The Role of the Media in the Processes of Globalization and Migration: From Representation to Participation

by Prof. Dr. Kai Hafez

Speech held at the Dublin Goethe Institute, 17th October, 2008

From the beginning the mass media have been considered a vanguard of the globalization process. The media seem to connect the world to a giant network of information easily accessible for all of us. The world becomes a village, as the famous Canadian media scholar Marshall McLuhan once said. The growing globalization of media and communication seem like the immaterial process that goes parallel with the economic integration of the world. Amazingly enough, however, there are still a few voices in economics today who argue that globalization is not as important as many people think and that the local and the regional spheres play a much more vital role in today's life.[1] Just think of the fact that France is still by far the greatest German trading partner, a neighboring country, and not far-away United States or, as many would believe, and not China. Now, I am not an economist, but what I can say is that globalization is far less important in the media sector than many people think. I suggest you forget about everything you have heard so far about this issue – globalization in the media is more myth than reality.[2]

It starts with the fact that we have almost no evidence for continuous media consumption of large parts of our national populations across state borders. There is a certain spill-over in regional language communities. The Irish might watch British TV, but Germans surely do not. The same is true for the Internet which is much more a local than an international medium. When was the last time that you entered a Chinese website? Except for certain information elites people remain within their national media discourses, with all the implications that has. The world looks much different from various national or regional perspectives. Media markets and policies are much less globally integrated than media corporations want to make us believe. Now, overall, media globalization is big mythology, like once communism and socialism, globalization is the capitalist super narrative of our times, but be careful not to believe everything politicians tell you about it.

Migrants – a vanguard of globalization?

As I mentioned, there are certain global information elites like academics, certain business people and the like who show quite an unusual behaviour. Perhaps it would be wise to speak of the 'globalization off different speeds' in the field of communication: one very slow for the masses, one much faster for certain information elites. Interesting enough migrants are among those elites, at least to a certain degree. While Turks in Germany 15 or 20 years ago were still more or less forced to consume German TV programmes and to consume information through German mass media for there was yet no other option, in the age of globalization they can stay in touch with their home cultures und ethnicities through modern media. Dozens of Turkish TV channels broadcast to Germany. German offshoots of Turkish print media grow rapidly in number. Research has shown that older-generation migrants tend

---

[1] Hirst, Paul/Grahame Thompson, Globalization in Question, Cambridge: Polity 1999 (2nd ed.).

[2] Hafez, Kai, The Myth of Media Globalization, Cambridge: Polity 2007.

to use more or less exclusively the media of their home countries.[3] Among young people that is completely different. Young migrants, quite like their German fellow citizens, use the media of the country they migrated to (in our case the German media), and they show a clear tendency towards television and entertainment, avoiding to a large degree the national German press. It is a social fact that many of the younger migrants live in an in-between-world where they have stopped to use the media of their native countries without already using the complete variety of the new media landscape that surrounds them, simply because their language capabilities and education backgrounds are still limited. Young Turks in Germany loose their Turkish reading competence while they are often still limited in reading and writing German.

There are a number of basic assumptions about the nature of media-based communication in immigrant communities. Media or the mass media, according to some, can contribute to integration in the new surroundings and thus enhance global cultural change, bringing nations closer together. Others, however, claim that the media may also hamper integration, that they might reinforce the fragmentation and ethnicization of society. German politicians often speak of 'parallel societies' that are growing in the midst of our societies also due to media ghettos that the migrants live in.

Now, statistics clearly show that young migrants have left these ghettos. Moreover, we have intelligent research showing that using foreign media is not equivalent to ethnic and social disintegration. British researcher Marie Gillespie discovered that the different generations of immigrants – parents, their children and grandchildren – sometimes perceive the range of programmes offered by Indian and British media in quite different ways.[4] While older people favour Indian film and video productions and maintain a critical distance to British TV programmes for moral and political reasons, younger people, who often know India only from holidays, frequently lack background knowledge of Indian productions or any sense of connection to them. Therefore they seem much less inclined to watch Indian films than their elders. If they do, however, their understanding of the products often differs tremendously from that of their parents. If, however, one and the same – either Indian or Western – range of programmes is 'read', received and interpreted by different migrants in quite different ways, then it will become ever more difficult, as one immigrant generation is replaced by another, to speak of a uniform ethnic, for example 'Indian', standpoint of ethnicization by the media.

Research I have done for the German government clearly supports that identical consumption of the migrants' media is related to very different forms of integration or disintegration among migrants.[5] It is vitally important to grasp that cross-border communication – Internet, satellite television, etc. – supports *both* basic tendencies of globalization and that the media has the potential to *promote* or *hinder* integration in the age of globalization. To understand this we need to bear in mind with regard to integration the media operate in very different spheres. The media may impact on civic integration (political system integration), social integration or cultural integration. The media may influence people's attitudes in all these areas, but they do not necessarily do so. In my study on Turkish media consumption in Germany I found very different types of migrant media users.

The *cultural exile user* uses only Turkish media. He tries to maintain cultural contact with his homeland, and he remains largely disintegrated outside the Turkish community. His faith in the German

---

[3] Weiß, Hans-Jürgen/Joachim Trebbe, Mediennutzung und Integration der türkischen Bevölkerung in Deutschland. Ergebnisse einer Umfrage des Presse- und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung, Potsdam: GöfaK 2001.

[4] Gillespie, Marie, Local Uses of the Media: Negotiating Culture and Identity, in: Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi/Dwayne Winseck/Jim McKenna/Oliver Boyd-Barrett (eds.), Media in Global Context. A Reader, London et al.: Arnold 1997, p. 323-337

[5] Hafez, Kai, Türkische Mediennutzung in Deutschland: Hemmnis oder Chance der gesellschaftlichen Integration. Eine qualitative Studie im Auftrag des Presse- und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung, Hamburg/Berlin: Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung 2002.

political and economic system, however, is greater than in the Turkish system. This type of user is culturally detached from the rest of the Germans, a typical first generation phenomenon of a 'homesick' generation, living in ethic social networks, however, politically highly loyal to the German system.

The *political exile user*, in contrast, consumes only Turkish mass media, but he does so because he is consciously identifying with the Turkish state and system. He upholds a negative image of Germany as a hedonist or even racist country. His nationalism is often exclusivist and even chauvinist. That type of user was hardly found in our study, but it is the typical anti-role-model of German politicians if they speak of ethic disintegration through migratory media.

Bicultural users are consumers of mass media who use both German and Turkish media. They are often highly skilled and try to get the best out of both media realms. They uphold a comparative political perspective and fulfil a very important cultural bridging function that is helping to overcome national and state informational boundaries. Bicultural users often criticise both the Turkish media's excessive focus on the Turkish nation state and the limited and thus distorted view of Turkey found in German media.

The counter-type to the exile user is the *assimilation user*. He uses only the media of the immigrant country, in this case the German media. This mostly young type of user knows Turkish culture only indirectly through parents and his family. A cultural change is clearly apparent, and he is the ideal migrant for any German politician. But despite the German-oriented media consumption this type of user may still have reservations against integration, for example ruling out marriage with Germans. The consciousness of belonging to distinct nationality may persist among assimilation users. This clearly demonstrates that basic social and political attitudes, sometimes called 'identities', are not a matter of media consumption styles. It confirms the theoretical assumption that core values are often resistant to mass communication. Just think of the young British Muslims who comprised the London terror attacks: they were well integrated into British society, but still upheld very separatist form of identity.

To sum up: The simple slogan "the more someone uses domestic media, the better integrated he or she is and the better her relationship to the country of immigration" seems too sweeping. This also implies to the inverted interpretative model "the more foreign and foreign-language media someone uses, the less integrated he or she is". Especially cultural exile users can hardly be regarded as an obstacle to integration.

My political conclusion is: The current situation is not ideal in the sense of Jürgen Habermas' model of the engaged participatory public sphere.[6] This author wants us to share a common public sphere in which we all exchange about problems of democracy. In fact, migrants and non-migrants live partly in separated media worlds. But is that so disastrous? Large parts of our populations in Europe live in separated media worlds. Just think of the 30 or so per cent of the German population who are not interested in political news at all. The idea that media consumption has a civilizing effect on people is very questionable. Family and school socialization are at least as important. If, as the current situation seems to suggest, a certain elite among the migrants participates in the general media discourse that could well suffice to live up to Habermas' concept whose public sphere was always an ideal construct. Open debate in Western democracies has never reached the point of ultimate integration and satisfaction. We do not live in fully developed participatory democracies. Let's be careful to criticise minority media and minority populations for deficits that they share with majority populations. Let's also be aware that transnational media consumption is an integral part of globalization and that part of the

---

[6] Habermas, Jürgen, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press 1989 (Orig. 1962).

migrants are a real vanguard in transcending the boundaries of nation-based discourse (even though their main interest seems limited to their home countries which makes them sometimes prone to new forms of national identity politics).

Non-migrants and globalization

Let's turn away from the migrants and look at majority societies. If we hesitate to call migrants in general a vanguard of globalization, is the majority population – are we? – such a vanguard? Now, most people in Germany use German media. The idea that very often came along with globalization, that people cross borders for media consumption, has proven to be very idealistic. At least in the sphere of satellite television and regular print media, a little less so in the internet, the majority of people stays with their own national mass media.[7] In the past, researchers argued that national media often revealed ethnocentric biases, that foreigners and strangers have often been treated in a racist or at least prejudiced manner. Have we overcome that situation today?

David Morley and Kevin Robins have pointed to the paradox that in the middle of the era of globalization a counter-tendency seems to arise.[8] People are increasingly eager to assert their national identities. Xenophobia and racism are undergoing a revival. The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) in Vienna has carried out comparative research on media and racism in European countries.[9] The EUMC criticizes European media for anti-migration prejudices. Mass media regularly create public panics by zooming in on problems involving small numbers of immigrants (violence, forced marriage, etc.). The EUMC identified certain hot issues that pertain often over years and overshadow the migrants' image (asylum, Islam, etc.). The media create so called 'fixed repertoires', and therefore the EUMC demands more diversity in the media. The monitoring centre complains about the dominant position of politics. Especially conservative politicians instrumentalize the media for populist anti-migrant discourses. Time and again politicians in Germany rely on that mechanism. For example governors of federal states like Jürgen Rüttgers, the governor of Northrhein Westfalia, who ran a campaign 'Kinder statt Inder' (children instead of Indians) or Roland Koch, governor of Hesse, who during an election campaign mobbed young foreigners as potential criminals in order to get re-elected. There is no clear consensus in Germany among politicians to refrain from making ethnicity the subject of election campaigns.

The EMUC also revealed that ethnic references in the media are often made in connection with criminality, even without any obvious functional connection. Media headlines like 'Russian murderer' are only justified if the fact that the murderer is Russian must be considered vital to the crime itself (as in the case of a Russian mafia that is comprised on the base of ethnic belonging). The monitoring report also states that while foreigners and migrants are often linked with issues like criminality they are at the same time underrepresented when it comes regular issues. The existence of a Turkish middle class in Germany, for example, is hardly noticed by public opinion. One last feature that was mentioned by the EUMC is that certain religious and ethnic groups are singled out as negative stereotypes, namely Islam and Roma and Sinti.

A number of studies about the image of Islam in German newspapers and television confirm this observation. A recent work on German public television shows that about 80 per cent of all issues cov-

---

[7] Hafez 2007.

[8] Morley, David/Kevin Robins, Spaces of Identity. Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries, London/New York: Routledge 1995.

[9] Ter Wal, Jessika (ed.), Racism and Cultural Diversity in the Mass Media. An Overview of Research and Examples of Good Practice in the EU Member States, 1995-2000, Vienna: European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia 2002.

ered in major TV talk shows, reports and documentaries focus on a violent or otherwise conflict-oriented image of Islam.[10] Another long term study of the German press shows that the negativity of the news agenda on Islam is around 60 per cent, more than any other topic in the field of Middle East reporting.[11] The problem is not the coverage of negative issues as such but the absence of positive news, the absence of news on the variety of life. Islam is hardly perceived as a religion in Western media and much more as a political ideology. Cognitive chain reactions have developed according to which Islam equals politics equals fundamentalism equals violence. This trend was there long before 9/11. It began with the Iranian revolution of 1978/79. Before that time Islam was hardly present in Western news, but with the revolution Islam and especially political fundamentalism received enormous attention. The 9/11-attacks were not the big turn of the tide in Western media but the events merely reinforced a very limited agenda on Islam. At the same time, public opinion polls show that 60 to 80 per cent of the Germans are afraid of Islam. It is surely hard to prove that mass media are responsible for this imbalance in public opinion – but it is highly likely.

There are also some signs for recent positive change. It is my impression that in German mainstream media explicit verbal stereotypes like 'the fanatic Muslim' occur less frequently. If we compare Western coverage of Islam of the 1960s with today's situation we must confess that political correctness has changed many things. It is no longer true what Edward Said has said: that anything can be said about Islam in the West.[12] Verbalized racism seems a general taboo. However there is one significant exception: pictorial stereotypes in images – the headscarf, violent demonstrations of Muslims, etc. – have survived until today. German magazines today publish nearly the same type of images as 30 or 40 years ago during the Iranian Revolution. It seems to me that visual stereotypes of Islam have taken over the role of verbal stereotypes. Why many journalists seek to avoid verbal stereotyping in their texts, Eurocentric images of a strange, violent and irrational Islamic Orient are reproduced in our modern media. What we can observe is a very uneasy coexistence between media texts and photographs that often tell completely different stories. While the text might be bothered with a terrorist group, the images that go along with it, show the Kaaba in Mecca. While the text might be informative about a certain radical group, the picture conveys the intrinsic Huntingtonian message that Islam as such is violent and that a clash of civilisations is unavoidable[13].

In media articles the major problem is not stereotyping but a narrow thematic and topical awareness of today's Muslims' realities. Many texts are rather harmless at first glance, seemingly neutral descriptions of...of what? Of terrorism, violence and conflicts. The major problem is not explicit textual stereotyping as in the old days, but a distortion of the media agenda through one-sided forms of agenda setting and a lack of thematic diversity. To be more precise: no German journalist would dare to say today 'Islam is evil', they would even sometimes oppose such generalisations, but then they go on and cover mainly issues like terror and combine their texts with images of the holy places in Mecca. Journalism about Islam and about Muslims is changing, but at the same time biases are re-invented in various politically correct forms. For me the current situation of media reporting about Islam can best be described as 'enlightened Islamophobia'. We claim an enlightened tolerant position vis-à-vis Islam – and then we treat Islam as an ideological counterpart.

---

[10] Hafez, Kai/Carola Richter, Das Islambild von ARD und ZDF, in: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte 26-27, 2007, S. 40-46

[11] Hafez, Kai, Die politische Dimension der Auslandsberichterstattung. Bd. 1: Theoretische Grundlagen; Bd. 2: Das Nahost- und Islambild in der deutschen überregionalen Presse, Baden-Baden: NOMOS 2002.

[12] Said, Edward W., Orientalism, New York: Pantheon 1978.

[13] Huntington, Samuel P., The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, New York: Simon & Schuster 1996.

Now, let's come back to our main question: are the majority media ready for dialogue with migrants? Are they ready for a dialogue with the multicultural society? I hesitate to say 'yes'. While changes are under way, the image of certain migrants – especially Orientals and Muslims – is still to a large degree the prisoner of black-and-white journalism. Compared with non-migrants they are not treated with equal differentiation but often discriminated through headlines of a negative agenda or positive discrimination of a politically correct pro-migrant reporting. Everyday-complexities and issues, the normalcy of migratory lives too often escape media attention.

Problems and solutions: representation and participation of migrants

Another positive trend, one could argue, is the fact that more Muslims are represented in the media system since 9/11. Muslims and other Oriental migrants are frequently invited as guests to German TV shows. However many of these guests complain that they have to react to the same very negative agenda that the media uphold especially of Islam. They feel they are invited, but many of them say that they have little or no influence on the media agenda and the coverage at large. They are obviously there to explain the connection between violence, terrorism and repression in Islam, and they hardly ever invited for other purposes. The recourse to early phases of democratic development in the West one might describe such situation as 'representation without participation'.

One of the reasons behind such unsatisfactory state of migrant representation is the situation of migrant journalists in our media systems. It is certainly not the case that only migrant journalists could change the coverage to a more balanced coverage about migration. German or British or Irish journalists without a migratory background can do as well. However, it is my impression that the situation of migrant journalists somewhat reflects and explains the above mentioned situation of representation without participation. A study published about ten years ago by a Dutch research group explains that only a very small percentage of migrants in the television system in Germany (as in other European countries) are of non-German descent.[14] We have no clear statistics, but the study estimates that around 2 to 3 per cent of German media workers are migrants. Now, that figure might be on the rise since 9/11 due to the fact that especially our public service television and radio companies have started to actively hire foreigners or children of migrants, who know the host language. But the share of migrants among German media workers remains very low. Representation in the media sector is well below the migrants' average share of the population. I doubt that anybody could argue that there are not enough qualified foreigners or migrants in Germany. Even though the number of university graduates is still low, especially in the big cities in Germany in many social sciences approximately ten per cent of the students are of migratory background. The small number of migrant media workers, however, shows that the link between social ethnic origin and career in the field of journalism is still very strong. Germany, like other European countries, wastes very many talents in the field of international and intercultural journalism.

What is more alarming than the mere statistics of underrepresentation in journalism is the fact, that especially in important positions in journalism, namely newsroom positions and upper hierarchies of newsroom editors, publishers etc., migrants are almost non-existent. They might be working in our media as cameramen, musicians or technical staff, but hardly ever as influential journalists. Therefore migrants in German mass media hardly ever get the chance to leave an impact on media coverage. This is part of the reason why migrants invited to participate as guests in German talk shows or as interview partners feel that they are mostly framed in a Eurocentric way.

---

[14] Ouaj, Jamil, Employment and Access of Ethnic Minorities to the Television Industry in Germany, the UK, France, the Netherlands and Finland, Utrecht: STOA 1999.

Things become more disturbing if we turn to more advanced migrant societies like Great Britain and the BBC. According to a study by Simon Cottle even the BBC fails to grant what might be called robust representation to migrants.[15] BBC programme makers are almost exclusively male or at least white middle class. Independent migrant producers who worked for BBC and were interviewed in one of Cottle's studies complained about BBC conservatism inhibiting programs and ideas made by migrants for majorities or from a minority point of view. In Germany we have less migrants in newsroom positions, in the radio or TV system, but those few who made it complain about quite the same type of conservatism of programme making. A migrant news moderator recently complained that she had to report about the Middle East in ways she would like to change, and another foreign correspondent is in constant struggle over her work. A group of migrants and other like-minded journalists has recently formed an alternative journalistic network 'the new German media makers'[16].

Meaning what? That even if we raise the share of foreigners and migrants in our media and even if we grant them access to better jobs in journalism they still tend to be assimilated into some kind of Eurocentric program policy? Is the structural pressure of traditions and Eurocentrism handed down by white middle class newsroom managements so strong that it is able to prevent all changes? Migration might and can lead to assimilation – if the migrant chooses to be assimilated. But it should also leave room for real participation and changes in coverage. A migratory country is necessarily a country of cultural change. Not all things remain the as they are, debates need to be opened up. However, those migrant journalists that we have, and very often also their cosmopolitan German colleagues, speak of a journalistic 'burden of representation'.[17] They feel like being trapped: the majority wants them to be assimilated, their ethnic peer groups demand changes in media output.

The massage is clear: we need structural changes in our media systems, more migrants in the media, in better positions and with much more freedom of reporting. Perhaps you might think that my description of the story is a little black-and-white, but I believe there is enough statistical and empirical evidence to prove that the message is in principle correct: that we are still far away from the idea of global journalism. Let's take the chances of globalization much more seriously!

---

[15] Cottle, Simon, Television and Ethnic Minorities: Producers' Perspectives, Avebury: Aldershot 1997.

[16] http://neue-medienmacher.de

[17] Cottle, Simon, A Rock and a Hard Place: Making Ethnic Minority Television, in: Simon Cottle (ed.), Ethnic Minorities and the Media: Changing Cultural Boundaries, Buckingham: Open University Press 2000, p. 112 f.