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Seeking Ontological Security Beyond the Nation: The Role of Transnational Television.

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Keywords: television audience; satellite television; ontological security; mediated identity; Arab audiences

Abstract

This paper examines the role of transnational television in supporting transnational subjects' ontological security in a world of information, risk, interconnected spaces, but fragmented social relations. The discussion draws on Silverstone's and Giddens' work on ontological security and modernity. It revisits Silverstone's (1993, 1994) analysis of television as a core system for managing modern subjects' ontological insecurities and relocates this thesis in a transnational context. In its ordinariness and ever-presence, transnational television frames a 'safe' and 'secure' space for everyday life for many diasporic and migrant audiences. Enabling symbolic as well as physical co-presence, the space around television becomes a contradictory, yet important, frame for managing everyday angst. This is particularly the case for people torn by anxieties associated with separation, political instability in their region of origin, and the precariousness of migrant life. With reference to empirical research with Arab audiences across Europe, the paper shows that television sustains its central role, even when new media make significant advances.

Introduction

When the 'Arab Spring' grasped the world's imagination, there was little talk about the role of television in the uprisings. Instead, global media almost instantly branded the events as the 'Facebook revolution' and the 'Twitter revolution'. There is something significant in the little attention television attracted during these events: television was old news. Satellite television has become such an ordinary and banal element of Arab audiences' daily media consumption that there was little more to say about it as these media events unfolded. The lack of satellite television's newsworthiness and its ordinariness are at the core of this paper. The discussion revisits Silverstone's (1993, 1994) analysis on television supporting audiences' ontological security in a world of information, risk, interconnected spaces but fragmented social relations. It explores the relevance of this analysis in the context of intense migration, satellite television's omnipresence and the diversification of mediascapes. Drawing from a study that recorded television's remarkable popularity, the paper explores continuities and changes in the ways transnational subjects locate their sense of self in a media-saturated, risk-ridden world. How can television *still* be so popular? In what ways has television's socio-psychological role for audiences changed, if at all, in the context of diversified, transnational and fragmented mediascapes? And, does television advance or challenge global subjects' ontological security?

In recent years, television has changed from being primarily a national medium, as it was when Silverstone developed his thesis, to being as much national as transnational. Television's transnationalisation presents a new challenge in understanding the relation

between television, global risks and audiences' sense of security. Transnational television, now available across millions of households in the world due to satellite and digital technologies (Chalaby 2005), has challenged the boundedness of spaces of identity as contained within the nation-state. This shift is particularly important to migrant and diasporic groups, who have for long sustained links to people and communities across boundaries and who have been particularly vulnerable to global risks. Arabs in Europe represents no exception. A diverse group of people, established through various waves of migration and exile, they regularly experience anxieties associated with politics that affect their region of origin but also their lives in Europe. In a cross-European project with Arab-speakers, participants spoke about many of those anxieties and the ways in which they try to manage them. Importantly, television was a regular reference in these efforts. In an inductive analysis driven by the participants' own words and practices, this paper argues that television remains a powerful tool for transnational subjects' attempt to find ontological security. As shown below, television sustains this role more than other media because of its ordinariness and its ability to adapt to the new media environment.

The analysis is organised in three main sections, each revealing one of the ways in which television supports' participants ontological security: as a cultural system that supports a sense of homeliness, as an everyday companion providing daily reassurance, and as a supporter of efforts to manage transnational anxieties. The audiences discussed here, like other audiences, occupy highly mediated and globally connected spaces characterised by internal heterogeneity. With the 'ordinariness' of audiencehood as a starting point, the discussion examines what is particular about these audiences, especially with regards to migration and transnational life. Empirically, the discussion draws from an EU-funded cross-

European project with Arab audiences of transnational television in seven European capital cities.

Revisiting ontological security

As all global subjects, migrants and diasporas are increasingly aware of risks to humanity and to their own well-being as a result of conflict, environmental disasters, and financial transactions that take place close-by and in distant places (Giddens 1990). Yet, migrants and diasporas experience some of those risks in great intensity. In sustaining emotional attachments to distant places and people, geographically distant suffering (Chouliaraki 2006) becomes proximate, familiar and intimate. At the same time, the precarious life that many lead, as a result of social exclusion and the politics of migration, turn global risks into personal experience. As risks, and awareness of risks associated with globalisation, intensify in the context of migration and transnational communication, Giddens's (1990) and Silverstone's (1993, 1994) analysis of ontological security becomes more relevant than ever. For Giddens, ontological security refers to:

the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action. A sense of the reliability of persons and things, so central to the notion of trust, is basic to feelings of ontological security (1990: 92).

Giddens grounds his analysis in modernity's realities and draws from 'object-relation' theory in explaining how individuals manage conditions of high risk. As he argues, threats to humans' ontological security have intensified as technological and industrial change brought

about new risks which humans are more aware of. At the same time, technological change and industrialisation have changed most humans' significant relations from being primarily face-to-face to being increasingly mediated and dependent on abstract systems of effective management of risks. As a consequence, systems of trust have been reconfigured with space-time distancing and individuals have increasingly grounded their sense of ontological security on relational networks, which are often dislocated from the immediate locality.

In Giddens' analysis, ontological security provides a dialogical system of management of the self within social systems; it represents an attempt to explain how individuals are not constantly anxious, even when risks are all around them. As Bauman argues, without a sense of security human subjects "are stripped of the confidence without which freedom can hardly be exercised" (2005: 36). Ontological security starts developing in childhood and is achieved through a system of trust that the infant develops through her knowledge that her caretaker is reliable but also through the understanding that there is a space between herself and the caretaker that allows the development of a distinct identity (Giddens 1990). Absence is central to an infant's ability to develop social capabilities, which Giddens applies to global subjects' experience of time-space distancing within late modernity. Transitional objects provide the infant with a sense of security when separated from the caretaker and for many global subjects the transitional object is television, writes Silverstone:

Media, television perhaps preeminently, occupy the potential space released by blankets, teddy bears and breasts (Young 1996) and function cathectically and culturally as transitional objects. As such, they are, of course, vulnerable to the

exigencies of our own individual upbringing as well as to the environments in which they are both produced and consumed (1994: 13).

While Giddens emphasises the threat to ontological security resulting from the dissolution of face-to-face and intimate relations, Silverstone brings relations of trust back into the home. He argues that television bridges the abstract mediated knowledge with the familial and face-to-face interaction around the consumption of television, especially news, and turns abstract and distant symbols such as those associated with disasters into elements of everyday life. Television, thus, contributes to ordering everyday life, especially in its embeddedness in routines and rituals (1994). As a medium, television extends our reach and our security in a world defined by information; it is an entertainer and an informer, both reinforcing and containing the temporalities of the everyday:

Routines and rituals of television 'disturb but also regulate everyday life' and thus manage crises and insecurities. Ontological security is sustained through the familiar and the predictable. Our common sense attitudes and beliefs express and sustain our practical understandings of the world, without which life would quickly become intolerable (1994: 19).

Broadcast schedules reproduce the domestic and familiar time and space organisation, while crises and catastrophes are 'managed' by the highly ritualised and regularised structures and flows of news. Silverstone's (1994) analysis bridges the home (local/micro) and the global risks (global/macro). Global risks 'come home' via television and families find ways to make sense and manage the knowledge they get through mechanisms associated with the domestic economy and morality. But what happens when 'home' and

family expand across boundaries, as much as global risks? What if television does not just mediate distance between the local and the global but also maintains it? And how much does television matter in a world saturated by different kinds of media?

The ever-presence of satellite television in many households demonstrates both the continuing relevance of Silverstone's thesis and the need to update it. The global and domestic environment where television is consumed is changing. Most of the households we studied are media-rich and include numerous media and communication technologies: television sets, computers, and a range of personal media, such as mobile phones, iPods and game consoles. Many of these households are multilingual and so are the media environments, with participants using Arabic, English, French and other languages. But one of the things that surpass diversity is the intensity of mediation: media are everywhere and they are used and talked about regularly. In this media-rich environment, it is no surprise that television counts.

Television is a particular kind of medium as well as one of the core technologies within media culture. Its role is important but increasingly conditional and subject to the continuities and discontinuities that a diverse, fragmented and decentralised system of mediated communication sustains. As shown below, television has not been marginalised by social and personal media, but rather it has become a more complex medium itself, available on different platforms and drawing from information available on other digital media. The persistence of television's popularity, through change, makes Silverstone's thesis a reference of sustained relevance.

Instantaneity, simultaneity and vastness of shared information circulated on television, as well as on other digital platforms redefine symbolic spaces of belonging beyond geographical boundaries. The success of satellite television reaffirms the relevance of television as a technology and as a cultural reference; television supports a sense of continuity in migrant and diasporic populations' symbolic space of belonging and a shared imagination of a hybrid transnational community (Georgiou, 2006). As Naficy (1993) writes, exilic television can become the transitional object between the world that vanished for the exilic subject and their new environments. In many ways, the loss that Giddens recognises as historical becomes spatial. Even when they have not experienced violent uprooting, migrant and diasporic people often face the fragmentation of intimate relations and the dissolution of grounded in a single place realities.

Transnational television for a transnationally connected world

Satellite television is the ultimate transnational medium, only comparable to the internet in its reach and richness. It is also a converged medium in a number of ways, at least two of them being significant: it is usually available on different platforms and it has increasingly benefitted from cross-fertilisation with social media. This cross-fertilisation was well-recorded when Al Jazeera repeatedly reproduced video footage recorded on Tahrir Square demonstrators' mobile phones. Less widely known is the use of Facebook and Twitter to sustain the popularity of channels or programmes through fan clubs, FB events and other regular feeds.

For many transnational audiences, television represents a particular cultural symbol of association and community and this is what makes it significant; the platform where it is consumed is often less important. This is a kind of television consumed by dispersed populations who often share certain distinct commonalities – language being the most basic (Author 2006). Satellite television, as all television, is embedded in everyday life; it is used regularly and discussed in familial but also in public settings and reflects interests and preferences in entertainment, information and politics, as much as it reflects the domestic economy and family dynamics (Morley 2000; Silverstone 1994).

As an ultimately transnational medium, satellite television broadcasts representations of distant places and people, with a speed and vibrancy rarely observed in most other media. For example, satellite television constantly reminds its audiences of cultural and political interconnections across physical boundaries, such as those between Middle Eastern and American politics. Popular programmes, such as X-Factor and Pop Idol, are regularly consumed in various linguistic and regional versions, while interactive programmes, such as phone-in talk shows are integral to media consumption among audiences spread across the Middle East, Europe and Africa (Kraidy 2010).

Arabic satellite television's huge expansion, which currently includes more than 500 channels (Slade 2010), has been studied within a cross-national research project on Arabic television audiences across Europe¹. Data emerging in this project informs this paper. The study was conducted between 2008 and 2011 in seven European capital cities and included four main phases: a survey on media uses with approx. 400 self-identified Arab-speakers in each of six capital cities (Amsterdam, Berlin, London, Madrid, Paris and Stockholm); media diaries filled in by approx. 100 participants in each of those cities demonstrating their

specific media choices over one week; six single-gendered focus groups with adult men and women self-identified as Arabic-speakers in the six capital cities above and additionally in Nicosia, Cyprus; and a public engagement event in each of the seven cities, which provided an open forum for debating the relationship between citizenship and the media.

Arabic television has benefitted from a transnational audience that spreads across continents (Sakr 2008) and the participants in our study confirmed its success. The study recorded very high levels of transnational television consumption; television is the most popular medium consumed across age, class, ethnicity and location. While media preferences vary across this diverse transnational group, the majority of respondents in the survey said that television represents their most important source of news (68.9% among those aged over 30 and 58.2% among those aged under 30). For 25.6% of those under 30, internet represents the most important medium for news; this is the case for 11.6% of those over 30. For the remaining respondents, newspapers, radio and word of mouth represent the most important source of news.

Part of television's success is associated with the fact that as a medium it requires only basic media literacy and low linguistic skills to consume compared to other media. These are both important elements when it comes to transnational audiences who have different levels of literacy in Arabic. While shared trends were observed across countries, differences in migration experiences and in personal histories also emerged as important parameters. The group consist of people with origins across the Middle East, North Africa and other Arabic-speaking African regions and it is characterised by extensive internal diversity in terms of cultural, religious and class identities (El Kenzand and Amin 2005; Fargues 2004). Among the 2470 participants in the survey conducted in Amsterdam, Berlin,

London, Madrid, Paris and Stockholm, 23% were born in Europe, 30,9% in Morocco, 13,8% in Iraq and the remaining participants were spread across more than 12 countries. These percentages vary per country, with the sample in Amsterdam, Madrid and Paris being primarily Moroccan, the London sample being characterized by a diversity of origins, Nicosia bringing together a rather cosmopolitan group of sojourners, and the Stockholm group consisting predominantly by Iraqi refugees (56.9%). Some of the most important differences in patterns of media choices related to gender, ethnicity and generation. Men chose news more often than women, while different ethnic groups had varied preferences when it came to Arabic and European television: on the one end of the spectrum 50% of Arabs born in Europe watched only European channels and on the other end, people born in Iraq were the most likely group to only watch Arabic channels (43.8%). Also, first generation migrants were more likely to depend on Arabic television compared to second and third generation. As focus group data also shows, engagement with Arabic television becomes more intense at times of crisis and other major events; at such periods television consumption peaks. The findings discussed here represent only a snapshot of the richness and diversity characterising media use among participants, as recorded in the project; the limited space available poses inevitable limitations in the discussion.

Transnational subjects, transnational insecurities

This paper locates the particularities of a transnational audience, Arabs in Europe, within the broader context of globalisation and intense mediation. On the one hand, television's persistence in everyday life – this being transnational or national, digital or analogue –

points towards media's power to contain practices and discourses of identity. This persistence applies as much to transnational subjects as it does to other global subjects². Thus, many of the patterns associated with media use among participants represent elements of global media culture and less so ethnic particularity. Television provides access to the world 'out there', and the world 'out there' can be in the same city or at a different continent. Also, television condenses the realities of everyday life in representing and in reaffirming social relations and value systems. On the other hand, there are certain distinct characteristics associated with migrant and diasporic experience, such as the anxieties associated with diasporic life. For many, these anxieties derive from anti-migration and Islamophobic sentiments currently on rise across Europe:

I feel an immigrant in Spain because when you want to practice your religion in public, people look at you as if you were an alien. (Madrid, Males, 26-45)

My son who is born here and is only 18 is constantly stopped under the Anti-terrorism Act...I always say to him: 'You are English and Egyptian, Egyptian and English'...He says 'yeah' but inside I know he feels like a *persona non grata*. (London, Males, 46-65)

Anxieties as those expressed above represent powerful discourses and turn 'big' politics into personal experience and emotional pain. The in-betweenness that is a condition of migration and diasporic life is often experienced as angst and uncertainty around self identity.

Once we were on a course and everyone was asked to say where he/she is from. No one would have believed me if I said 'I'm from Spain'. On the contrary they would think that I'm ashamed of my origin. (Madrid, Females, 18-25)

I am an Iraqi refugee because I cannot go back to my country. If I go back to Iraq, I need a good school, safety, freedom, everything I have here, the same lifestyle...I cannot say I am Iraqi Cypriot, I am only Iraqi but I can say Cyprus is my second country. (Nicosia, Females, 18-25)

For others, even when not expressed as a constant source of anxiety, like for the woman below, migration leads to uncertainty and a sense of rootlessness.

I feel I am Lebanese and Palestinian but only a part of me. I am Cypriot but only in a part of me. I don't feel I completely belong to one place. (Nicosia, Females, 26-45)

While identities are always incomplete and in process (Hall 2009), at times where assimilationist ideologies predominate, transnational subjects are more likely to feel apologetic or in need to retreat to essentialist positions. As an example from Madrid shows:

My feeling, if you ask me 'Do you love Syria or Spain more?' I'll be upset with myself and say Syria. I get upset because I live here [Spain] and I was born here. I lived 21 years here but I love Syria more. (Madrid, Females, 18-25)

Hall interprets the retreat to essentialist identities as a result of insecurities associated with attack to certain identities:

[Y]ou are driven into the exact opposite alternative, which is to defend yourself against the loss of identity which wholesale assimilation as a strategy entails, and retreat defensively back to where you came from, into that sphere called 'tradition', as if that has remained the same, untouched by history (2009: 348).

Retreat to essentialist identities was observed in a number of cities. In Madrid it was primarily associated with a reaction to xenophobia and Islamophobia, in London primarily with Islamophobia and the 'war on terror' and in Paris primarily responded to a powerful and hegemonic discourse of a homogenous 'Frenchness'. Most often, identities were observed as being unsettled, and participants were often anxious in trying to define 'who they are' and 'where they belong'.

Transnational television and ontological security

It is in the context of the repeatedly expressed anxieties across different European cities that the present analysis takes place. As participants struggle with anxieties, satellite television comes into domestic life as a permanent, reliable, easily accessible and ever-present point of reference. As television sustains a changing, yet lasting, role in everyday life, Silverstone's thesis remains relevant in at least two ways: as television supports links between individuals' realisation of the self through being part of the world; and as television has the ability to reproduce the familiar and ordinary at times of intense global risks. As a medium, transnational television has a complex and contradictory role: it intensifies insecurities through its regular broadcasts of news associated with conflict and risks, and, at

the same time, it contains insecurities by integrating such news into the discourses and routines of everyday life.

The ways in which television supports transnational subjects' ontological security are discussed around three sub-themes that revisit Silverstone's analytical framework: television's role in sustaining a sense of homeliness; television as a system of daily reassurance supporting individuals' confidence that there is more continuity than disruption in their life; and television as a system of management of insecurities associated with transnational condition. The transnationality of everyday life is reflected in the richness of media consumption, which for most participants in all cities includes an eclectic mix of Arabic and British television channels ranging from BBC1 and Al Jazeera, all the way to Al Manar (Hezbollah's channel) and Iqraa TV (Islamic religious channel). The use of different channels and genres reflects the diversification of media consumption for most audiences, but also the negotiation of proximity and distance that takes place in diasporic everyday life and as participants try to make sense of the world and their place in the world.

A sense of homeliness

For most diasporic and migrant populations, home is rarely synonymous to a singular and clearly bounded physical place. Uprooting, migration and physical disruption to significant relationships relocate the home (or lack of) within a transnational context. Simultaneous and transnational consumption of satellite television both reflects and, to an extent, responds to the disruption in physical co-presence among audiences who share familial relationships. With transnational television, a double sense of familiarity is in place: satellite

television is de facto transnational and the digital and satellite technologies it relies on are dislocated (or can be located anywhere). In some sense, like its audiences. Satellite television is also a technology that represents a familiar domestic cultural form (Silverstone 1994). The multilinguality of satellite television fits within the cultural form of the family and the domestic economy of many Arabic households. It also provides access to other members of the audience – a transnational imagined community. Thus, the space around television becomes more than merely a space of consumption. It becomes reaffirmed as a space of emotional proximity, regular exchanges and of ordinary interaction, in similar ways as it has been for decades (Morley 2000; Silverstone 1994). Only, in this case, the familial and the domestic are not rooted in a single place. As an Iraqi participant in London said in a focus group, different members of her transnational family who regularly watch soap operas on Arabic television support their shared viewing with regular exchanges on Facebook, Skype and over the telephone.

While technologies, such as satellite television and the internet, which allow such sharing might be new, the social forms they support are old (Silverstone 1994). As television and other media support family relations, the space around transnational television can become, not just a tool to expand connection across space, but also a space of resistance to the changes and threats to family life and routines as a result of migration. Many participants' statements about their communal consumption are not merely descriptive, but evaluative of a home and of the possibility to sustain a family within a transnational context.

When we want to watch something [in my family] we don't argue about it because we have the same preferences (Cyprus, Females, 18-25)

Shared consumption as reaffirming a sense of homeliness is vividly captured in the words of the participant below. Routines and rituals associated with domestic life provide a sense of homeliness but also a sense of certainty that both *I* and *We* are contained within a transnational domesticity:

If there's one thing I've somehow got used to indirectly is entering the living room everyday at 6 o'clock and watching the news on Future TV...because it's news about Lebanon specifically and it's just been very ordinary for us. (London, Males, 18-25)

A sense of familiarity and ordinariness associated with domestic life and television as a technology can support ontological security. Transnational television is television; this is both a familiar medium and a medium most closely associated with life at home. As Morley puts it:

If it is now a common place to note that television has replaced the hearth as the totemic centrepiece of the family's main living space, we should note that this replacement occurred literally at the centre of the symbolic space of the family home: a sacred space, by any definition, within our culture (2000: 87).

With the diversification of media and communication technologies, the totemic centrepiece has become multiplied, and as Silverstone argues, it has in many cases supported familial relations and domestic economies that could have been threatened – as a result of migration in the case of this group. A young female London participant explains that her family has three television sets in the living room. One television set is used by her young brother to play games, the second set is always tuned in Al Jazeera, while the third set's use shifts between Arabic soap operas and films, and is usually watched by the female

members of the family. 'When you walk in our living room you walk into Club Arabic!', she says laughing.

While this example might not be representative of most participants' living rooms' media geography, the diversification of the domestic media environment it reveals certainly is. Participants across Europe described the spread of media and communication technologies across the households and the different uses family members make of them. Yet, repeatedly, two shared patterns were recorded. Firstly, most often participants described this fragmentation as ordinary and banal, being associated with the internal diversity of their family's identities. Secondly, they often spoke about daily fragmentation of media uses as regularly interrupted by shared moments of media consumption and talk, especially during evening family time. Thus, rather than these being households divided along technological and generational lines, what participants most often described were media-rich households. This richness represents the diversity of identities and experiences associated with people of different generations and gender sharing a home. It also reveals the multinodal location of the migrant and diasporic home, which is often connected to many other nodes along diverse transnational networks. It is thus the ever-presence, as well as the fragmentation of media consumption in migrant and diasporic homes, that provides a sense of homeliness. These are homes located in transnational familial networks but also in networks associated with generational, age, gendered, and other individual identities.

An everyday system of transnational reassurance?

One of the main sources of anxiety for individuals within globalisation, Giddens (1990) argues, is time-space distanciation. Most people's significant relationships have been stretched beyond the immediate locality and mediated communication has largely replaced kin and face-to-face interaction. Thus patterns of everyday life have become dislocated from singular places and relational networks have taken over as systems for sustaining trust. 'Money, air travel, media content are all, in their various ways, trusted. They only work, of course, because they are trusted', writes Silverstone (1994: 7).

For migrant and diasporic people the relational networks and mechanisms of trust involve some traditional forms of organisation which have become transnational, such as family networks, and religious and political associations (Vertovec 2009). Media and communication technologies have provided not only one of the mechanisms for sustaining a sense of trust but also the necessary glue for these systems to remain trusted.

Not one day passes without me going through all my country's channels. It's not to follow news as there are news channels that report the news of my country...But I long to watch Yemen. It is a matter of longing...I know that whenever I open my country's channels, there will be no news at all. But I just like to have a look and get a sense of comfort. (Stockholm, Males, 18-25)

It is indeed in the banality and dailyness of television that many transnational subjects find reassurance and a sense of comfort. Predictability in broadcasting is in itself a reminder of continuity of identities *here* as well as *there*.

News can take a particularly important role as a genre that provides daily reassurance that identities, places, and people are 'in place'. Indeed, and as the media

diaries indicate, news is by large the most consumed genre across cities. It ranges from participants in Madrid consuming news and current affairs programmes during 85% of their viewing time and participants in Berlin doing so during 54% of their time. 'News is addictive, the more so when the world is unsettled. News is a key institution in the mediation of threat, risk and danger, and on Giddens' terms as well as Winnicott's, central to our understanding of our capacity to create and maintain our ontological security', writes Silverstone (1994: 17).

While Silverstone recorded the role that news in reassuring national audiences, it is interesting to see how news becomes a complex and multinodal system that provides reassurance to transnational audiences:

I follow Al Jazeera, then Al Arabiya and BBC in Arabic and English and I follow the websites which have chat rooms about the political events to know many points of views. I also follow the direct coverage of important events on Arab or western channels (Nicosia, Males, 26-45).

I have to compare and contrast, whether it's the war in Gaza or the Danish cartoons (London, Males, 18-25).

Diverse patterns of viewing as those described above are common. Perhaps what they reflect most vividly is the lack of trust towards one singular news provider: news agendas reflect biases and broadcasters have their own interests, as many said during the focus group interviews. Yet there is awareness that news, in their format and content, represents the daily realities of transnational life and global politics.

At the same time, as Augé argues (1995), a sense of familiarity while in new places can come through forms and symbols associated with global consumer culture. Global brands, which increasingly include media brands, such as BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera, but also globally circulated formats, such as those of Reality TV, newscasts, and soap operas, provide the reassurance that, within uncertainty and political turmoil, certain systems of trust are still in place.

[Al Jazeera] stands out as a channel, different than the French channels which are ideological and the Maghreb channels which are patriotic. (Paris, Males, 46-65)

I didn't find Aljazeera biased. They are controversial, yes, but I think they kind of expose a lot of things that people don't want expressed. (London, Females, 26-45)

While the brand of Al Jazeera is the most recognised and praised across the media consumed, similar appreciation is expressed towards national public broadcasting – from Sweden to the UK – and for non-Arabic transnational broadcasters, such as BBC World or France 24.

Constant exposure to news from the Middle East provides a complex system for managing risks. For many, the more they engage with mediated systems of information, the more they feel in control of their anxieties. Especially as this group is exposed to a regular and high level of global risks associated with war and political instability, risks do not go through the regular televisual cycle of 'breaking news – rolling news' that Silverstone talks about. The emotional proximity to geographically distant crises, especially those associated with Palestine, Iraq, and the Middle Eastern uprisings more recently, gives television yet an

enhanced totemic role. At those moments, regular routines are interrupted and engagement with transnational television becomes more intense.

I watch the BBC 10 O'clock news. When there are troubles, I listen to Al Jazeera.

(London, Males, 26-45)

We also watch the news on Al-Jazeera Arabic but not always. So for example if there is some disaster somewhere like in Palestine and Gaza then we watch it intensively.

(Madrid, Females, 18-25)

Engagement with the media does not only reflect changes in mediascapes; it also reflects global politics. Most participants are well aware that global risks are not going away; active and dynamic engagement with transnational realities, largely through the media, becomes a way of taking symbolic and emotional control over risks beyond their practical control. In this context, the mental space created around television consumption provides a great sense of comfort and some sense of security.

Transnational television for transnational ontological security

While both Giddens and Silverstone recognise human mobility as a key element of globalisation, neither of them discusses the ways migrant and diasporic populations manage global risks. In conducting empirical research with people who occupy transnational mental spaces, it becomes clear that many of their deepest ontological anxieties are tied to interrupted physical proximities. It is at moments of crises and of intensification of disrupted geographies that transnational television most visibly takes over the role of a transitional

object. Providing a substitute to the security usually offered by the family, the home, the community, and the routines associated with these spaces of belonging, television can become an object full of meanings, especially when in new places. In one of many similar examples, a London participant says:

I never thought about this before. I just realized that I have never made an active effort to watch Arabic TV at home but whenever I'm travelling with work the first thing I do is look for the Arabic channels on the hotel TV (London, Males, 26-45).

It is likely that Arabic television turns into a transitional object at times of ontological need to ground the self to the familiar, especially when surrounded by the unfamiliar.

The 'Arab Spring' represents a case when transnational television became a powerful transitional object. Ontological dependence was vividly captured in the words of participants during focus groups conducted while the Egyptian uprising was in progress. During the days of the uprising, television was embraced as a way to fill in the space created by the disrupted physical geography separating migrant and diasporic audiences in Europe from protesters in Cairo.

The last few weeks with events in Egypt, obviously I was glued to events on Al Jazeera, much more than I usually would be (London, Females, 26-45).

Because of the Egyptian events I have watched the news more than I usually do. For example I went home on the weekend to see my parents and Al Jazeera was on from the morning to the night...Then, we would compare what is being said on Al Jazeera

and for example what the BBC says, Al Arabiya, comparing news channels...how they view it (London, Females, 18-25).

On satellite broadcasts the conventional separation between national and international politics, which dominates national media agendas, becomes appropriated to transnational realities and sentiments. Even when the broadcasts themselves reproduce nationalist discourses, the fact that they are consumed across national territories relocates their meanings. This makes 'living in translation' (Hall 2009) a constant reality for many. Hall defines people 'living in translation' as:

[P]eople who have no choice as to whether or not to become cosmopolitans. They have to learn to live in two countries, to speak a new language and make a life in another place, not by choice but as a condition of survival. They have to acquire the same cosmopolitan skills of adaptation and innovation which an entrepreneur requires – but from a different place... So, culturally, they're living 'in translation' every day of their lives...not the global life as a reward for status, education or wealth, but the global life as one of the necessities imposed by the disjunctures of modern globalisation (2009: 347).

If Hall is right, migrant and diasporic people's ontological security cannot be achieved within a sedentary way of life, within a life grounded in a single place. As the mental space of many transnational subjects expands across boundaries, so do their spaces of identity. It is thus the homology of transnational television and of transnational everyday life that supports their interdependence in sustaining ontological security. The study of

transnational subjectivity requires a review of Giddens' definition. The confidence that most humans have in the continuity of their self-identity Giddens talks about is, in this case refers to the continuity of relational networks linked to interrupted geographies of co-presence. The 'constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action' (Giddens 1990: 92) is paradoxically achieved through movement, especially movement between mental spaces enabled through mediated communication and networked connections (Castells 2009).

While Giddens acknowledged that more knowledge through the media makes us more aware of global risks, he did not anticipate the way knowledge through media might help us manage deep insecurities associated with those risks. Transnational television becomes one of those media that are crucial for many migrant and diasporic people to sustain a sense of ontological security and a sense of continuity of their identities. In knowing that their familiar world is changing, and as they often have little ability to intervene, like in the case of the Egyptian uprising, connectedness itself becomes a way to be part of changing cultural and political geographies. Transnational television thus becomes more than a system of dissemination of information; it becomes a tool of engaging with crises, of being an active participant, not just a witness. And in addition, transnational television becomes incorporated in a complex system of individual media world, which includes different media, each being able to inform the other. In this complex system, interactivity and cross-reference become as regular and banal as the use of television. And audiences become participants and actors in events happening far away:

There are so many ways to describe Al Jazeera, but because I needed to know exactly what was happening in Egypt so I was either watching Al Jazeera or getting

the news from Facebook. So the social media side of things has been revolutionary for me. I have been glued to it...my husband just avoids me when I am doing this, sometimes I'm laughing and sometimes I'm crying. (London, Females, 26-45)

The words above capture the intensity of emotions and the desire to be an active participant in Middle Eastern events. While it was social media, such as Facebook, that supported the dialogical exchange with people on the ground, television allowed participants to share 'the feel' of the events. As satellite television was consumed at the same time across boundaries, its representations of the uprising provided many a basis for claims to a community and a polity (Silverstone 1994).

A transnational space...with some security

As shown through the three themes discussed, transnational television mobilises and sustains transnational communities around shared rituals, repertoires, and moral systems associated with communal consumption across geographical boundaries. In its images, stories and narratives associated with a community and a *homeland* – partly imagined, partly experienced – satellite television reproduces sentiments of attachment and sentiments of continuity of a world, which might be fragmented but somehow works through this fragmentation. In its mediation. When young participants said that they found a peculiar attraction to the slideshows of still images of famous locations in Egypt or in Libya, repeatedly broadcasted on Egyptian and Libyan television stations, a deep sense of association with places, with the familiar and the predictable could explain this attraction.

Satellite television also locates migrant and diasporic audiences firmly within a media culture which is not ethnically or religiously specific. It is as much local as it is transnational. It is ordinary and banal, not only for Arabs but for most people living across the globe. Images regularly consumed on television, dull and familiar, as much as the disturbing images in the news, shocking, upsetting, but framed within a recognizable framework of televisual broadcasts, integrate 'these paradoxically "daily" rituals...into the structure of everyday life' (Silverstone 1994: 21). The awareness of television's everydayness can provide some comfort and some sense of security to individuals living in societies where they often have to defend their particularity.

Transnationality, which diaspora and satellite television share, can expand a projection of ordinariness beyond television consumption: leading a transnational life becomes in itself reaffirmed as ordinary. There is nothing extraordinary in sustaining links *here* and *there*, in being emotionally attached to various communities, in being politically engaged with multiple public spheres, in the same way as there is nothing extraordinary in watching and enjoying different programmes, different channels, hearing and speaking different languages. The ability to see one's self represented on the screen as ordinary, not as a subject associated with terrorism, migration problems, and 'the veil', was repeatedly highlighted as important by many participants. It is in its banality and its ever-presence that satellite television becomes a symbol of continuity, of particularity but also of modernity, supporting presence and a sense of self across and beyond singular systems of cultural and political representation.

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Endnotes

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² According to Ofcom (the UK broadcasting regulator), television remains the most popular medium in the UK with each adult watching 3:45 hours a day (Ofcom 2010).