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# Online mediations in transnational spaces: cosmopolitan (re)formations of belonging and identity in the Turkish diaspora

Miyase Christensen

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## **Abstract**

The lives of transnational groups and individuals are marked by a spatial and imaginary split: a phenomenon wherein identity, belonging and representation have become increasingly elusive concepts, and the realm of the 'cultural' vastly important. And, the theoretical compasses of cosmopolitanism and transnationalism are particularly relevant and illuminating in considering social space, mediated communication and belonging in relation to urban diasporic communities and gendered subjectivities. The aim of this paper is to address expressions of identity and belonging at the intersection of online communicative practice and offline spatial formations, with a focus on the specificities of gendered constructions of sociality and subjectivity in the diaspora.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** cosmopolitanism; transnationalism; space and identity; online social media; mediation; Turkish diaspora.

More specifically, the paper discusses the persistence and reinvention of meanings of place as a determining factor in identity formation, especially through media use. The discussion focuses on online social media in the case of people of Turkish origin living in Stockholm. It demonstrates how these media do not necessarily detach identities from place, but rather relocate them in it. In doing so, the paper seeks to offer a more nuanced deliberation of locality vs. translocality and fixity vs. transcultural fluidity that play into individual pursuits of identity formation and of creation of cosmopolitan spaces of social belonging. The analysis and discussion is based on qualitative interviews conducted between 2008 and 2009 with Turkish migrants living in Stockholm, and is informed by secondary analysis of existing

research on migrant life, media representation and residential segregation in the increasingly diverse Swedish society.

### **Study frame and methodology**

As part of a larger, ongoing project exploring identity, social space and the role of mediated communication in the lives of diasporic subjects living in Sweden, this study involved semi-structured interviews with eighteen individuals (ten women and eight men) between the ages of twenty-three and forty-four, of Muslim background, secular orientation and mixed Turkish and Kurdish ethnicities. All were working during the interview period, while three female and four male participants were also studying. All of the participants use media and communication technologies (including social media) with varying degrees of competence. Five of the participants were brought to Sweden as children, six moved for professional/educational purposes in their teens and twenties, and seven were born in Sweden.

The participants lived in the suburban parts of Stockholm, such as Rinkeby, except for one woman who lived in Uppsala as a student (although she formerly lived with her parents in Rinkeby) and one man who lived in innercity Stockholm. I place particular focus on the experiences and personal accounts of the women interviewed for the purposes of this article, which explores gendered subjectivities in diasporic contexts. Most interviews were tape-recorded, unless requested otherwise. They lasted between one and two hours, and, in some cases, were accompanied with follow-up communication for clarification. The participants were recruited using the snowball technique, starting with randomly selected individuals contacted through diasporic organizations. Further recruitment was based on their personal networks. Semi-structured and open-ended interviews were conducted in order to obtain a wholesome picture of the factors that play in their perceptions and overall experiences of identity-formation and belonging, and their construction of spaces of belonging through mediated communication in their everyday lives. Interviews were conducted in Turkish and the interview questions were designed to inquire: the role of geography and social space, and place and place-making, in their lives (i.e. spatial relations in Sweden vis-à-vis home country); ethnicity, education, class and gender-related factors in relation to identity and everyday life; and, the use of everyday communication technologies for connecting and for mediating space and belonging. The study also incorporated ethnographic strategies such as site visits to and observation of residential areas populated by migrants, regular viewing of most popular online diasporic sites and attention to representations of migrants in the Swedish media.

The interviews started with questions about personal-familial background and everyday life, and were conducted in a relaxed manner to encourage dialogical discussion. All of the women and most of the men talked about their lives, world views and aspirations in relation primarily, to individual choice, cultural taste and personal lifestyles, rather than a binding sense of nationality and collective ethnic identification. During the interviews, place (i.e. the place of residence and of origin) emerged as a uniting and dividing factor, and one that is instrumental (and, can be re-invented) in establishing proximity and distance in symbolic and real terms. Women, in particular, displayed a great degree of reflexivity about the simultaneously enabling and disabling roles of ethnicity and group identity, geographic origin and everyday spatial settings and gender. As discussed below, on the whole, the study group represents a differently positioned ontological mode and experiential patterns of transnationalism than those often associated with the Turkish diaspora in Europe (see Westin 2003). Their stories and perspectives, their capacity to sustain both in-group commonality and individual difference in their identities, and the nature and boundaries of their social networks and communicative patterns are clearly constitutive of cosmopolitan life-worlds and mental geographies structured both by individual factors and the realities of the transnational migrant settings that they find themselves in.

Larsson (2006, p. 2) notes that academic studies of Muslims, both in general terms and in Sweden—and, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11—are mostly limited to religion and religiosity and they rarely study people of Muslim origin as ordinary people with secular lives. As he notes ‘... the Muslim community (the term is used here as a collective label for a large number of different communities) is generally described in both public and academic debates as a religious community, even though most Muslims living in Sweden are secularized’ (p. 2). A supplementary aim of the article then is to go beyond commonplace perceptions of the role of religion and religiosity in the Turkish diaspora and to offer an account of (gendered) mediation and sociality in the lives of younger/fairly young Turkish migrants from a cosmopolitan frame of reference (a frame, which is not commonly associated with migrants of Muslim backgrounds). While this is an ethnographic study and does not claim representativity of the Turkish migrants in Sweden, the interviews reveal, with consistency, a high degree of reflexivity and certain patterns of mediation: strong sentiments about the close connections between space and place; and, feelings of both alienation and association with the host and home cultures that shape communicative routines and consequently borders of identity.

The paper addresses the questions raised above in three parts: the first part frames the discussion at the intersections of transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and the use of media technology in migrant contexts, and offers basic information about the history of Turkish migration in Sweden. I focus here on the tropes of migrant transnationalism and cosmopolitanism for they allow for nuanced analyses of mobility, fixity and various modes of communicative sociality. Theoretically, the scope of transnationalism provides a broad paradigmatic tool to analyse the questions of migrant identity, communication and belonging as categories embedded both in situated material and mediated realities. Cosmopolitanism as a framework to locate both rooted and world-oriented dispositions can certainly be extended to understand identity and positionality in certain transnational settings and online social constellations originating therein. Yet, transnationality or transborder mobility alone are by no means readily equitable to cosmopolitanism, and transnationalism and cosmopolitanism cannot be conflated. In this study, cosmopolitanism is employed as an analytical tool in discussing certain positionalities and ethical/cultural orientations of the participants who live in a transnational social context.

The second part of the paper empirically locates intersectionality between online space, offline locality/territoriality, communicative sociality and gender. For participants, material realities are primarily located in the urban spatial context while their mediated ones are shaped through complex systems of networked sociality. This part draws from data revealing the persistence and significance of place and territoriality and reflects on the primacy of *the city over the nation*.

The final part takes issue with the notions of mobility, agency and expressivity (in relation to the ways in which these notions are embodied in the communication process), and the positioning of gendered, cosmopolitan subjectivity in participants' lives. Drawing from Hetherington (1998), expressivity is taken to involve, not only rational choices and direct deliberative action, but also emotions and sense of belonging that materialize in daily life through spatial—both material and virtual—practice.

### **Transnational migrant settings, mediated communication and the question of cosmopolitanism**

With the increase observed in the rate of global material, human and virtual flows, both transnational-translocal relationships and everyday situated experiences and deterritorialized and reterritorialized dimensions (Smith 2001) have become part and parcel of the ways in which migrants construct their identities (cf. Glick-Schiller, Basch and Blanc 1995; Vertovec 2001) cutting across fixed notions of belonging (Dwyer

2000). Theoretical constructions of transnationalism as social morphology, type of consciousness, mode of cultural reproduction and reconstruction of place and locality (Vertovec 1999) are relevant and significant in this study. Transnational urbanism (Smith 2001), which further accentuates the significance of physical location and communicative practice in the face of pervasive processes of denationalization (Sassen 2008) adds more nuance to our understanding of networked sociality and mediations of social space in diasporic contexts.

In this study, transnationalism provides a broad contextual framework and an epistemological plane on which to locate emergent dynamics (e.g. shifts in power geometries) and social phenomena (e.g. cosmopolitanization) arising from the increasingly complex forms and practices of actual and virtual mobility, fixity, mediation and belonging vis-à-vis everyday diasporic realities. As noted in recent literature (see Vertovec 2009; Held 2010), there has been a return to cosmopolitanism both in cultural studies and political science to account for a variety of developments and phenomena from multiculturalism and marginal communities to global social movements and environmental crises. Although the Kantian, Enlightenment origins of cosmopolitan theory are often associated with rootlessness and abstraction from particular local and cultural belonging (e.g. Hannerz 1990), certain other streams in the theorization of cosmopolitanism have been particularly instrumental in counterbalancing the elitism and top-downism commonly associated with the concept.

As Werbner (2008) notes, the theory of cosmopolitanism from the 1990s onwards has striven to go beyond interpretations of cosmopolitanism as only universal, open and, above all, 'Western', and to include local, rooted and historically and spatially situated dimensions that can be accommodated by the ethical horizon of cosmopolitanism. Werbner's (ibid) linking together universal enlightenment and local specificity through the discursive frame of 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' resonates well with the ways in which the study participants position themselves on a plane of contradictory opposites: local, cultural, rooted proximities and loyalties and an ability and eagerness to maintain a transnational, open, modernist and individualist ethical outlook. Robbins' (1998) 'actually existing cosmopolitanisms'; Clifford's (1998) ideologically progressive 'discrepant cosmopolitanisms'; Stevenson's (2002) efforts to think multiculturalism, cultural citizenship and cosmopolitanism together and connecting such thinking to questions of 'identity formation *within* and *between* national societies' (emphasis added) are all exemplary of the conceptual apparatus that frame the study presented here in meaningful ways. Clifford's (1998, p. 362) note of cosmopolitanism as encountered by people in 'worldly, productive sites of crossing,' is particularly useful in understanding the role of urban space and 'connexity' of both difference and diversity

and universality. His 'discrepant cosmopolitanisms' is invoked here in referring to a process of continuous rectification of our perceptions of social distance and moral/cultural borders.

The understanding that guides this particular study is one that conceives cosmopolitanism in relation to mediations of (re)attachment (e.g. to place) and positionality based on location and culture as well as to detachment and openness. Further useful here is Glick-Schiller, Darieva and Gruner-Domic's (2011) conceptualization of cosmopolitanism as 'simultaneous rootedness and openness to shared human emotions, experiences and aspirations' (2011, p. 399). Attachment and positionality in diaspora, however, are far from being singular, and always multiple, contested, and, at times, pragmatically constituted.

This multiplicity is quite pronounced in the case of the Turkish migrants living in Sweden. Turkish labour influx to Sweden, mostly from rural Turkey and mostly from the town of Kulu, started in the mid-1960s and continued until the first half of the 1970s. From the 1980s onwards most migrants originating from Turkey were Kurds seeking refuge on the grounds of political persecution, or, to a lesser extent, those migrating for family reunion (Westin 2003). Today, there are around 65,000 residents of Turkish origin in Sweden (of various Turkish and Kurdish ethnicities), most residing in the suburban areas such as Rinkeby of Stockholm, making them the tenth largest ethnic minority group in Sweden. Slightly more than half of the members of this community were born in Turkey, and the remaining are second and third generation members born in Sweden (Westin 2003). Transnationalism and transnational ties are embodied, to varying degrees, in the sense of maintaining continuous contact with those left behind in Turkey, amongst themselves as migrants living in Stockholm and with others (Turkish or otherwise) living elsewhere. As included in the sample group of this study, there are also individuals and families who came and settled in Stockholm for professional and educational purposes. As revealed through the interviews, there is as much difference as there is commonality within the Turkish diasporic community in Sweden.

Amongst the participants, there is a high level of consciousness about questions of inter/intra-group positionalities and identities. It is precisely these tension fields arising out of such multiplicities, and, realities and aspirations that simultaneously feed from and turn against each other, that give way to a cosmopolitan state of orientation. Caglar (2002), in referring to Clifford (1998), suggests we should consider cosmopolitanism as a 'reality of (re)attachments with multiple affiliations. . . . Cosmopolitanism can still be conceived of as a mode of attachment, which, by entailing multiple, uneven and non-exclusive affiliations challenges the conventional notions of locality as well as of belonging,' (Caglar 2002, p. 180). As she surmises,

what determines cosmopolitan formations and mental orientations is not the existence or absence of attachments but the ways in which such attachments are enacted and how individuals navigate their lives across multiple domains of choice and (in)formally conceived reciprocal, unilateral and forced obligations and allegiances (e.g. familial and traditional boundaries).

In line with these analyses of cosmopolitanism, the present study is illustrative of expressions of cosmopolitanism that do not necessarily manifest themselves as a commitment to achieving a western cosmopolitan ideal (see also Tarrow [2005] on cognitive vs. relational cosmopolitanism). The ways in which individuals and groups relate to the global and the local, the self and the *Other* (including their own *Others*), and the distant and the near are far more complex than what could simply be grasped under categories such as 'rootedness and fixity' vs. 'mobility and flexibility'. The interview data point to a complex variety of elements that underlie these individuals' migrant existence and mind frame such as a sharp understanding of the current global and national conjuncture; an awareness and willingness to accept and negotiate the 'relativity of one's own social position and culture' (Beck 2004, p. 131); and an equally sharp awareness of the different positionalities and *Others-within*.

As research shows, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and diasporic media play an increasingly significant role in fostering emerging identities or sustaining identities (cf. Georgiou 2006; Bailey, Georgiou and Harindranath 2007). There is a rich body of literature exploring the linkages between digital communication use and migrant communities (cf. Nakamura 2002; Adams and Ghose 2003, to name but a few) in relation to both the place of mediation in the everyday lives of migrants and in relation to political deliberation and cultural expression. Alonso and Oiarzabal (2010) point to the significance of applications that enable 'produsage' and to the ways in which the majority of internet content will come from users themselves, with migrants in particular contributing to this significantly through social networks.

Yet, deterritorializing tendencies of global forces (Sassen 2008) in various spheres of life notwithstanding, place and power geometries (Massey 1993) embedded therein retain their significance with offline power often migrating to online spaces. Mobility runs parallel to significant and complex forms of territorial anchoredness (spatially, culturally and institutionally) in the lives of transnational migrants and such fixity is also challenged through mediations of place and spatial relations. This calls into question earlier conceptualizations of online space as 'placeless space' (Christensen, Jansson and Christensen, 2011). Further, increasing numbers of studies have pointed to the need to introduce a 'place lens' (Gielis 2009) and to emphasize the

importance of 'the city', 'migrant congregations of urban settlements' and 'translocalities' (cf. Sinatti 2006) in the study of migrant transnationalism and cosmopolitan communication practices. Harvey's (1989) conceptualization of spatiality and temporality in which mobility and fixity are equally generative forces and Massey's (1994) point about the stratifying role of gender (amongst other factors) in the (re)location of subjectivities through both fixity and mobility are of significance here. Thus, examining the juxtaposition of the spatial flexibility of the online and the significance of place and locale is a necessary starting point in order to capture the connection between the transnational diasporic condition, communicative sociability and cosmopolitan (re)formations.

### **Where the material meets the virtual: the case of the Turkish migrants in Stockholm**

To start with, the city of residence and the city of origin have significant material and symbolic bearings that impact upon patterns of sociality, communication and belonging. Apart from the role of social determinants, such as class, education and gender and of individual preferences, two elements reign supreme in shaping social relations in the diaspora: spatial configurations of the city itself and the persistence of territorial extensions (both translocally and transnationally). The domain of the city as a site which embodies immediacy and various forms of material exclusion and inclusion play a far greater role in the social imaginaries of the migrant subjects than the more ephemeral, symbolic realm of the national. In the city, certain sites and places have 'social centrality' (Hetherington 1998) and take on a symbolic role. Shopping centres, common meeting points, cultural centres, neighbourhoods and various other forms of nodes constitute such common places. Of importance in this study are the relative sensory textures of the suburban migrant areas and of the centre as experienced by the participants. The migrants' sense of belonging is closely linked with their physical presence in the city as they are positioned 'in between' the peripheral and the central spaces of identity. One particular point that comes out of the interview data is the participants' articulations of strong attachment to Stockholm and a heightened sense of reflexivity (and ethical openness) they possess, not least due to their experiencing both the migrant-suburban and the central realms of the city. In relation to its constitutive power for forming and performing identities, the experiential realm of the city and the way it mediates between tradition and liberation then could be seen in juxtaposition to the more symbolic and abstract realm of *the national* (and its politics and institutional culture).

In the particular case of Sweden, there is a disjuncture between the national imaginary, which celebrates the nation as one of the world pioneers in foreign aid, social and gender equality and a very high per capita refugee intake rate on the one hand and the spatial configuration of its urban areas on the other. As Pred observes (1997):

Many of the first and second generation immigrants and refugees racialized by the majority population have developed forms of collective identity and cultural reworking that cannot be separated from the ways in which they have been spatially segregated in the Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö metropolitan areas (pp. 395–6).

Stockholm is marked by spatial segregation and the subsidized 'Million Homes' areas in the outskirts of the city such as Rinkeby, built in the 1960s and 1970s by the Social Democrats to solve the housing problem, are inhabited mostly by migrants today. Consequently, these areas have become homogeneously and stereotypically *alien* and *immigrant* (see Pred 1997; Christensen, C. 2008). As Andersson (2007) details, the Turkish-born population is fairly concentrated in large housing estates built as part of the Million Homes Programme. On the whole, reductionist accounts, particularly in relation to Muslims, play a significant role in the national social imaginary as recent studies suggest. Hvitfelt (2002) notes that television news associate Muslims and Islam primarily with violence and war; and, Westin (2003) observes that Turkish people are seen as ethnically distant with strong cultural attachments by the Swedish society.

The majority of the participants interviewed for this study indicated that they feel, in certain social instances, a strong alienation from the society, as a result of popular perceptions about their origin, appearance and cultural backgrounds. A number of the female participants said that they felt native Swedes displayed prejudice (or in some cases mere *naïveté*) against females of certain ethnic origin. One university student remarked:

I can see it in their [native Swedes'] eyes that when they look at me they think 'oh, another one of those *svartskalle*'<sup>2</sup>. And, they get shocked when they hear my native Swedish accent. I am Turkish, educated and non-veiled. They don't know what to make of me (Female in her twenties).

As this and a number of the other participants noted, such instances of feeling *Othered* both within the diasporic community and by the larger society leads to a search for alternative means of sociality, particularly using online platforms, which in the case of one participant went as far

as starting a Facebook group for 'equally open-minded individuals' (personal interview 2008). On the one hand, there is a general, encompassing element of commonality of identity and identification with a shared historicity, language and everyday culture within the Turkish diasporic community in Sweden. On the other hand, there is a great deal of diversity, and pronounced elements of generational, gender and class differences, and antagonisms arising from both territorial and class origins of certain sub-groups.<sup>3</sup> Strong feelings of antagonism and alienation were noted particularly in relation to certain subgroups of Turkish migrants' discriminatory and *Othering* attitudes toward other individuals and groups of Turkish origin. While its findings cannot be generalized, the study clearly indicates that identity, belonging and representation are far from unitary but very much contested and play a significant role in patterns of communication and mediated socialization amongst the Turkish migrants of Stockholm. Migrants' physical location in the city and the degree to which they interact with the larger society are linked with their mediation habits and the virtual channels they prioritize for everyday socialization.

During the interviews, it was pointed out that the older members of the diaspora appear to have closer in-group ties and they consume traditional Turkish media (mostly television), while the younger members are in touch with the Swedish society to a larger extent and have different media consumption habits. One participant, a woman in her twenties, pointed out that she only watches Turkish television when she visits her parents. As was revealed by a number of the participants, some of the older/first generation members of the diaspora are connecting through translocal sites (or 'village sites' as the participant referred to them) displaying communicative habits that can be seen as the extensions of their sense of spatial belonging. The village sites are online domains launched to represent certain locales (villages or towns) in Turkey and their people living in Turkey *and* across the globe. As such, they are both transnational and geographically defined. <http://www.kululuyuz.biz/> and [www.serefli.org](http://www.serefli.org) were brought up as popular examples frequented by Turkish migrants in Sweden and elsewhere. For the older generation (noted as casual observations by the participants in relation to their families/relatives), everyday sociality appears to take shape through face-to-face interaction with other migrants of Turkish origin while the participants' own social connections are more multi-nodal and mediated in character bringing together elements of physical locale and virtuality in complex ways.

Study participants also pointed to the existence of fields of strong tension between those who have been power-holders and gatekeepers in representing the diasporic community over extended periods of time

and those who lead or belong to newer, alternative social formations (e.g. associations or online portals). Online social media were consistently pointed to as platforms where communication assumes a more expressive form. This links to forms of belonging as sought outside the bounds of more commonplace versions of diasporic, ethnic and sub-group identity, and where ‘the cultural’ and ‘the political’ are intertwined leading to the rise of cosmopolitan sensibilities and new communities of choice and communal belonging. Likewise, Werbner, R. (2008), cited in Werbner, P. 2008) argues that public cosmopolitanism is *de facto* a socially inclusive political project that takes the form of linking like-minded individuals and groups. This project involves, as he notes, ‘first, the restless quest for the further horizon; second, the imperative of moral re-centring; and third, the constructing and transcending of difference,’ (p.15). The significance of mediated sociality and online media here is that such platforms do not only serve as communication media but precisely as spaces for moral re-centring and for re-shaping the form, scale and context of everyday relational experiences toward more cosmopolitan horizons.

Online networked sociality, in particular, provides a spatial matrix to forge, sustain, resist and appropriate diverse modes of representation. Sites such as Facebook are used as meeting places by both existing groups and communities, and as breeding grounds for new social constellations: ‘Isvecli Turkler (Swedish Turks)’; ‘Isvec Turkleri (Turks of Sweden)’; ‘Turkar i Stockholm (Turks in Stockholm)’; ‘Isvec’te Yasayan Turkler (Turks living in Sweden)’; ‘Isvec’teyiz (We are in Sweden)’, moderated by the offline Sweden ‘Idea and Culture Association’; and, ‘A Group for the Swedish Turkish’ constituted some of the popular Facebook groups during the research process in 2008–9. In addition, some offline institutions also have their own Facebook groups. The Facebook groups listed above all bear spatial associations through which the *centre* is reclaimed by its marginalized members. Appiah’s (1998) discussion of rooted cosmopolitanism and of how cosmopolitans start from membership in morally and emotionally significant collectivities such as ethnic communities and families is meaningful here in understanding the role of significations of place. While national space (Turkey, Sweden) and urban space (Stockholm) are precisely the containers of ethnic, cultural, geographic divisions, of segregation and ethnically-produced residential concentration (i.e. ‘migrant neighbourhoods’), imagined and mediated reinventions of place, such as the Facebook groups, that embrace difference as much as similarity, serve the purpose of a cosmopolitan recentring and spatially-enacted ethical recalibration. As such, place remains very much part of identity negotiation and virtual sociality in transnational settings.

### **Thinking mobility, agency and gender together**

As argued, material conditions, concrete boundaries and restrictions/scarcities on the one hand and mediated transgressions on the other, factor heavily in shaping agency and positionality amongst Turkish migrants. Reinventions/reclaiming of place as a cosmopolitan discursive tactic and strategic practice to generate 'open' spaces of diversity is routinely challenged by spatial proximity and fixity which harbours gendered delimitations of choice and agency on an everyday basis. In her discussion of social stratification, Anthias (2001) critiques the view that regards gender and ethnicity as social constructions that are commonly associated with the symbolic or cultural realms, while class is seen as relating to material inequality. She suggests a formulation in which claims and struggles over various types of resources take place in terms of gender, ethnicity/race and class. In the case of transnational migrant communities, class and ethnicity are often conflated and ethnicity is often perceived as a marker for class and educational level by the larger society. In the case of Muslim groups, perceptions of gender (often seen as a mere product of ethnicity and religiosity) are further complicated.

Gender dynamics within and outside of the transnational group are generative of stratification, and of various forms of spatialities and positionalities. Here, consideration of mobility—in its broadest sense—and reflexivity as dual forces navigating agentic disposition and expressivity offers an analytical gateway to approaching gendered cosmopolitan subjectivities. Hannam, Sheller and Urry (2006, p. 4) make note of 'the power and politics of discourses and practices of mobility in creating both movement and stasis,' and Fay (2007, p. 1) suggests that 'women have come to participate in voluntary movement in more agentic ways than possibly ever before.' Such a perspective helps us to better grasp the gendered reverberations of confrontations over power and identity, which result in instances of both persistence of traditional social constructions and annihilation/bypassing of them.

While younger women in the Turkish diaspora have a relatively high degree of social visibility in educational, professional and public life, they are far from untouched by social pressure and monitoring within the diasporic community and by discriminatory treatment in the larger social field as it was noted during the interviews. The segregated nature of urban areas and the tension fields between the migrant groups and the larger society have significant consequences for women. An affluent young female who holds a high level position in one of the diasporic representative institutions remarked:

It is difficult to pursue an independent lifestyle here if you are a woman. You know... You start dating someone and somebody's

mother sees you at a café and tells your mom. This kind of thing. There is a lot of close monitoring (Female in her twenties).

A similar observation was noted by a young male in relation to his larger family and their concern over 'cultural corruption': 'My aunt and uncle keep a very close eye on my two [female] cousins. . . . The girls use the internet heavily though and it's difficult for my aunt and uncle to control that,' (Male in his twenties).

As the interviews illustrate, in addition to reinforcing existing and engendering new spaces of belonging, online groups also allow for enactments of *phantasmic belonging*: a seamless form of interaction for individuals (in this case women) who do not necessarily wish to subscribe to identificatory categories by way of becoming members but want to partake both for ontological security and simple sociality. As discussed earlier, transnational communities, particularly Muslim ones, have been more prone to essentializing attitudes, particularly after 9/11. Hence, current practices of identity formation/assertion, communicative action and certain cultural reflexes toward both protectionism and rejection of certain labels need to be seen in that context. As one participant remarked:

I only use Facebook to get in touch with people that I am away from. I don't use it for its group function. . . . Also, I don't want to join those groups because it [the identity they represent] is not important for me. Turkish, Kurdish, Assyrian, Armenian . . . I don't want to take on an identity like that (Female in her twenties).

A male participant in his twenties commented on how he uses his Facebook account to form different groupings. He posts his photos and other personal information in creative ways so that he can be discreet about his sexual identity in family circles and diasporic networks, while revealing his choice openly to other contacts. Various other forms of online social activity and ways to avoid building concrete and visible ties were brought up during the interviews. As such, online social media platforms, such as Facebook, not only facilitate ordinary networking of individuals and groups, but also pursue regimes of *invisibility* and concealment, particularly by younger individuals and females who incorporate various communicative tactics to avoid power geometries and social monitoring. By incorporating a *mobile agency*, the individuals interviewed for this study both sustain their gender roles within the community and enter into new playing fields through mediation which is not easily penetrable by in-group control apparatuses. The mobility (of agency) in question eases crossing of social borders, particularly when and where cosmopolitan openness is challenged by parochial protectionism and intervention.

Consequently, a disposition toward appropriating simultaneously local/particularistic and savvy/universalistic sensibilities, and accompanying tactics to carve out publicly intimate spaces is revealed at the juncture of offline social space and mediated communication. These intersectional communicative spaces engender a specific experience of belonging, empathy and (dis)trust 'which does without the consolation of idealized images of community and communication' (Silverstone 1999, cited in Barnett 2004, p. 66).

To go back to the question of cosmopolitanism, Tomlinson (1999, p. 195) draws from Hannerz's (1990) typology of cosmopolitans and locals, in suggesting that the cosmopolitan is not the ideal type to be opposed to the local.

She [sic] is precisely someone who is able to live—ethically, culturally—in *both the global and the local at the same time*. Cosmopolitans can recognize their own cultural dispositions and negotiate as equals with other autonomous locals (emphasis in original).

A heightened sense of reflexivity, as Tomlinson is alluding to here, accompanies mobile agency and tactful subjectivity, qualities which seem to correspond to the discourse developed by diasporic women participating in the current study.

It is worth noting that reflexivity is one concept that has been highly valorized in the globalization, cosmopolitanism and mobilities discourses alike (and, at times, to the point of downplaying the role of material exclusions and overbearing structures). While the role of social structures and resources remains very much vital, reflexivity takes various shapes. In many instances, reflexivity manifests itself as a self-regulated expressive capacity not necessarily engendering instant social change by radically shifting the power geometry but nonetheless enabling individuals to live—ethically, culturally—in an in-betweenness by continuously forming and adapting comfort zones around attaching locality and disembedding universalism. Such a tendency is clearly a common characteristic shared by the female participants in this study. Urry's mobilities (both symbolic and real), particularly in relation to the individuals and groups involved within this study, also remain instrumental as (1) movement between identificatory categories and social domains is occurring incessantly and in complex ways; and (2) some groups and individuals (such as the women in this study) incorporate a heightened sense of self-awareness and a more organic form of reflexivity that is routinized (even if it is not immediately privileging in material terms) rather than occasional (cf. Christensen, 2011). One participant noted that she follows Turkish TV programmes in order not to lose her social presence in certain settings.

Such forms of tactfulness that are developed in transnational settings have precisely to do with the fact that self-realization between obligations, restrictions and aspirations necessitates an ability to continuously observe situations, make informed choices and keep a fine balance between different positionalities.

### **In conclusion: life on the brink of flux and continuity**

Mediated communication is far from offering imminently and radically transformative experiences and privileges lacking in the offline domain. While contemporary forms of mediation can yield ruptures—of varying scale and form—in the experience of territoriality and belonging, and in the norms that govern the multiple spheres of life, continuities prevail and must be accounted for. It is precisely in such contexts that vernacular, discrepant forms of cosmopolitanism find venues of expression in search of new ethical vistas and new relational experiences. Diasporas are heterogeneous and it is often the case that segregating and *Othering* practices in the host country combined with ethnic and spatial isolation yield nationalistic, even militant, reflexes of protectionism, not cosmopolitanism. Turkish diaspora is no different, yet the results of this study are illustrative of two significant, dialectically constituted, trends.

Firstly, although mediated activity epitomizes a significant portion of everyday diasporic life, spatially-defined limitations (such as segregated neighbourhoods) and place-bound belonging (to the cities of origin and of current residence) determine, to a great degree, both material possibilities and relational and symbolic boundaries. Gender adds another dimension to how individuals are positioned vis-à-vis mobility and fixity (Massey 1994). Secondly, constraint and fixity rooted in both demographic and spatial factors are dynamically challenged from within. In the current case, this takes the form of subverting and symbolically reinventing the very containers of 'closure', such as place and by generating altered spaces of belonging open to new relational experiences. Online spaces of connecting accommodates diverse forms of togetherness and voice and extended possibilities to see the world from a variety of *Others'* perspectives. While it is certainly not the case that Turkish diaspora—or any diaspora—in its entirety, can be studied from the analytical stance of cosmopolitanism, a thickly textured world-orientedness and a true and conscious openness are highly visible features amongst certain transnational groups and individuals.

Women, such as those who participated in this study, juggle between individual choice and aspirations and traditionalism and rootedness. Their communicative practices and the solutions they seek, without effacing cultural and individual differences, are clearly cosmopolitan.

In sum, while transnationalism and cosmopolitanism are often invoked in discursive frames of deterritorialization and placelessness, persistence of elements of spatial fixity and (trans)locality need to be seen as part of lived transnationality and global mobility. Understanding identity, communication and belonging in diasporic frames of existence requires unbundling, through situated research, of the ways in which mediation, gendered agency, spatial/territorial materiality and belonging feed into and from each other.

## Notes

1. Akin to Axel (2004), I take diaspora to mean a globally mobile category of identification rather than a community of individuals dispersed from a homeland; and, as constituted through a complex web of everyday social practices rather than displacement.
2. Svartskalle is a derogatory Swedish word, similar to nigger in effect, literally meaning black skull in reference to the darker hair color of certain immigrant groups.
3. Turkish migrants form neighbourhoods based on where they come from in Turkey

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