



SCIENTIFIC FINAL REPORT

Regnr Östersjöstiftelsen: 31/2016

Project manager: Heike Graf

Project title: The (dis)connected refugee: The role of communication technologies in trust-building in Sweden and Germany

1. Purpose of the project

In 2015, the public was witnessing large numbers of people fleeing from war and misery in their home countries. For many refugees from the Middle East, the most valued item out of their few belongings is a smartphone. In these extreme situations having access to a smartphone could mean the difference between life and death. Even when refugees have arrived at their destinations, smartphones enable refugees to access wide areas of information. This can support refugees finding some kind of security and predictability in the new unfamiliar environment but can also create new forms of insecurity. Thereby, trust and confidence in information sources become decisive strategies in order to manage situations of unfamiliarity and risk. This touched upon a special concern in this project, that is, to analyze the role of communication technologies such as smartphones and other media for refugees in migration flows. How do communication technologies and infrastructures condition forced migration, and vice versa?

To specify the role of modern communication technologies, our point of departure was that offline and online communications constitute specific situations and require different resources to establish stable social relationships that are based on trust. By historicizing the relationship of media and forced migration in the specific spatial context of the refugee camp done in the PhD project, the impact of today's digital media for migration could be further understood. Media practices found in archives reveal how they connect to today.

One of the main overarching theories, we used, is the concept of trust and distrust developed by Niklas Luhmann. Especially in situations of risk trust in people, or in information spread by people and organizations (offline and online) is crucial for meaning production and, more concretely, for making personal decisions. Without a strategy of



trust, it would be almost impossible to cope with situations of risk and danger. Generally, Luhmann sees trust as a precondition for social relations. He connects trust to the perspective of the observer (and not to the thing as such), which is in our case to the perspective of the refugee, from which trust is build up, maintained, or refused. Hence, trust (and also distrust) offers an important subjective strategy for coping with uncertainty, including surplus of information, but also information precarity. Refugees' mobility is based on information they trust (or distrust) and on trust in people, in organizations and also states. Trust here means dealing with the future in advance and taking risks.

2. The three most important results of the project and what conclusions can be drawn from them

Role of digital /analogue media in forced migration

The research project could demonstrate empirically and theoretically, how media practices and media technologies both provide complicated hindrances and obstacles for forced migrants, but also vital, existential, and unavoidable lifelines and opportunities of agency, voice and resistance. Digital media can help the newcomer to gain control over one's life project, but also to lose it because the relations between humans and technology are double edged. Therefore, the management of one's own life project is in greater demand than ever before. The choices regarding how to deal with digitalized communication are consequently highly contingent because all could be otherwise; a supposedly reliable source can turn out to be unreliable. It becomes apparent in our project, that a newcomer needs experiences transformed into knowledge to cope with the challenges of a digital environment.

Also, in the historical study of the refugee camp, it became obvious how media create boundaries and separation, but are important means for connectivity, and making one's voice heard. The doctoral thesis could thereby re-evaluate historical media practices in and of the refugee camp from the perspective of the digitized refugee regime and experience, and showcased trajectories of media practices that (regardless of media technological environment) have been employed in projects of negotiating and coping with being and being made a refugee. The conclusion drawn from this is a challenging of an often-implied



rhetoric of newness around digital technologies. By focusing on the specific space of the refugee camp, the doctoral thesis could therefore conclude the importance of spaces and their construction through media practices, for how migration is experienced and constructed, historically and today. By pointing out the complicities and existentiality of media practices in making, differentiating, and relating space, time, and politics in bordered states, the thesis has ultimately argued for an approach to media studies *from the margins* to help understand how seemingly peripheral spaces, such as refugee camps, mirror and co-construct media practices in society more generally. The camp, so the conclusion, is not only a neglected space at the margins of society, but by mirroring societies' outcasts, it enables and represents who belongs, and where borders and boundaries are drawn for all citizens.

Trust-building and digital communication

Regardless of directly addressing trust issues or not in the interviews, trust-building was seen of great importance for enabling one's agency, to overcome the precarities of the new life situation and to be able to connect to the new environment by finding reliable orientation in life. Interestingly, the notion of home is thereby central, if and how home and familiarity are regained or rejected. Home was understood either as a nostalgic space in the past or as a space in the new environment that provides the potential to connect past and present experience.

Since the development of trust does not only depend on personal experiences made in the local milieu of the offline world, but also in the online world, it becomes clear that the scope for developing relations of trust is enhanced. On the one hand, it is easier to develop relations of trust (or distrust) online. The online world connects to a familiar world and offers some kind of continuity. However, online resources are accessed selectively, and if one has learned to stay within one's own community, the scope of gaining experiences outside the community is limited. This means, on the other hand, that certain other possibilities for trust-building can be excluded from consideration. The familiarity of the community can, therefore, also hamper trust building in an unfamiliar world. Always keeping up to date with what is going on in one's own online community leaves little time for other things. Under the conditions of on- and offline practices, the stabilization of trust is affected and, perhaps, its "shelf life" is reduced. Trust can easily be lost as the result of changed communication environments and has to be developed anew. Through the



combination of on- and offline communication practices, more varied mechanisms for the creation and stabilization of trust and even distrust can be provided. It ultimately depends on internal conditions, the motives, and experiences of the refugee to use digital media technologies for building up trusted relationships in the offline world. However, trusted offline relationships can be supported by external conditions, that make these possibilities visible. It became apparent that interpersonal relations, both online and offline, play an important role in seeking and maintaining trust. Hence, we suggest, supporting interpersonal, meaning intercultural contacts in both the online and offline world can improve the scope of experiences of both groups, of newcomers and natives.

3. The project's contribution to the international research frontline

The project was able to contribute to the established international field of migration studies in general and to the growing field of digital migration studies in particular which seeks to systematically investigate the intersections of migration and digital media technologies. Several publications, as well as research presentations at international conferences, have been produced within the project, standing in the context of the international research community of this field.

Exploring how individuals make sense of new social environments and thereby of the possibilities communication technologies offer, we theoretically applied systems theory as developed by the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, which is seldom used in the English-speaking world and within media and communication as well as literature studies. We especially observed in our interviews that attitudes and behaviors are in flux and change, so we found this dynamic theoretical concept, that takes changes and developments into consideration, especially appropriate. This theory forced us to see trust building from a communicative perspective that always includes the perspective of the observer.

The doctoral dissertation is a significant contribution to media history in general and to the historization of media practices in and of refugee camps in particular. It contributed with a specifically *historical* investigation of media practices in contexts of forced migration. Taking a perspective beyond present-day, digital media environments, this section of the research project could provide empirical evidence into the question of how media technologies and media practices affected forced migration before. A systematic



combination of media history and migration history had not been done before, and the doctoral project provided exploratory insights into how this perspective is productive for the study of media and migration. It shows how mobility of the others has been technologized and how peripheral spaces such as refugee camps reflect and co-construct media practices in society in general. Thereby, the thesis explores how various media repertoires of protest resist the media of the camp by creating media of resistance. By consequently addressing the past/present relationship, the thesis challenges a rhetoric of newness around digital media technologies in modern refugee regimes which valuably advances the state of the art in digital migration studies.

4. New research questions that the project has led to

In further investigating the role of media technologies in forced migration, the project could uncover and prepare a range of further research questions and research fields.

In continuation of the doctoral project and its historicizing methodology, one such field identified is the role of borders and the governance of state borders, which are historically enabled and constituted out of media technologies. The initial investigation of media practices in refugee camps has led to the question how migration has been governed more widely with and through media technologies. After all, in order to identify, tell apart, and sort individuals crossing borders, technologies that mediate information are indispensable, not only in refugee camps. Today, digital technologies are seemingly revolutionizing border management, often through automation and artificial intelligence. While borders are testing grounds for new technologies, we know surprisingly little about the historical constitution of borders through media technologies. Therefore, the research field of border studies and its connection to media studies and media histories have been identified as a further productive field of study.

Another idea that has been developed from this project is the participation of immigrants in the public sphere. We have observed that immigrants and their descendants are increasingly claiming the right to participate in the public sphere by producing their own media. Since the technical preconditions for speech are enhanced with digital communication technologies, digital voices of the migrants have the potential to counteract a dominant mainstream media discourse. The challenge, however, for today's marginalized



communities is not necessarily being denied a voice but rather an audience that listens. In this project “Migrant voices” led by Jessica Gustafsson and financed by the Foundation for Baltic and Eastern Europe Studies, we examine the relationship between voice, agency and recognition in local, national, and transnational (Baltic Sea region) public spheres by exploring the societal conditions in which migrants get their voices heard outside their own community. We explore issues such as: What kind of voices, narratives and frames are privileged by migrant media? How do migrant media work in order to amplify their voice beyond the migrant community? When, where, how and by whom are migrant voices heard outside their own migrant community?

5. The contribution of the research to the knowledge of the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe

The project has been situated both in the Swedish and in the German context and has thus contributed with empirical insights into two countries of the Baltic Sea Region.

Especially, the study of German history could show the historical importance of Central and Eastern Europe in the development of global refugee and migration governance, that still characterizes forced migration today. The thesis has covered forced migrants from Central and Eastern Europe during and in the aftermath of the Second World War, e.g. German refugees and expellees from the ceded areas, Displaced Persons often from Eastern European countries, and others. As a study of refugee management and humanitarian actions during the post-war period demonstrated, many institutions, discourses, practices and policies (such as the Geneva Convention or UNHCR), actually hail from the context of post-war Germany and Central Europe. The region, hence, can be understood as a key site for the development of the modern global refugee regime, and its way of handling forced migration, also by way of media technologies. Especially, the perspective on migration in the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe demonstrates its historical entanglements and cross-border connections.

In our interview study, we could see that despite slightly different preconditions for re-settlement in Sweden and Germany, the concerns and struggles for a new life project are almost the same. Especially, problems occur if trust is lacking towards the people and institutions of the receiving countries which have an impact on the societies themselves and, therefore, also on the region.



6. Dissemination of the results of the project within and outside the research community

Monograph

Seuferling, P. (2021). *Media and the refugee camp: The historical making of space, time, and politics in the modern refugee regime*. (PhD dissertation, Södertörns högskola). Retrieved from <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:sh:diva-46390> (open access)

Peer reviewed articles

Graf, H. (2018). Media Practices and Forced Migration: Trust Online and Offline. *Media and Communication*, 6(2), 149-157. <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/57876> (open access)

Seuferling, Philipp, & Leurs, Koen (2021). "Histories of humanitarian technophilia: How imaginaries of media technologies have shaped migration infrastructures". *Mobilities* 16(5), 670–687. (special issue on infrastructures of injustice)

Graf, H. (2022). What to Expect? The Role of Media Technologies in Refugees' Resettlement. *International Journal of Communication*, 16, 17. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/17527> (open access)

Leurs, K., & **Seuferling, P.** (2022). Migration and the Deep Time of Media Infrastructures. *Communication, Culture and Critique*, 15(2), 290-297.

Book chapters

Farhan, C. (2022). Refugee experience in the songs of the *Zollhausboys*. In: *Refugee Genres: Essays on the Culture of Flight and Refuge*, Palgrave Macmillan (forthcoming)

Graf, H. (2021). Översikt av svensk medieforskning om invandring och etnisk mångfald. In: Institut för mediestudier. *Vitt eller brett: Vilka får plats i medier och på redaktionen* (pp. 108–130). Stockholm: https://mediestudier.se/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/vitt_eller_brett_sammanslagen_21-11-17.pdf#page=43 (open access)

Graf, H. (2020). Wir Flüchtlingskinder: Eine unendliche Geschichte. In *Kulturmöten: En festskrift till Christine Farhan* (pp. 105–121). Södertörns högskola. Huddinge. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1428236/FULLTEXT01.pdf> (open access)

Graf, H. (2019). Journalistiken, den etniska mångfalden och migrationen. In Karlsson, Michael & Strömbäck, Jesper (eds). *Handbok i journalistikforskning*. Lund, 311-324

Schwarzenegger, C., Falböck, G., Ellefson, M., Agirreazkuenaga, I., Ferrández Ferrer, A., **Graf, H.**, Yanglyeva, M. (2019). Ethnic Minorities and the Media – A Struggle for Voice,



Self and Community? In K. Arnold, P. Preston & S. Kinnebrock (Eds.) *The Handbook of European Communication History*. Wiley.

Manuscripts

Farhan, C & Graf, H. The interview situation. Interviewing refugees (20 pages)

Farhan, C. Becoming Coparticipant: My own story as a second-generation refugee. (22 p.)

Farhan, C. “This I consider as my first day in Sweden”. Narrative strategies of creating trust in five migrant interviews (25 p)

Presentations at international conferences

Graf, H. (2017) “I trust only this 100 percent”. Trust-building in forced migration. NORDMEDIA 2017, Tampere 17-19 August (peer review)

Seuferling, P. (2017, October). ‘Since 1945 We Have Had More Immigrants Than the USA Every Single Year’: Mediated Memory Cultures of Forced Migration during the Refugee Crisis (2015/16) in Germany. *42nd Annual Conference of the German Studies Association*, Atlanta, GA. (peer review)

Farhan, C. (2017). Interview narratives of refugees. ECREA, Lugano (peer review)

Seuferling, P. (2018, November). Immobile Socialities? Pre-Digital Media and Communication Practices Refugee Camps in Germany (1945-2000). *7th European Communication Conference (ECC)*, Lugano. (peer review)

Seuferling, Philipp (2018, May). Media, Memory, and Refugee Activism Across History, *68th Annual Conference of the International Communication Association (ICA)*, Prague. (peer review)

Farhan, C. (2019). Home is goose bumps (on a second skin). Refugee experience in the songs of the *Zollhausboys*. International symposium on Refugee literatures and histories, 16-17 December 2019, Södertörn University

Seuferling, Philipp (2019, August). Mediated Memory Practices in Refugee Camps. *Nordmedia Conference*, Malmö. (peer review)

Seuferling, Philipp (2019, May). ‘We Demand Better Ways to Communicate’: Pre-Digital Media Practices in Refugee Camps. *69th Annual Conference of the International Communication Association (ICA)*, Washington, DC. (peer review)

Graf, H. (2020). ¿Qué esperar de las tecnologías de la comunicación?: Uso de los medios por los refugiados (What to expect from technologies of communication?: Media use by refugees. Virtual presentation at IV Seminario Internacional de Pesquisas em Mídia e Processos Sociais. Brazil, December



Seuferling, Philipp (2021, May). Immobile socialities? Historicising media practices in refugee camps. *71st Annual Conference of the International Communication Association (ICA)*, Denver/online. (peer review)

Graf, H. (2021). What to expect? The role of media technologies in refugees' resettlement. In *The Virtual 71st Annual International Communication Association Conference : Engaging the Essential Work of Care: Communication, Connectedness, and Social Justice*. Presented at the 71st Annual ICA Conference, Virtual Conference, 27-31 May 2021. (peer review)

Seuferling, P. & K. Leurs (2021, April). Histories of humanitarian technophilia: How imaginaries of media technologies have shaped migration infrastructures. *"Migrant Belongings"*, conference of *ECREA section Diaspora, Migration and the Media*, Utrecht/online.

Seuferling, Philipp & Koen Leurs (2022, May). Media, Camps and Heterotopias: Historicizing Media Technologies of Control and Connectivity. *72nd Annual Conference of the International Communication Association (ICA)*, Paris.

Popular science publications/presentations

Seuferling, P. (2019, June) Popular-scientific public presentation at "Sommer des Wissens", Hamburg, about media and forced migration.

Seuferling, P. (2019) Podcast about media in refugee camps at "Bredow-Cast" (podcast of the Leibniz Institute for Media Research, Hamburg, Germany), episode 45, July 2019, online at: <https://www.hans-bredow-institut.de/de/aktuelles/bredowcast-45-mediennutzung-in-deutschen-fluechtlingslagern-1945-2000>

Seuferling, P. (2021/2022, November, January) popular-scientific presentations about histories of media and forced migration at Heiligenhof, Bad Kissingen, November 2021; January 2022.

Seuferling, P. (2021) Podcast about media, refugee camps, and heterotopias at "MKV podden" (podcast of Media and Communication Studies department at Södertörn University), October 2021, online:

<https://open.spotify.com/show/6BUyM0BRVQ08VsbmMwuDTK>

Graf, H. (2021) podcast about trust at "MKV podden" (podcast of Media and Communication Studies department at Södertörn University), February 2021 <https://open.spotify.com/episode/2jObAkd5n32fjeBsXcy05x>