, and also online surveys. The three groups share the experience of trying to build a life in another country (Norway), while their family and friends in the "homeland" experience political violence and civil war. We identify a notable sense of frustration and skepticism towards Norwegian media. The informants actively use international media and media from the homeland, and often find these more reliable and providing more relevant information than Norwegian media. They also voice a strong critique of the ways in which the media react when "the others" are victims of violence, and several participants react negatively towards the neglect of positive reporting from their respective homelands, and to media hostility towards Muslims.

*I feel sad if something bad happens – and glad if something good happens  
– for example, if the U. S. stops bombing Pakistan.*  
"Knut"

## Introduction

In this article we reflect on the media experiences and views of groups of young people in Norway with ties to homelands (or their parents' homeland) afflicted by war and conflict. Our aim is through mapping these experiences to identify their sense of belonging to a variety of imagined media-user communities – "here" and "elsewhere." Thus, this study has a narrower approach than general studies of migrant youth and media relations/consumption. We realize that research is a learning process through which we may come to understand more about "transnational literacy" (Sanders & Spivak 2006) through the experiences of young people's reflections on their own variety of media relations.

The creation of a coherent imagined community is often connected to mass media and media technology (Anderson, 2006), and mass communication and media have traditionally been seen as pivotal in the production of an imagined community of Norwegians (Eriksen, 1995, p. 384). In recent years, media fragmentation has, due to the development of new digital media, to some extent given way to more multi-centered and fluid media usage (Eriksen, 2012). The new mass media are more or less organized to transcend territorial frameworks such as the nation state (Christiansen, 2004).

Over the last 40 to 50 years, Norway has increasingly experienced a number of global processes that contest the notion of one homogenous nation, one language and shared culture, and a universally shared imagination of history. Starting with labor immigrants from Pakistan and Northern Africa in the early 1970s, the expansion of the EU and a general growth in the Norwegian labor market represent a significant change in immigration to Norway.<sup>1</sup>

This article draws on results from a study employing both focus groups and an online survey to reflect on the role of media in the life worlds of young people within diaspora groups that trace their origins to conflict-ridden nations. The study includes groups of youths, mainly between 18 and 25, belonging to the Afghan, Pakistani, and Tamil minorities in Norway.

1. In 2011, 79,500 persons migrated to Norway, 64 percent from EU-countries, with people from Poland, Sweden and Lithuania as the largest groups. At the beginning of 2012, immigrants and the children of immigrants constituted 13 percent of the total population of Norway, originating from 219 different countries. The largest groups from countries outside of Europe are from Pakistan (33 000), Somalia (29 000) and Iraq (27 000). Source: St.Meld. 6 (White Paper, 2012): En helhetlig integreringspolitikk ? Mangfold og fellesskap. Barne-, likestillings- og inkluderingsdepartementet.

The research questions are the following:

1. What are their opinions on Norwegian media in general and on the coverage of their/parents' homeland in particular? Do they find it reliable and trustworthy?
2. To what extent are diasporic youth using media from their homeland? Do they find them reliable and trustworthy?
3. What other international media do they use to stay informed on developments in their homeland, and what is their evaluation of these media?
4. To what extent do diaspora youth employ social media and other types of communication?

Media consumption is a social practice in which the cultural-geographical orientation of the media consumer takes a concrete form (Christiansen, 2004), thus mapping the usage among diasporic youth can elucidate these central questions. This article is based on observations of major changes in young people's media habits and an increasing number of youth having a transnational and diversified media orientation (Haavisto 2011, Elvestad & Fogt 2010, Mainsah 2009, Tufte 2003). Young people spend less time using traditional media than their parents' generation and possess other media skills in a number of areas.<sup>1</sup>

### **Diaspora: The importance of identity**

Diaspora can be described as a decentralized relation to ethnicity, meaning real or imagined relations among scattered people who sustain a sense of community through various forms of communication and contact and who do not depend on returning to a distant homeland (Georgiou, 2006, p. 3). The word diaspora comes from the Greek, meaning "to disseminate;" and describes people who have voluntarily or forcibly left their homeland and settled in new regions of the world. Georgiou discusses the need for a reconceptualization of diaspora "to address the global, transnational experiences of diasporic groups and individuals who construct new and hybrid belongings in relation to the country of origin, the country of settlement and through the routes of their diasporic journey" (Georgiou, 2006, p. 4). Thus, this article also tries to identify a sense of "contrapuntal reading" (Said 1994) from the cited experiences of our sources.

Those born into diaspora families, at times called "2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants," at times "1<sup>st</sup> generation citizens/Norwegians" (Eide 2011), may tend to develop their own culture in a way that both safeguards their cultural heritage, and also alters it in new directions. "The development of diasporic cultures necessarily questions essentialist models, interrogating the ideology of a unified, 'natural' cultural norm, one that underpins the center/margin model of colonialist discourse" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1999, p. 70). Diasporic identity can thus be characterized by a tension between relations of belonging to some kind of "original homeland," now left behind, and to the place of settlement and the larger national community found there (Clifford, 1997). Several theorists underline Georgiou's notion of diaspora as being characterized by a kind of longing for the homeland. Among refugees, this longing is often ambivalent, since threatening regimes of the very same homeland have driven them away (Alinejad, 2011). On the other hand, stories may still be kept alive among the same refugees about a more peaceful and harmonious homeland past, nurtured by generational memories.

### **Diasporic youth and media usage**

Previous research on immigrants and media usage has often focused on access to and use of TV channels and TV programs from the homeland, and a connection is often inferred between high usage of these channels and a low degree of integration into society (Andersen & Thoresen, 2012). It has also been pointed out that this transnational consumption undermines national TV-channels as integrating agents for the nation of residence (Christiansen, 2004).

With the growth of new digital media, this picture has changed, and recent research shows that Internet is now the major source of information and entertainment from the homeland for different diasporas (Andersen & Thoresen, 2012). Youth today use the widest range of different media compared to all other age groups, and they also belong to the first generation growing up with the newest technology, including the smartphone as a media platform (Kobbernagel, Schrøder, & Drotner, 2011). This makes the Internet more easily accessible for the younger generation, and it is used in many different ways; to gain access to information and news, for entertainment and gaming; and for communication with friends and family. But this "digital generation" also uses "old" media such as newspapers and books, and diaspora youth do this to a greater extent than youth in general (Kobbernagel, et al., 2011, p. 22). Even though the high media usage among diaspora youth is well documented, less is known about what kinds of news sources they prefer, and to what extent they orientate themselves towards national and international media or media from their homeland.

Through new media and the development of opinion spaces, blogs and social networking sites, the established relationships

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1. Norsk mediebarometer 2011; <http://www.ssb.no/a/publikasjoner/pdf/sa128/sa128.pdf>

between media producers and media consumers have to some extent been uprooted (Mandiberg, 2012). Active consumer participation is blurring the line between these two, and is opening up for many new directions of mediated conversation and content. The possibility not only to use a multitude of sources for information, but also to participate in providing and spreading it, empowers previously passive media consumers who once had to rely on established news media and their framing and worldview of current events. This is also connected to the belief that information technology could stimulate the growth of new global networks that are able to alter fundamental power relations in society, and the belief that participants themselves could directly distribute important information to their audiences without the mediation of journalists. In recent years it has become clear that civic journalism and online networks will not necessarily replace mainstream journalism, but that a long-term effect of the Internet is the development of a robust mode of independent and critical journalism within the traditional institutions of professional news production (Krøvel, 2012, Waisbord 2013).

With the expanded options provided by these changes in media technology, pivotal changes arise for international broadcasters and the global audiences that they serve (Gillespie & Webb, 2013). The growth of new international media has been explosive, and these new arrivals are making inroads in the dominant positions of CNN, BBC and other Western global media, challenging the hegemonic position they have held for many years. Seib (Seib, 2008) calls it the "The Al-Jazeera effect." At the same time, a traditional broadcaster like BBC World Service still manages to create intimacy and connections with its audiences across the globe through their diasporic engagement (Gillespie & Webb, 2013).

## Methodology

With this critical approach, we have invited focus groups to share their media orientations and meaning-making with us. The survey will mainly be exploratory (Gentikow, 2005) and holistic (Ragin, 1987).

A group interview or focus group can be described as a methodology where several people are discussing a topic with a researcher as chair and moderator (Gentikow, 2005, p. 85). Such a group is often composed of people who share one or more characteristics; such as friends, colleagues, religious background, etc. The intention is that shared points of reference at any level can generate an expression of collective experiences and attitudes, and that focus groups may thus have a greater general relevance than would individual interviews. The method is used to grasp various types of argument within a group and to determine how, for instance, a group reaches consensus – or does not – on an issue. Focus groups can solve a challenge that exists in the individual interview; they go beyond individual case studies and invite interpretations with greater socio-cultural or universal relevance. According to Gentikow, this makes focus groups a good tool to extract information about specific social and cultural experiences or interpretations of a phenomenon. A focus group can also have a very limited aim – as when asked to discuss a particular media output (newspaper articles etc., see Haavisto 2011).

One advantage of focus groups is that the interviewer or chair may appear less authoritarian or threatening than in individual interviews. The discussion may flow more naturally, and in this way, participants' ability to express themselves in their own words and with their actual opinions may be strengthened. In such a conversation, the participants have the opportunity to elaborate, comment and argue with each other. This can provide a richer set of data than in individual interviews. At the same time, there is also the risk that a few voices in the focus groups will dominate the discussion and disproportionately influence the perspectives and arguments put forward. The topics for discussion, as well as the composition, are relevant factors when it comes to size. The size of the focus groups varies, and there is no template for what is the ideal focus group. Some theorists recommend 6-12 people, others 4-8 (Fern, 2001). Some of the studies within the Nordic countries have dealt with very young informants (Hagen 2003, Tufte 2003) and are not specifically about media use linked to war and conflict. In this research study, all participants were 18 years old or older.

In addition to the focus groups, we employed an online survey using QuestBack.<sup>1</sup> The online survey asks many of the same questions as the ones discussed in the focus groups, on the use of Norwegian media, international media, media from the various homelands/parents' homelands, trust in different media, evaluations of different aspects of the media, etc. There are several potential benefits from combining focus groups with online surveys. First, the latter allow the respondents to voice their opinions on all the questions anonymously. It thus potentially allows the inclusion of a broader variety of responses. Second, it adds to the reflection on possible patterns or structures in the responses given, at least guiding a more systematic reflection on the connections between observations and possible explanations. Third, a survey includes numerous fields for self-reflection, providing helpful inputs for a qualitative interpretation of the responses. The number of respondents in each group of the online survey is too small to be used for generalizing purposes (49 responses in total: Afghanistan (12), Pakistan (23) and Tamil Eelam (14)).

Recruitment both to the online survey and the focus groups was done by research assistants who started with established contacts within the respective diasporic communities. The "snowball" effect (Gentikow, 2005), where contacts are asked

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1. For more on the software: <http://www1.questback.com/>

to find new contacts, proved useful. One challenge with this approach (where people are asked to "spread the word") is that it is difficult to estimate the total number of persons who received or obtained knowledge of the invitation to participate. Furthermore, difficulties in achieving gender equality within the focus groups led to additional rounds of recruitment within the existing networks. The result was a second focus group of Afghan youths, since the original group consisted only of males. Most of the participants in the focus groups also completed the Internet survey. By using this type of recruitment, one effect may be that some of the participants are acquaintances or know of each other, and the recruitment may thus be limited to a particular environment. Consequently, there is a danger that an important diversity of opinions might be under-represented in the groups. In this study, the number of people contacted was quite high, with a high degree of variation in type of work/studies and residence, which reduced the possibility of very close connections between participants. But several of the participants in the focus groups were clearly acquainted – or had roots in the same area in the previous/parents' homeland, and this was also expressed by them. This was the case particularly in the Tamil group, and entails that they could possibly have discussed among themselves the various topics treated in the focus groups. On the other hand, the questions asked during the group encounters were not known to them in advance. Another aspect is that patterns of immigration to Norway show that some areas in particular recruit newcomers; which may explain the relative lack of diversity.

The young people included in our research were both born in and outside of Norway, and some have lived there as little as three years; but all were able to communicate well in Norwegian. Their relations to their/parents' homeland turned out to be very diverse, which provided for interesting reflections in the groups, as well as in the team of researchers.

The recruitment of an equal number of men and women posed certain problems. In the Pakistani group (12 participants), only four were girls, and our first attempt with Afghan youths resulted in an all-male group (8 participants). Later we organized a new focus group for Afghan youth, and this time the majority of the participants were girls (4 out of 6 participants). In the Tamil group (6 participants) there were three women and three men. While we aimed at gender balance, looking for gender differences was not an important part of our study, as the numbers of participants are very small.

The focus group meetings took place in the localities of Oslo and Akershus University College for Applied Sciences. In the Afghan and Pakistani meetings, two researchers were present to serve as chairs; and research assistants in three of them. In the Tamil meeting, one researcher and one research assistant were present. We employed a semi-structured interview guide containing open questions about media orientation. For accuracy, a combination of written notes and sound recordings was used. This also created a methodological problem. Sound recording ensures that everything said is registered, but not necessarily who said what. Here written notes are helpful. At the beginning of the meeting, the participants agreed to the use of sound recordings. In a conversation about personal media usage, sensitive information may be presented, and thus the participants were guaranteed anonymity. This means that personal and background information is not included in this article. Since the focus groups in this study are organized according to country of origin, and the age span is limited, there is always a possibility of someone identifying the participants, but the Pakistani, Afghan and Tamil youth groups in Norway are not so small that there is a risk of the identification of participants based on these two criteria alone. To ensure anonymity, each participant was given an alias before the interview, and these names were used both by the participants and the chairs throughout the sessions.

The researchers' roles as moderators and chairs may vary from that of a passive observer to a very active role in asking questions and establishing a clear presence (Fern, 2001). The direction the discussion took would be decisive for which of the above-mentioned open questions required maintaining an ongoing conversation. In general, it was easy to follow the flow of the conversation, and there was no "competition" for attention. The chairs tried to keep a low profile and not interfere more than was necessary in the discussions. In the findings, all quotes and references to individual participants are from the focus groups. When we refer to results from the online survey, we clearly indicate this in the text.

For the survey, we used statistical analysis, making comparisons between the diaspora groups on the different variables in the online survey. In addition, we employed qualitative analyses of the questionnaire spaces that the survey included, which provided an opportunity for self-reflection. For the focus groups, the qualitative analysis was thematically structured according to the discussions that took place in the groups. Each focus group interview was held using the same interview guide, to make possible comparative analyses of the group exchanges.

### **Findings: Proficiency, variety and distrust**

In the focus group with participants of Pakistani origin, the majority of the participants were born in Norway, but some of those born in Norway had spent from one to several years in their parents' homeland. Collectively, they seem internationally oriented, and several explained that their usage of media is related to the places where they spend their time. At home with their parents, they often watch a Pakistani TV channel; while on their own, they may rather use *vg.no* (the largest online newspaper in Norway). They report that they spend an average of from 30 minutes to an hour on news media every day.

The participants in the two Afghan focus groups have lived in Norway for a shorter period than the Pakistani youth. Most of the participants were born in Afghanistan or as refugees in one of the neighboring countries, and some have only recently arrived in Norway. Their time spent on news media ranges from 20 minutes to several hours a day. They use a wide range of Norwegian, Afghan and international media. As in the Pakistani group, the choice of media depends on where they spend their time, and on what subjects they seek information. They also actively use smartphones and other digital devices, typically to read *vg.no* or listen to radio on their way to and from school/work.

The participants in the Tamil focus group were all, with one exception, born in Norway. Their media consumption varies from ten minutes to several hours a day. They also choose media depending on where they spend their time and what information they seek, but the average use of Norwegian national media is much higher than in the other groups, as well when they want information on international issues. Many of the participants express a marked difference in media usage compared to their parents' generation. Very few participants in this group read newspapers on a regular basis, and all list online news as their main source of information.

According to one young Afghan, the daily consumption of different media is tailored to suit his range of interests:

Johan: "For me it depends on the issues. When it comes to international issues, I use the big ones, Washington Post, The New York Times. The Norwegian tabloids VG and Dagbladet are a bit behind. BBC also gives a certain insight into Afghanistan. In addition, I use Outlook Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> These I trust. Other Afghan media are more marked by propaganda, like Kabul Express and other newspapers. I also watch videos from Tolo TV on Youtube."<sup>2</sup>

This young man may be characterized as having a very internationalist attitude to media consumption, well aware of the prominent US news sites, and critically evaluating the homeland media. The Norwegian media are, according to him, unsatisfactory when it comes to foreign news.

The high media consumption and the preference for digital media are seen in other studies of youth media usage (Kobbernagel, et al., 2011; Livingstone & Bovill, 2001). In a Danish survey, immigrant youth and the children of immigrants had a higher average use of news media than youth with a Danish family background. They also read more newspapers, used new digital devices (such as smartphones) much more frequently to stay informed, and were more active users of social media (Drotner, 2011). As mentioned before, this study is too small for generalizing purposes concerning the media usage of minority youth in Norway. Surveys from Statistic Norway, show, for instance, that the immigrant population has poorer digital skills compared to the population in general. At the same time, this competence varies depending on factors such as gender, age, educational level and country of origin. These surveys also find that the children of immigrants born in Norway have the same or higher digital competence as "ethnic" Norwegian youth.<sup>3</sup> Another explanation for the high degree of media usage among the participants may be that persons accepting an invitation to participate in a study of this character are probably more disposed to be interested in media as such.

### Norwegian soldiers and the value of life

In all the focus groups there is a varied, and to a certain extent, regular use of different Norwegian media products. There is a general feeling of disapproval and skepticism, both towards the way in which Norwegian media represent minorities in general, and towards the way in which their or their parents' homeland is portrayed. In the online survey, one of 49 respondents has a "somewhat positive impression" of the Norwegian media coverage of their homeland, while more than a third has a "mostly negative" impression.<sup>4</sup> Some of the participants behave like "Johan," they use Norwegian media solely to stay informed about Norwegian issues, and switch to other media, international or media from their/parents' homeland for international news or news about their homeland. The survey also shows that Norwegian media score much lower with regard to trust than do international media and media from the homelands. Some of the Afghan youths also use Norwegian media as an aid in learning Norwegian. This was also shown in a study of Cameroonians in Oslo, which concluded that the use of Norwegian media was an important factor in adjusting to Norwegian society, while at the same time the everyday media representation of immigrants was seen as provoking feelings of exclusion and marginalization (Mainsah, 2009, pp. 118-119). The dual or multiple identities become apparent when we see how Norwegian and Tamil media are used for different purposes by Tamils in Norway<sup>5</sup>. The consumption of Tamil media helps in maintaining a sense of identity with

1. Daily Outlook Afghanistan is an Internet newspaper in English; <http://outlookafghanistan.net>. According to Wikipedia (28/09/2011), it is the "the first English newspaper of Afghanistan. It covers national and international news with 10,000 circulation published by Afghanistan Group of Newspapers, an independent media group which also publishes The Daily Afghanistan, the largest Persian and Pushtu paper in Afghanistan."
2. Tolo TV is the most popular TV-station in Afghanistan, founded in 2004 by MOBY Group, and an Afghan-Australian.
3. SSB: Undersøkelsen *Ferdigheter i bruk av datamaskin og Internett*. <http://www.ssb.no/teknologi-og-innovasjon/artikler-og-publikasjoner/mange-innvandrere-digitalt-ekskludert>
4. Based on 49 responses from Afghanistan (12), Pakistan (23) and Tamil Eelam (14).
5. In this study, the participants were between 20 and 50 years old.

their country of origin, while Norwegian media help in developing an understanding and allegiance to their country of settlement (Chelliah, 2012).

In the Pakistani focus group, very few mention NRK – Norwegian Public Broadcasting – as a preferred news medium, while more participants mention TV2 and their round-the-clock news channel. Many are able to recognize the names of the best-known Norwegian-Pakistani journalists, especially the names of those working for TV2.

In the Tamil focus group, the use of Norwegian media is more frequent, but they are also skeptical of the representations of minorities. The main media in use are VG, *Dagbladet* (both tabloid, non-subscription) and *Aftenposten* (subscription, Norway's largest print newspaper). The first two are the most popular, but the last is by far the most trusted media among the participants. Almost everybody mentions *Aftenposten* when asked which media they trust the most, together with NRK and TV 2.

When it comes to Norwegian media coverage of their homeland, the Afghan participants wish for more in-depth coverage, and react negatively to certain perspectives often taken by the media.

Lars: "Norwegian media should use more resources to cover what is going on in Afghanistan. It is important for the citizens. The Norwegian government and its military are spending a huge amount of resources. What have they been doing there these 11-12 years? The media should show this to the population. "

In the Afghan focus group, Eivind expresses frustration with the framing of news from Afghanistan based on a certain understanding of Norwegian identity. He specifically mentions the coverage of a Taliban attack on Kabul, and criticizes VG for focusing on Norwegian soldiers taking part in the battle. The footage accompanying the story showed soldiers with Norwegian flag badges on their shoulders. Several group members address the issue of how different persons' lives seem to be valued differently. As Lisa says: "When an American soldier kills Afghans, it is one minute – and over in Norwegian TV. When an Afghan kills some foreigners, there is much more. In Al Jazeera it is different." Others are preoccupied with the lack of explicit details in covering the Afghan war and again use Al Jazeera as an example. On the other hand, Afghans seem frustrated by the one-sidedness of the news: "Killings happen practically every day, you know. We cannot think about it," says Grete, and Lise adds that they get used to it.

The Tamil group makes this same observation of the Norwegian framing of news. When the civil war raged in 2009, large demonstrations were held by the Tamil diaspora in Norway. The news stories filed on this event mainly focused on the demonstration itself, and less on the situation in Sri Lanka. Adding to this picture, the Tamil participants mention the difficulties journalists face in their attempts to get accurate information about Tamil areas in Sri Lanka due to censorship and strict control by the Sri Lankan government.

Several of the Pakistani participants wish for more positive news from Pakistan, and regard the Norwegian news coverage as extremely negative. "I feel sad when something negative happens, glad if there is something good, such as when the US stops bombing in Pakistan" (Nils). However, they give a few positive examples, such as Telenor's operations in Pakistan and other Norwegian business ventures that contribute to connecting the two countries.

Erik: "They should bring more of those stories – e.g., Telenor, etc. Business is done and money is made."

Knut: "There are many negative stories about immigrants, especially Muslims. Even when it's something positive, the focus becomes negative. "Girls are doing well, BUT boys are not." For many Norwegians newspapers are the only contact with minorities."

We can here observe the conversation starting with Pakistan before shifting to the representation of immigrants in Norway. This illustrates the connectedness of these two seemingly separate fields of media representations (Eide & Simonsen, 2005, 2007, 2008).

There is also visible frustration in the Afghan groups when it comes to the coverage of immigrants in Norway.

Torbjørn: "There are heated debates on the websites of *Dagbladet* and VG. You see how the average Norwegian thinks. It is interesting. When it comes to news about crimes committed by foreigners, then we see what perspective people have. Sometimes it is sad to see how people think. "

Terje says that there is an over-emphasis on traditional Muslim garments, niqabs and hijabs, in Norwegian media. He cites several reasons for female adherence to these traditions: some wear them because they do not want to be harassed by men; others are forced to wear them, something he disapproves of. "But there is not just this hardship. What about all the young girls who work and attend Universities?" Some in the Pakistani group are also concerned with the way freedom of expression is handled by Norwegian media. As Erik says: "Freedom of expression has its limits; one cannot say anything one wants to others," while some group members point out that the Prophet Mohammed is venerated by more than a billion people around the globe.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Here they are clearly referring to *Jyllandsposten's* publication of the Mohammed cartoons (2005) and its aftermath.

When asked about their use of comment spaces in various media, not many answer positively. Thorbjørn says he never engages in these debates, while Johan has participated in a few. In the Tamil group, one of the participants, Martin, was both active and strategic in his use of these spaces in Norwegian news sites, especially with issues concerning Tamils.

Martin: "The arguments are often very unserious, and I want to respond to that. If I write well-articulated views and seem reasonable, people will notice this. ... to show that Tamils can express themselves clearly [in Norwegian] and are not a bunch of primitive beings that sponge off others."

One reason for the low degree of participation may be the general distrust of Norwegian media, but also a fear of confrontations with hostile participants, as emphasized by Johan.

### **"Homeland Media" and Osama bin Laden**

Media usage is somewhat linked to the context of media consumption. In the Pakistani group, several of the participants told of watching TV together with other family members.

Berit: "I follow what is happening [in Pakistan]. My parents also do this, and we discuss what is going on in Pakistan. ... My interests are in military news, economy and poverty. It makes an impression on me when a bomb kills people, when you see the reactions from the families, as happened when military personnel were killed in Mehran."<sup>1</sup>

Kristin: "I follow the news on a regular basis, I guess like most others, at my parents place. I get foreign news on vg.no, but rarely use Pakistani channels."

Some also trust Pakistani media more than Norwegian and international media. Harald gives an example related to the killing of Osama bin Laden, and notes that the presentation of the news in Pakistani newspapers was very different from the coverage in VG. As Harald explains, "The Americans enter a sovereign country – and then complain about Pakistan. Nobody asks questions or problematizes. What if they did this in Europe?"

In general, it is our understanding that the Pakistani participants express a profound distrust of Western media war coverage, but when events of particular importance happen (such as the killing of Osama bin Laden), their use of international media increased somewhat. In the online survey, more than two-thirds of the respondents reported using BBC World on a regular basis – more than Al-Jazeera and CNN taken together.

The Afghan focus groups mainly use online media from their homeland, and several of the participants mentioned TV (especially Tolo TV). Grete explains that she regards Tolo TV as quite objective. The leaning towards digital media is partly due to a lack of access to satellite TV. Some participants say they do not have time to watch TV at all, and this may be due to their social situation, combining studies with work. Several members of the Afghan groups reveal a very critical interpretation of the news. Lars explains that when a certain event unfolds, he switches between two or more news sources, decides which one has the best coverage, and then follows the event there.

The Tamil group has similar practices when it comes to media from the homeland, but there is a distinct difference in the degree of trust in these media. They do not trust Sri Lankan media at all, they mainly view the information provided as government propaganda, and they also think it is heavily censored. When it comes to Tamil media, many have parabolic-antennas in their family home, and parents who regularly watch different Tamil TV-news.

Elise: "They use an old-fashioned language, so to watch it is a bit discouraging. I choose instead to get a summary from my father."

Several of the other participants list their parents as a main source for Tamil TV, as they themselves do not watch it, but get summaries of what is reported, and this often becomes a topic in family discussions.

### **Protest and resilience**

In 2009, the dramatic and violent end to the conflict between the Sri Lankan government and The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) deeply affected many young Tamils in Norway. Many of our informants in the focus group participated in activities trying to stop the advancing Sri Lankan army. In particular, Kari, Tone and Martin participated in organizing protests and rallies in Oslo.

Martin: "In terms of media coverage, it was very successful. The media showed great interest in the issue and the protests."

Both Martin and Tone were interviewed by journalists about the protests.

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1. A terrorist group attacked a military base near Karachi in May 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-13495127> (read 20.09.2011).

Tone: "The journalists did quote us correctly. It was ok. ... It wasn't exactly front page news, but the coverage was quite extensive."

Despite international protests, the Sri Lankan army pushed on with the offensive until the LTTE was militarily defeated. Approximately 350,000 civilians were trapped between the combatants during the final offensive. Estimates of the death toll for the last four months of the conflict vary between 15,000 and 20,000 (Chamberlain, 2009). Afterwards, members of the Tamil focus group again engaged in activities intended to inform Norwegians about the atrocities committed during the final stages of the conflict. Tone and Kari used Facebook to promote a Channel 4 documentary on the final days of the conflict (Callum Macrae, 2011).

Kari: "We used it to inform others about what happened in Sri Lanka. When the Channel 4 documentary was aired on NRK2, we kept posting "watch the news at ..." Some might have found it annoying, but never mind."

Martin: "You were really good! It was actually a campaign directed towards the Norwegian media to make them broadcast the documentary."

Tone: "We are still working on it ... . We also want NRK2 to broadcast a second Channel 4 documentary.<sup>1</sup> More than a thousand have "liked" the page."

In the course of the group sessions, the Tamil participants mentioned and discussed various types of online activism aimed at informing other youths with Tamil roots or Norwegians in general. Some members of the group took part actively in online discussions in order to correct "misunderstandings" or present alternative perspectives on the debate. They discussed the importance of a calm and respectful style of debate even when confronted with hateful messages. All in all, the Tamil group showed a high level of media skills and transnational media literacy, which they draw on to participate in campaigns and influence public opinion. Their skills and media literacy seem connected to a relatively high level of education, proficiency in Norwegian and a good understanding of Norwegian politics, in combination with a deep understanding of Tamil society and history. The group as a whole demonstrates considerable resilience to crisis (Hall & Lamont, 2013) and has developed the social capabilities necessary to work for the transformation of social reality (Goldstein, 2012).

## Global orientations

The Pakistani, Afghan and Tamil participants all use international media fairly extensively. Al-Jazeera, BBC and CNN are mentioned by almost every participant. The BBC seems to be used particularly often as a news source, especially by the Afghan and Tamil youth. Several of the Tamils also mention Channel 4.<sup>2</sup> Many of the Afghans use the BBC Persian Service.<sup>3</sup> In fact, many respondents admit to using the BBC more regularly than Norwegian media or media from their homeland.

Siri: "I prefer to use BBC rather than Norwegian media, which pay little attention to what is going on inside Afghanistan in general."

The BBC in particular is viewed as more trustworthy and offering much better coverage on Afghanistan than Norwegian media. In the Tamil group, the BBC gets credit for more in-depth and more comprehensive coverage than Norwegian media, which, according to participants, usually just refer to news agencies for their stories. Nevertheless, one of the participants in the Pakistani group still expressed a very profound distrust of the BBC.

Knut: "The BBC is terrible, they lie all the time and thus give the wrong impression of events, as if they are an extension of British foreign policy."

This may be a reflection of growing hostility towards both the US and UK in Pakistan, which was at one time part of a British colony. However, as well in the Afghan groups there was a critical view of international Western media in general. The online survey somewhat modifies this interpretation. Views seem to be quite polarized between those who trust and those who have no trust in international media. On average, the level of trust is higher than that in Norwegian media and media from the homeland.

While not mentioned at all in the Tamil group, Al Jazeera is another major international news source in the Pakistani and Afghan groups. In the group sessions, we found it interesting that no one alluded to the fact that Al Jazeera is the only international channel *not* presenting a Western perspective.

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1. (Calum MacRae, 2012).

2. In 2011, Channel 4 presented evidence of atrocities committed during the war in Sri Lanka in the documentary "Sri Lanka's killing fields" (and in the follow-up "War crimes unpunished"). Described as one of the most graphic documentaries in British TV history, it elicited reactions from different governments, international human rights groups and various public figures.

3. The BBC has a channel in Farsi (Dari), and one in Pashto, the two main Afghan languages. Farsi is also a language used in Iran and Tadjikistan.

## Social Media

Almost all the participants in the focus groups use Facebook. Very few, however, use Twitter, which they consider a more "elite" medium, most actively used by journalists, media workers and politicians. Most of the participants use Facebook to stay in touch with friends. During the discussions, it became clear that many of the participants in the respective groups are familiar with each other as Facebook friends. But a few are somewhat more active. In the Tamil group, Martin pointed out that most of the participants also had their parents as friends in Facebook, stating that: "Tamils are good at using social media, even our parents." They regard Facebook as an important arena for rapidly spreading information.

In the second Afghan group, some told of sharing video clips and files containing material on killings and attacks inside Afghanistan, material that was not broadcast by the regular news media, due to the graphic content of those videos.

In the Pakistani group, a few had participated in organizing a Facebook group to protest against the publication of the Mohammed cartoons and used this group to mobilize for a demonstration. In both Afghan groups, some of the participants used Facebook to plan the activities of different organizations for Afghan youth in Norway. One of the Afghan participants is the administrator of a Facebook-page and spends much time moderating the page:

"In the organization, there are youths from all the different ethnic groups in Afghanistan: Hazaras, Pashtuns and Tajiks. We try to hold them together, because they sometimes oppose each other. We try to keep them on friendly terms and rein in those who oppose others, bully or say nasty things. We don't delete or erase comments, but do send a message telling them that this is the wrong thing to do."

This inter-Afghan ethnic discrimination comes as no surprise to those who know Afghanistan well, since conflicts between, for instance Pashtuns and Tajiks, run all the way to the top in Afghan politics. The Hazaras have historically been subjected to discrimination<sup>1</sup> by other groups and suffered massacres, exclusion and persecution under the Taliban. The Uzbeks also struggle to achieve equal rights. The civil war in the nineties and the ongoing warfare and terror have not eased these conflicts. In light of this, it is encouraging to see youths who try to build bridges across the conflict lines and educate youth in good net-ethics.

In general, with the exceptions mentioned above, few of the participants indicate that they actively use social media to share news or stories about their/parents' homelands. It is more of a passive approach, where they read/take note of the information, but do not actively post or share such information. These findings are supported by the online survey. In fact, 39 per cent in the online survey "never" use social media to inform themselves about issues and events in the homelands. Almost half of the respondents never use networks on the Internet dedicated to providing and disseminating information about events in the homeland. Facebook is mainly a medium used to keep in touch with friends.

## A variety of belongings and identities

Based on our experiences, we envisage a landscape of "dual belongings" for the respondents, combined with great variety in their media usage. Many of the media mentioned in the group exchanges are well known and belong to the Norwegian mainstream, while a substantial number are known only to those who have a grasp of Afghan, Pakistani and Tamil realities. That Afghan youth to a certain extent seek information from not only Afghan media, but also Pakistani and Iranian media, demonstrates their "double exile existence," since many of them have spent time in Afghanistan's neighboring countries. For the Tamil youth, a closer connection to Norwegian media can be observed.

What the groups do share, then, is critique and negative feelings concerning the Norwegian media representations of minorities – and this seems to be connected to a rather full-fledged (albeit varying) distrust of the ability of the Norwegian media to comprehend the situation in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Thus, there is an apparent need to seek further information, and consequently these youth may acquire other profiles of media experiences than do those who have ethnic Norwegian parents (and grandparents).

The importance of "different levels of diasporic belonging," as Georgiou (Georgiou, 2006) explains, is emphasized by the experiences and findings of this research project. Not all have the same strong longing for their country of origin, and some, possibly due to continual "bad news" from their / parents homeland, shy away from reports on the everyday violence and focus more on Norwegian media. Most, though, seem to be concerned.

Several participants belong to transnational networks, indicating a cosmopolitan orientation. However, it is the *diasporic* cosmopolitan who is out there looking for other "exiles" in selected websites and networks. When the media of a nation state – through its shallow/missing coverage of certain minorities' country of origin, and also negatively slanted coverage of minorities who feel a belonging to their/their parents' country of settlement – do not satisfy young people's information

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1. Under Abdurrahman Khan (government 1880-1900), regarded as the leader who consolidated the Afghan state, a large number of Hazaris were killed or displaced from their provinces in central Afghanistan.

needs and their urge for belonging, they will seek other channels. And, something that comes as no surprise – they will look in a variety of directions. Thus, these dual belongings make for internationally, outward oriented media usage that is not necessarily connected to a nostalgic longing for a distant homeland and likewise does not prove a low level of integration. Nostalgia for a war-ridden country has its limits.

### Conclusion: Five findings

First, among the groups of diaspora youth we have found a notable sense of frustration and skepticism towards Norwegian media. Albeit differences (a broader focus, fewer persons (13) and younger informants), Tufte's findings from more than ten years ago in Denmark bear some resemblance to ours: "They [the 13 informants] feel a lack of subtlety in the media representations, which articulates a shared experience of being 'other' in the society they live in and form part of" (Tufte 2003, p. 194).

The frustration we found seems to be particularly pronounced regarding Norwegian media coverage of news in their/parents' respective homelands. Second, most diaspora youth actively use media from the homelands, and the results indicate that they find (some of) them more reliable and trustworthy than Norwegian media, at least regarding the coverage of news from their/parents' respective homelands. Third, international media, particularly the BBC, but also Al Jazeera and others, play a vital role. BBC World is generally seen as more trustworthy than Norwegian media and media from the respective homelands. It is also the most often used information channel.<sup>1</sup> We must therefore assume that the BBC is particularly influential in the construction of knowledge and worldviews. Fourth, we have found that diasporic youth use online news media to keep informed about news and events in the respective homelands, and to a lesser extent they also actively participate by sharing this information with others. Social media seem thus to function less as a social arena for active participation than as a more traditional medium featuring a one-way flow of information when it comes to news and events from the homeland. Last, but not least, there is a strong critique of the way Norwegian – and some international – media react when "the others die," to media hostility towards Muslims (except the Tamil youth) and of the neglect of positive developments in the respective home countries. This matters much to them, as most of the youth are well-informed and closely follow the unfolding events and ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

In this article, we also wanted to reflect on the role the media plays for the on-going production of a sense of belonging, and explore the hybridity inherent in the dynamic status of diasporic youth. The young informants in this project, through their multiple media approaches and experiences, *do indeed* produce other versions of what it entails to be a resident of Norway, a Norwegian citizen, a Norwegian; and thus challenge researchers and journalists alike to develop the contours of a more inclusive "we" and *transnational media literacy*.

This literacy has to do with the ways in which the diaspora situation, with its implicit (weaker or stronger) conflicting belongings, may open up for a (media) critical potential, as observed in this case. For researchers, it entails recognition of transnational media consumption as an important formative factor among young people belonging to diaspora milieus; and not least an ability to see the coverage of international events with the eyes of the so-called "others" among us. The latter may be helped by an exchange of lenses – between academics and journalists; among young people in general, encouraged by education – across continents, across mediated, virtual and physical boundaries.

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1. One factor here may be that the BBC broadcasts news in several Asian languages, such as Urdu, Pashtu and Persian.

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