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Only a mouse click away from home: transnational practices of Eastern European migrants in the United Kingdom

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Abstract:

In May 2004 the European Union was enlarged by ten new member states, eight of these were countries from the former Communist bloc. Between May 2004 and May 2006 the citizens of so-called EU8 countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovak Republic and Slovenia) enjoyed full worker mobility only in three 'old' EU member states, the Republic of Ireland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Following EU enlargement migrant workers from EU8 countries as well as their dependants have been arriving in the United Kingdom. In December 2007 almost 800,000 workers from EU8 countries were registered on the government's worker registration scheme. This article is concerned with the transnational practices of migrants from EU8 countries who have arrived in the UK following EU enlargement in May 2004, in particular with everyday transnational practices that involve the use of a variety of media. The experiences of transnational migrants involve connections between former and new (sometimes temporary) homelands. The role of media, in particular satellite television, has been studied in the

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transnational context. However, satellite broadcasting has not been embraced

by migrants from EU8 countries to any extent, rather they rely on a range of

media and practices that enable them to be connected to two or more national

contexts. Migrants interviewed for this research have proved to be avid and

highly skilled users of digital media in particular, they access newspapers,

magazines and films online, use Skype to make calls, post photographs on

social networking sites and even check online images of their home towns in

Eastern Europe on a daily basis. The article explores the implications of these

transnational practices in relation to migrants' identities and belonging as well

as political participation. The data analyzed in the article was collected in in-

depth qualitative interviews with 20 recently (post May 2004) arrived migrants

from EU8 countries in London, Edinburgh and Newcastle. The interviews were

conducted in winter 2006 and summer 2007.

Keywords: transnational migration; media; new EU member states; everyday

life

This article explores the everyday transnational practices of migrants from 'new' EU member states who settled down in the UK shortly after the May 2004 enlargement, it is particularly concerned with those practices that involve the use of a variety of media. The experiences of transnational migrants involve connections between former and new (sometimes temporary) countries of residence and media play an important role in maintaining existing and new social networks, emotional ties, cultural belonging and environmental experiences (see e.g. Christiansen, 2004; Gillespie, 2006; Aksoy & Robins, 2003). However, in contrast with the prevalent focus of literature on media and transnational migrants (or diasporas) on the construction of ethnic identities (see e.g. Georgiou, 2004; Arnold & Schneider, 2007) the present article places migrants' media use in the context of their everyday lived experiences and routines. Migration represents an experience in which individuals' lifeworlds are disrupted. I demonstrate that the use of media helps migrants overcome this disruption and establish a sense of normality in their lives. Without it 'our feeling of continuity as well as our ability to plan for the future would be weakened' (Misztal, 2001, p. 313). I argue that this contextualization leads to more informed insights than conceptualizations working with diasporic/ethnic identities.

Transnational media uses have been explored in studies on diasporic media, migration and multiculturalism (Georgiou, 2004; Aksoy and Robins, 2003; Christiansen, 2004). The central tenet of studies on diasporic media is that migrants (immigrants, ethnic minorities) maintain a sense of belonging to an original homeland and negotiate that with belonging to a new 'host' country which has its different majority (national) community (Georgiou, 2007). The consumption of transnational media contents is understood primarily as a means of constructing an ethnic identity based on the identification with the national group of the original homeland. Even the

terms 'homeland' and 'host country' used in such studies suggest that migrants are bound to maintain an identity shared with the national group of – what is termed in a rather neutral way – the country of origin while residing as guests in a 'host' country. This conceptual framework is seriously flawed, it involves 'techniques associated with describing a bounded national container society' (Wimmer&Glick Schiller, 2002, p.324). Such an approach, argue Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller,

> encompasses a culture, a polity, an economy and a bounded social group. … Almost no thought was given to why the boundaries of the container society are drawn as they are and what consequences follow from this methodological limitation of the analytical horizon – thus removing trans-border connections and processes from the picture (ibid, p.307).

In her overview of the theoretical and empirical groundings of research on diaspora and media Myria Georgiou (2007, see also Aksoy&Robins, 2002, pp.368-374 for a critique of diasporic media studies) acknowledges that a number of these studies are characterized by methodological nationalism – they understand the national frame as the most important one for studying these phenomena (Wimmer&Glick Schiller, 2002; Beck, 2006, chapter 3). Thus in terms of theoretical frameworks and methodological explorations studies on media and diaspora have to respond to the challenge of moving away from the centrality of the nation state but not completely abandoning it as a significant category.

Research on migrants' cultural and communication practices in the context of everyday lives has been more responsive to the limitations of a nation-centred approach. Similarly, the use of the city as an analytical category in research on migrants' experiences aims to provide more informed insights. Kevin Robins (2001) thinks against the nation and through the city (to use the title of his article) when exploring London as an existential and experiential space which enables different experiences and attachments than the identification space of the nation. These two approaches also necessarily have their limitations, however, 'the task is to determine

what reductions of complexity will make best sense of the contemporary world and which ones are leaving out too many tones and voices, transforming them into what model builders call "noise"' (Wimmer&Glick Schiller, ibid., p. 326). It seems that the reductions involved in the frameworks of everyday lives and urban settings enable a more adequate understanding of what is happening in contemporary societies.

Researching everyday life poses a number of theoretical and methodological questions. In this article I do not discuss conceptual issues related to everyday life rather I understand it very generally in terms of routines and habits that our interviewees recalled. The recollection of these mundane everyday practices and their critical assessment involve particular challenges, 'everyday life is synonymous with the habitual, the ordinary, the mundane, yet it is also strangely elusive, that which resists our understanding and escapes our grasp. Like the blurred speck at the edge of one's vision that disappears when looked at directly, the everyday ceases to be everyday when it is subject to critical scrutiny ' (Felski, 1999-2000, p. 15).

I explore normality, or rather normalcy, which migrants gradually establish in their lives after the disruptive experience of migration, as Barbara Misztal observes

> when in stable times, we question the "normality" of daily life as demanding too much conformism and consensus, when such times are disrupted we seem to miss the appearance of normality and worry about the uncertain shape of the future. … Normality is associated with the existence of both: a feeling of continuity and a sense of prospects for the future (2001, p. 313).

Computer savvy migrants

The article reports on findings of in-depth qualitative interviews with twenty recently arrived migrants from EU8 countries in London, Edinburgh and Newcastle. The interviews were conducted in winter 2006 and summer 2007 as part of a research project on Eastern European migrants' environmental experiences.[1] The interviewees were asked to give detailed accounts of their media use in the context of everyday

lived experiences and routines both prior to and following migration and these accounts provide key data analyzed in this article.

The twenty interviewees moved to London, Newcastle or Edinburgh after May 2004 and at the time of interviewing they were aged between 20 and 32 years. The large majority of them were single and childless (there were two exceptions in this respect); university educated young people (or university students) prevailed in the sample, however, some interviewees did not work in their fields but rather took up unskilled jobs e.g. as waitresses and hospital cleaners. I interviewed twelve women and eight men from a variety of EU8 countries, including the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and Lithuania. I conducted the interviews in a variety of languages, depending on my own as well as the interviewees' language skills and preferences we used English, Czech, Slovak or Hungarian. I should note at this point that the interviewees' proficiency in English was in every case sufficient to communicate on an everyday basis. Some interviewees noted that they continued to try and improve their English language skills, for example, by watching films in English or that they did not really 'feel at home' in the English language, arguing that their command of idioms, word puns etc. was insufficient to feel comfortable.

Before I move on to the discussion of interview findings there are a few points that I should discuss in relation to the media that the interviewees could access and that they frequently utilized. For this particular group of interviewees the by far most frequently used media were computers with broadband Internet connection and mobile phones. In most cases the interviewees used their own laptops, in two cases desktops and they rarely relied on flatmates' computers or computers available at the university or the local library. Landline telephones, television and radio sets were either missing from the interviewees' households or tended to be used very selectively

and infrequently and were often shared with other occupants of the household. This, however, does not mean that the interviewees did not listen to radio stations or watch television programmes as I explain in the discussion of findings. Clearly, laptop computers and mobile phones are ideally suited for the needs of migrants, they are portable and do not involve expensive and complicated installation in order to use them for a variety of purposes including television viewing and telephony services (in contrast the set-up of satellite/cable television or landlines is more complicated and more expensive and not necessarily appropriate in the case of temporary accommodation or short-term stays).

The fact that for the overwhelming majority of interviewees, computers with Internet connection constituted the most important medium in their everyday lives opens up a number of issues. First of all, a single computer with high speed broadband Internet connection actually combines a number of media in one: a radio set, a television set (a computer television tuner card is financially accessible and easy to install), a (video) phone, a newspaper, an instant messenger as well as a hi-fi system – to mention only the most evident ones. Moreover, the choice of media contents facilitated by the Internet is greater than that offered by satellite television, print media or even digital radio sets. The terms Skype, email, ICQ, FaceBook, Flickr (or their equivalents originating from the interviewees' countries of origin) appear to be household names for these migrants. Evidently, the availability of broadband Internet using a variety of connecting devices (landline, cable, mobile phone) and the fact that it is financially affordable for these migrants play a key role in enabling their media use. However, I should make it evident that apart from economic resources there are a number of other factors including computer literacy, availability of free or low cost software as well as cultural capital that determine migrants' use of the

Internet. And, as has been widely discussed especially in literature relating to the information gap (see e.g. Lee, 1999; Haddon, 2000; van Dijk, 2005; Gillespie, 2006), the material circumstances of accessing the Internet as well as the location in which it is accessed (i.e. in a private or a public space) are decisive for the kinds of uses that one makes. All of these factors have surfaced in the interviews.

We should also consider the fact that the use of the Internet enabled means of communication and contents is highly individualized and selective. This raises a number of concerns, for example those relating to the fragmentation of audiences and young people's changing patterns of news consumption (see e.g. Hujanen & Pietikainen, 2004). I argue that at least in the case of young migrants from new EU member states the reliance on the Internet as a main medium poses serious challenges and highlights the inadequacy of already discussed conceptualizations based on diasporic media uses. A detailed mapping of everyday diverse media uses in the context of attachments to (near and distant) family and friends, physical (and virtual) environments and various languages appears to be a good starting point for an understanding of the role of media in the lives of these young, computer savvy, educated new Europeans.

Media use and everyday life before and after migration

The design of the research project made it possible to explore migrants' media use in their countries of origin prior to migration and in the United Kingdom following migration. It emerged from the interviews that migrants carry over everyday routines from their countries of origin and adjust these to the new circumstances of their lives in the UK, this applies to media routines as well. These routines, like others, contribute to a sense of normality in migrants' lives as their 'comforting presence suspends the arbitrary character of reality' (Misztal, 2001, p. 315). The media uses

and flows of media contents, as I suggest below, are very varied and go far beyond the countries of origin and the current country of residence. The large majority of these transnational media flows are enabled by new technologies and do not involve actual transport across borders, there are, however, some elaborate routines that are put in place in case certain media contents are not easily available in the UK.

In the following sections I discuss the varied uses of media reported by the interviewees and the adjustments in media uses following migration to the UK. I structure the discussion around two themes – use of media in interpersonal communication and use of media for other purposes (mainly entertainment and news). Discussions of transnational media uses within the fields of cultural studies and media studies rarely explore interpersonal communication, in most cases their focus is either on entertainment or news consumption. Some studies published in these fields work with the tacit assumption that technological developments as well as market pressures have made transnational interpersonal communication financially accessible, readily available and reliable (cf. Vertovec, 2004), they do not, however, provide insights into users' actual practices. Research with focus on the technological or economic aspects of transnational communication has dealt with the development of communication infrastructures that enable transnational communication flows yet these studies leave out the actual uses of these infrastructures. In the following section I attempt to address some of these issues by discussing our interviewees' media uses for interpersonal communication.

Media in interpersonal communication

One of the key issues for the interviewees was to find affordable and accessible ways of keeping in touch with family members and friends upon arrival in the UK. This is understandable as these types of attachments and encounters have formed an essential

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part of normality in their everyday lives; they represent a certain 'constancy and patterning of behaviour; while this is not the only source of regularity in human affairs it is certainly an important one'(Goffman as quoted in Misztal, 2001, p. 315). Some of the interviewees found it rather difficult to cope with restrictions on communicating with them at the beginning which were due to financial reasons, this applied mainly to those interviewees who wanted to use phones for communication the same way they used them in their country of origin. Those interviewees who had access to the Internet from their arrival (although living in temporary accommodation) or used the Internet at the university they attended or at work or in Internet cafes used Skype, email and messenger services to communicate. The use of Skype has been widespread among the migrants I interviewed, some of the advantages of using this software for phone calls were the low cost of the phone calls, the availability of the software for free and also the fact that it can be used to make cheap phone calls also to landlines thus the other person does not necessarily require a computer with Internet connection and a certain level of computer literacy. When both (or more) Skype users connect through the Internet it can be used as a video phone (also for video conference calls).

Once the interviewees settled down and their financial situation improved they could choose from a variety of affordable options for international interpersonal communication. Some interviewees used mobile phones and special pre-dial numbers/codes that facilitate cheaper rates when calling abroad. Others made use of phone cards or landlines with special pre-paid tariffs. It should be noted, however, that after an initial phase in which the interviewees were conscious of the cost of making phone calls, they developed routine uses more or less regardless of the cost involved. The uses of means of interpersonal communication were very varied and

personalized in this group of interviewees yet they clearly indicate the same preferences/routines in the UK as in the country of origin in an adjusted form. In some cases interviewees learnt to use new devices/software or acquired new skills but their ingrained habits and personal preferences did not change. For example, some of our interviewees restricted the use of mobile phones to a minimum both in the country of origin and in the UK, others preferred ICQ to email in both locations etc.

A number of media uses for interpersonal communication become routine and fit among other everyday activities carried out in a variety of settings and at various times. Some interviewees talked about routines that they follow when communicating with close ones in their countries of origin, in particular with parents (calling on a specific day or at a specific part of the day or even a specific hour, emailing from work as the parent can email back while at work), partners (calling at a particular hour or confirming availability for a call in a text message) or friends (making oneself visible on ICQ – or its equivalents – in the evenings to alert friends to one's availability for a chat). I should note here that while these routines most frequently applied to contacts with people in the countries of origin, interviewees also used a variety of media to stay in touch with friends from other countries and also with family, friends and colleagues in the UK. It is, for example, evident that many routine online tasks related to their everyday lives in the UK with no connection to other geographical settings would involve media, e.g. shopping online, booking tickets on the phone, emailing the local council etc.

Another point that I should make is that interpersonal communication is also characterized by sharing a variety of types of data. Interviewees shared photographs, films, music, news stories as well as web links with family and friends (in the countries of origin, the UK as well as other countries). They made use of a variety of

options to store and share large data files (e.g. photos and music): some set up a google mail account (a free web-based email account with the capacity of 6,800 MB), others used free online data storage facilities (e.g. the Czech 'depository' at www.uschovna.cz) which automatically alert the addressees to download the data file and yet others had their personal websites on which they placed photographs or used websites such as flickr or Google's Picasa to share photos with friends and family. These forms of mediated communication enable various routines that structure the lives of migrants as well as those of their family and friends. The sharing of visual images, however, did not necessarily involve sources personally known to the user. One of the interviewees accessed an architectural website that published images of the changing historical centre of his Polish home town on a daily basis. He was better informed about the development of the town centre after his migration to the UK than his mother who continued to live in the town.

There are a few interesting features connected to the use of mobile phones in this group of migrants. It is not unusual for the interviewees to have two or more mobile phones or SIM cards. These interviewees could be reached on a (new) UK mobile number (or indeed two in case they used a private and a work mobile) and also on a previous (country of origin) mobile number. The interviewees gave a number of reasons for this: it was cheaper for their relatives and friends from the countries of origin to contact them on their 'old' mobile number rather than on the UK one (this would involve a more expensive international tariff), they tended to use the 'old' mobile number when visiting their countries of origin, they prepaid certain services (such as a news alert) on the 'old' mobile and could not cancel them so they decided to make use of them or they could not cancel an earlier contract. Two of the interviewees would have UK pay-as-you-go mobiles and whenever they ran out of

credit on these they would use their Hungarian ones instead. Some interviewees

would use the websites of mobile operators from their countries of origin to send text

messages for free within their national network (in some cases the mobile operators

limit the number of messages and they do not include international texts).

Consuming entertainment and news

Transnational consumption of satellite television programmes and news in particular

has been central to the interests of researchers (see e.g. Aksoy & Robins, 2003;

Christiansen, 2004). Such studies have, however, concentrated above all on the

consumption of programmes from the country of origin and their role in the

construction of migrants' ethnic identities. In contrast, in this section I outline

interviewees' overall media consumption patterns in the context of their everyday

lives. I should stress at this point that none of the migrants we interviewed had access

to satellite television programmes and indeed a number of our interviewees did not

possess a television set at all. Eight of the twenty migrants I interviewed made the

decision either not to have a television set in their households or to use it exclusively

for viewing DVDs. These interviewees did not have a television tuner card installed in

their computers either and they used the television set or their laptops/desktops to

view films – often with flatmates or friends. Some shared a television set with

flatmates, only one interviewee had a television set all for himself in his room. These

arrangements were not due to financial reasons.

This already suggests that the interviewees tended to make highly personalized

choices in the consumption of media contents and used media in a way that enabled

flexible timings. It is worth noting that only one interviewee, a Slovakian IT specialist

Julius, decided to obtain a television tuner card for his laptop so that he could

socialize with colleagues at work. He recalls his experience:

> But friends at work, for example, would talk about sport, about a programme and in that case you are left out completely because you have no clue, you're not following it. For example Big Brother, when it was on they were always talking about Niki did this etc. and you have no clue. Because you haven't seen any of it although you can read something about it in papers but you don't know. I didn't use to watch it regularly but sometimes. Or some good programmes about which they explicitly told me: 'Watch this.' Or Jatin [a colleague] called me 'This is on TV now, watch it.' And I said 'I don't have a TV.' So that was also a reason why I bought a TV [tuner card].

Other interviewees rejected this idea, arguing that colleagues would in any case talk about topics that they were not interested in. A Polish interviewee, Marcin, pointed out that he did not find himself in many situations when he would talk about 'British stuff'. Zsuzsanna, a Hungarian media student, continued her dislike of the reality show *Big Brother* despite an embarrassing episode in a class which she described for me:

> I'm not interested in English news. … The news here, chewing on the Big Brother. Now on Tuesday, well, I wasn't really following the news about it, I just saw Big Brother this, Big Brother that in the gym on the TV but I didn't know what the story was about. On Tuesday we had television practice and we started by discussing what happened during the week and we were looking for a news story and someone said something about Big Brother and I didn't know what it was about so I asked: 'What is it all about?'. And everyone stared at me, 'Oh my God! You don't know about it.' And the tutor told me that it's as if I lived on another planet, it was really embarrassing. They were right, I'm living here, I study this field I should know but I'm just not interested in Big Brother.

Although a number of interviewees opted for an everyday life without television programmes as accessed on a television set, this did not restrict their media use at all, rather the opposite, they proved to be highly skilled new media users with strong personal preferences often with major concerns about wasting time on the consumption of poor quality media contents. Our interviewees tended to use laptops or desktops to watch DVDs, television programmes online, listen to radio, music, read papers etc. To untangle these varied media uses in the following I concentrate on routines related to entertainment and news consumption to argue that whenever

possible the routines these migrants had in their countries of origin were maintained after settling down in the UK. These would include spending Saturday and Sunday mornings watching television or checking news upon arrival at work and shortly before leaving. Also, the interviewees tended to rely on the already tried out and trusted online sources of news and entertainment contents (these included those from beyond the countries of origin and the UK).

This, however, does not mean that the interviewees did not develop new routines or did not adjust to flatmates' ones, e.g. if flatmates had the television on in the morning they would have a quick look at news or check the weather forecast. They would also develop new routines around online accessible content from their countries of origin. For example, Agnes, a Hungarian interviewee, would spend time before leaving for work on Thursday mornings on reading columns by her favourite authors in a Hungarian weekly. Other new routines related to visits in the countries of origin, bringing back CDs, DVDs (some would choose those with English subtitles to share with flatmates), books and papers. Also, visitors from the countries of origin would in some cases bring their favourite papers/magazines. Some of the interviewees with a television set incorporated watching UK television channels to their everyday lives in the same way as they used to do in the country of origin. Migrants combined elements of normality that characterized their lives prior to migration with new ones thus maintaining continuity and also opening up new possibilities.

When discussing media consumption habits in their countries of origin, a number of interviewees mentioned buying (or borrowing) newspapers and magazines regularly. This does not necessarily mean on a daily or weekly basis (in the case of magazines) but they clearly had their favourites and, for example, bought the newspaper on days when they were published with a supplement they liked. In

many cases the reason for buying the newspaper was specifically the supplement (e.g.

a sport supplement, a science supplement and one with television and radio listings

were mentioned) as the interviewees would read news online (often the online version

of the same newspaper) and thus buying the paper would mean buying old news. The

availability of free newspapers in the UK (such as Metro, London Paper and London

Lite) brought a new dimension to some interviewees' everyday routines as they

would run through the paper quickly on the commute and then read news online.

For a few interviewees buying newspapers only with special supplements

involved frustrations and some of the interviewees eventually gave up on buying

them. In the words of a Polish interviewee Krzysztof:

> The problem is that I'm the sort of a person who has to read the newspaper
> from the front page to the bottom page plus all the additional supplements.
> So really to read a newspaper it takes a day, it's like a book. I feel really
> guilty when I don't read all of it. I buy a few magazines, one is *Creative
> Review*, this is a British one, the other is *Urban Design* magazine so it's all
> within my interests but I do spend all the time on the Internet especially
> with Polish newspaper Gazeta [Wyborcza].

Understandably, the feeling of guilt of not reading the paper from cover to cover

disappears when reading on the Internet. In exceptional cases the interviewees simply

did not find a newspaper or magazine on the UK market that would be an acceptable

substitute for the favourite newspaper/magazine in their countries of origin. Ilija, a

Slovenian interviewee, explained his position this way:

> I think English newspapers have too much yellow, too much stuff, you
> know, exclusive reports on how someone was murdered, I don't need that,
> it is sensational enough without that. … We have this Evening Standard
> which is sold just as you go to tube and I can read through someone else's
> dropped Evening Standard and every time I go through it I convince myself
> that I don't want to buy it. I even now rather not read anything than that. So
> I don't buy that much here, I'd love to buy *the Economist* or things like *the
> Guardian* with lots of supplements but I find that I don't manage to read it
> as much as I'd like and then I keep it for months thinking that I'll read it so
> I'd rather not buy it and you know read something quickly. If someone else
> has it and I need to read it in the next half hour I do it and then get rid of it.

Another point that should be made in relation to media consumption routines

is that the increased flow of goods between the UK and Eastern European countries and the increased demand for these goods in the UK (the Polish population in the UK is numerous enough to make the import of Polish goods profitable) enables migrants to maintain their habits. One of our Polish interviewees, Marcin, continues his habit of buying a copy of his favourite Polish weekly, 'I got the same here [in Edinburgh] which is very nice, I discovered that I can buy *Polityka* and others, weekly. And just one week later than in Poland.'

In the following argument I consider the origin of contents consumed as entertainment and news. It became clear from our interviewees' accounts of everyday media uses that in terms of entertainment they access a whole range of contents of all sorts of origins extending beyond the two contexts of the country of origin and the UK. There are a number of interesting flows of media between the country of origin and the UK (e.g. two interviewees mentioned that their fathers were recording programmes broadcast on television channels in their countries of origin on DVDs for them to watch when visiting or to take with them to the UK) and also networks within which media are exchanged among migrants from the same language group (this is particularly true about films). For some interviewees it was crucial to watch films in the English original in order to improve their command of the English language. Language skills obviously played a role in the selection and consumption of media contents but the circulation of music, for example, did not require special language skills.

The consumption of news by migrants or members of ethnic minorities has been discussed in academic literature as well as in public discourses mainly in relation to integration and citizenship issues (Christiansen, 2004; Vaiou&Stratigaki, 2008; Arnold&Schneider, 2007). I outline some of the implications of these

discussions below. First, however, I briefly turn to routines that the interviewees perpetuated. Not surprisingly, they tended to maintain routines from the country of origin in relation to news consumption and selection of news sources. For example, the already mentioned Slovenian interviewee Ilija explained his use of the websites of two Slovenian television channels to check news, a habit that he maintained also in the UK: 'For Slovenian news I would look at the main television channels' homepages, I didn't check foreign news that much because they were already there, the main news, if something happened I'd check somewhere else but not necessarily, I wasn't interested in let's say UK problems.'

Apart from these websites he also followed television news on BBC and CNN. I should note that for our interviewees radio did not play a major role as a source of news. It was rather exceptional that interviewees actually had a radio set in their households as even in their consumption of music they tended to make personalized choices, some listened to various radio stations on the Internet but listening to music involved mostly their own choices of CDs or tracks on iPods etc.

In contrast with sources of entertainment, and in line with previous research findings, the interviewees' news consumption tended to centre on sources from the country of origin (see e.g. Christiansen, 2004) and these were in a number of cases supplemented with English language ones (the most frequently mentioned were BBC and CNN). Christiansen discusses assumptions surrounding immigrants' consumption of news from their countries of origin in relation to integration in the 'host' country and points to the central assumption that reliance on transnational news sources indicates reluctance (or an outright resistance) to integrate in the 'host' country. She demonstrates that this assumption is mistaken for a number of reasons. First of all, national public service broadcasters no longer (if ever actually) act as an

integrating agent for the nation thus it is unfounded to believe that watching public service broadcasting facilitates a sense of belonging to the national community. In addition, news sources are dispersed, audiences are increasingly more fragmented and new media provide a whole range of modes of news consumption thus it is likely that news consumption patterns are changing also in the case of the majority population. Secondly, she argues, diasporic experience is characterized by attachments to at least two national contexts thus it should not be surprising that members of ethnic minorities seek out news from both contexts. And finally, empirical research suggests that immigrants or members of ethnic minorities seek transnational news for a variety of reasons, many of which have to do with shortcomings in the supply of relevant items in national news rather than a reluctance or resistance to integrate. In her research on Turks in Denmark Christiansen found another reason for consuming news from the country of origin, her Turkish interviewees expressed critical attitudes to the messages in national news. Although my approach to the study of migrants' media uses differs from Christiansen's in many ways, there are important intersections in terms of findings.

For the group of migrants whom I interviewed the most important reasons for relying on news sources from the countries of origin were already established routines and reliance on known and reliable sources with relevant news as much as a lack of relevant news in the national news (in line with a general decrease in foreign news, see e.g. Hamilton & Jenner, 2004) and personal preferences. In many cases our interviewees opted for media from their countries of origin simply because British media did not provide information they were interested in, this applies to hard news, soft ones as well as sports news (e.g. winter sports such as ice hockey are very popular in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, however, they are completely missing

from UK sports news). Interviewees complained about the lack of foreign news on UK channels and the extent to which UK news concentrated exclusively on UK issues. Thus understandably (and easily) they would turn to other news sources. For example, Julius, an interviewee from southern Slovakia who was brought up on the bank of the river Danube was not in Slovakia in February 2006 when during an exceptionally cold winter the Danube froze. This particular story did not make the headlines in the UK yet 'when the Danube was frozen I watched the Danube using online streaming'.

As I already indicated in the case of the Hungarian media student Zsuzsanna, some interviewees were either not interested in UK news or did not have enough knowledge of the political scene to understand some of the news. There are other personal choices that influenced interviewees' news consumption and among these interviewees, just like in populations all over Europe, we can find individuals with very little or no interest in news in general. For example, Simona, a Lithuanian student, characterized herself as 'anti media' and did not consume news. She gave me an example to understand the extent of her rejection of news: 'Yes, my parents call me up and tell me what's going on in London actually. Like "Have you heard about this shooting?" "No." "There was something in Lewisham." "No." I'm this kind of a person.' Petra, a Hungarian interviewee, would receive news headlines in text message form on her Hungarian mobile phone and Vera, another Hungarian interviewee, would usually learn news from her husband, occasionally when something was happening she would check the Internet herself. As I argued earlier rather than an indication of a willingness to integrate in the new country of (temporary) residence news consumption should be understood as a complex issue and not simply as an indication of attachment to one or another national context.

When discussing media consumption with interviewees and politics in more general, a number of issues emerged that are relevant for the concerns of this article. For the vast majority of interviewees the experience of migration either reinforced or enabled the decision to opt out of politics both in the country of origin and the current country of residence. The migrants I talked to rarely expressed an interest in voting in elections in their countries of origin or in the UK, in the latter case they would not be eligible to vote in general elections, however, they could vote in local elections and also in elections to the European Parliament. Some would acknowledge a sense of guilt in relation to not voting in the UK, in the words of Magda, a Polish interviewee, 'there is an election coming, I think in May so we may [vote]. I start to feel that I should take part, if you live here you should in some way be responsible.' The disinterest in formal politics should not come as a surprise and is probably not more typical of these migrants than of populations across Europe, disillusionment with politics, decreasing voter turn-outs etc. have been well documented in recent years despite increases in forms of voting that could be termed more user-friendly (postal voting, e-voting etc.). Some interviewees were clearly relieved that the move to the UK divorced them from everyday politics in their countries of origin which were characterized by scandals (corruption, sexual harassment, cronyism etc.) or outbursts of nationalism (examples would include the government of Kaczynski brothers in Poland or (violent) protests against the left-wing government in Hungary that continued for months in 2006). I found this comforting distance particularly interesting as it occurred despite – often up-to-date and detailed – knowledge of political developments in the country of origin gained either in interpersonal communication or from media. It appears that this distancing was enabled by the fact that our interviewees did not live an everyday life in the particular political climate of

their countries of origin and also perhaps because the awareness of political strife and scandals in the UK (and in some cases other countries) made some of our interviewees disillusioned with politics as such. The Slovenian interviewee Ilija summed up his thoughts on the subject:

> Usually when people go to a different country they say: 'Oh it's great here because there are not those quarrels between fractions and some really silly problems that we have in our country.' But I think that the problem is that they are not informed enough and they don't know the people so when they see all this information that is in the newspapers they are not really aware of the silly small problems between two politicians, they don't have all the history of what happened between different fractions and so on. So I think it's the same everywhere in the world. It's just that when you go to a different country when you go back [to your country of origin] and open a newspaper you say 'Oh they are doing the same thing again, it's just rubbish. Cannot they just get over it?'. But I think it's the same for English people coming back to England and it is just that I don't know the people in the media in England.

Home and other contexts in migrants' media use

The scope of this article does not allow me to discuss interviewees' reflections on belonging and home. Yet, in this concluding section, I consider it important to briefly consider some of the issues that were voiced. The interviewees' thinking about their own identities and attachments was characterized by a matter-of-fact view on their home – the place/city/town where they born, which they knew intimately and where their families (mostly parents) still lived or where they spent decisive years of their lives and formed attachments with long-term consequences. The matter-of-factness of their understanding relates to an acceptance that the language they spoke, the books they were brought up reading, the food they ate, the sports they watched on TV were all linked to the place they were born and they could not change this. Ilija, the young Slovenian physicist, proved eloquent once again:

> I enjoy the idea of being British, I try to imagine what they did what I didn't do and I usually feel I'm sorry, I'm sad that I will never be able to be a boy in an elementary school in England because I won't be in elementary school any more. But I wouldn't change what I did. Not because it's better but because what I am is this and I don't think it's any better than anything else or any worse than anything else, it's just that the symmetry is broken

> and I've already done this and now I'm this, not something else. But
> especially in Japan when I saw those boys in uniforms from elementary
> school I thought, wouldn't it be interesting, they must have a totally
> different view of life because they did what they're doing but I know that
> there are things I'll never do and I'll never be a part of and I don't really
> mind.

Knowing what their Home (I use the capital 'h' as it seems to me that this is an idealized home, a place where life is straightforward and where one is always in an intimately known environment) was, however, does not mean that they maintained and reinforced ethnic identities based on their belonging to an 'original' nation state.

The interviewees reflected on the complexity of belongings and attachments that characterized their experiences and choices. Vera, an Edinburgh based Hungarian mother of a toddler, demonstrated an openness and curiosity about 'local culture' (including mastering 'local' topics for conversations) and hoped that in a few years' time she might fit in very well, yet

> there would still be all that which I left in Hungary and I cannot have here.
> This is similar to the fact that I couldn't love two men at the same time with
> all my heart. I'd either be with one of them or the other but each occasion
> spent together would at the same time also be a lack. Right now I feel above
> all like an interested foreigner but I think that this doesn't affect me fitting in
> in a negative way, it just adds a different flavour to the process.

When asked about their belonging to the British nation, all the interviewees would reject the idea, but would acknowledge that they felt they became Londoners or they fitted among the Brits. The sense of being a Londoner was often linked to 'mastering' the city, knowing one's way around, establishing routines in the lived environment. However, for some of the interviewees London was alienating due to its size or they understood it only as a temporary location. Yet, even those who were not particularly enthusiastic about the city in which they lived felt at home somewhere in the new location. Eighteen of the twenty interviewees found such places and could name them without thinking too much, these included parts of the city, a university library, parks,

and even an opera house. For the Lithuanian student Simona, such places were outside London, a café in Glasgow and a small place in Hertfordshire.

The migrants I talked to proved to be young 'new' Europeans with highly individualized, fragmented and skilled media consumption habits and personal preferences (sometimes with strong attitudes to media and effective uses of one's time) that are hardly linked to national identifications. Their views on belonging/home also suggest that they are reflective about their own choices and their implications which are anchored firmly in their everyday lives with all their complexities.

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