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Communicative figurations of the good life:

Ambivalences surrounding the mediatization of homelessness and the transnational family

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Communicative figurations of the good life:
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1.   Introduction

The concept of "mediatization" has been the focus of considerable debate and reflection for scholars in media and communication seeking to understand an increasingly media-related world (Couldry & Hepp, 2013; Hjarvard, 2013; Lundby, 2014). In theoretical work, mediatization is defined as transformations in media and communications that relate to social and cultural change as a societal meta-process akin to individualization, urbanization, and rationalization (Hepp, 2013a; Krotz, 2009). These reflections are increasingly complemented by empirical studies investigating transformations in institutions as well as social and cultural practices on different scales over varying historical periods. This includes the *longue durée* of human history, the consequences of media for modernity, and the more recent emergence of a mediated network society (Jensen, 2013; Livingstone, 2009; Livingstone & Lunt, 2014).

Much of this empirical research has examined the potential for media-influenced transformations in specific domains of life often focusing on particular media. In this chapter, in contrast, we emphasize the importance of understanding mediatization in the context of complex media environments, and argue that a "communicative figurations" approach (Hepp, 2013a, pp. 92-97), based on Elias' process sociology, is a potentially useful framework to capture this understanding of mediatization. We use two examples to illustrate this point: the ontological insecurity of homelessness, and the use of media by migrant mothers in transnational families. Both cases, although critical of hyperbole about digital media, examine the ethical potential of new media in connecting those disconnected through homelessness and enabling parenting at a distance. An analysis of these situations inevitably involves a variety of media rather than the operation of a particular technology. These two cases focus on the role of social media for everyday life in the context of contemporary late modern societies presenting a challenge to mediatization theory that focuses on processes of historical transformation. Livingstone and Lunt (2014) argue that "mediatization" refers to either long-term historical cultural change, or to the role of media in modernity over recent centuries. In addition, the concept appears ideally suited to explain the contemporary media-related transformations in late modern societies against the backdrop of former forms of societies.

The challenge we confront in this article, therefore, is to relate empirical research on contemporary forms of life in the new media landscape to mediatization. In so doing our aim is to discuss whether mediatization is amenable to a "history of the present." Our

main argument is that a process sociology approach – the aforementioned figurational perspective – is a highly helpful starting point to apply ideas about the mediatization of culture to contemporary forms of life. This leads us to consider whether an understanding of media ethics in both cases (insecurity of homelessness and media uses of migrant mothers) might enable us to link mediatization theory to normative questions of "the good life."

2.   Process sociology and communicative figurations: Three things we can learn from Elias

Sociologist Norbert Elias produced ground-breaking work through his book *The civilizing process* (Elias, 2000 [orig. 1939]), whereby he developed a sociology of "social processes" (Elias, 1978, p. 17) aimed at distinguishing structural transformation from the inherent dynamic changes in modern society. Three aspects of his work are particularly relevant to understanding transformation in present media and society: (1) the necessity of *linking* the individual with the social, (2) the *process* perspective, and (3) the distinction between *transformation* and social change.

First, the necessity of linking the individual with the social is fundamental to Elias' thinking. He criticizes the then (and still now) two dominant perspectives on the relationship between individuals and society: either society is understood as the aggregated outcome of individual actions, or as a more or less autonomous system in which no account is taken of individual action unless the individual is conceived of as a similarly autonomous system (Luhmann, 2012). Elias (2000) argues for an approach that examines individuals in their complex and dynamic interrelationships with society, which is more than aggregated individual actions, and cannot be reduced to individual plans and purposes. Society also provides the context for action and a variety of constraints on what it means to be an individual, and is the result of both individual and social transformation.

Second, Elias focuses sociological theory on processes rather than structures. A starting point was his criticism of key assumptions of sociological theories, "even the concept of social change is often used as if it referred to a fixed state – one drifts, so to speak, from seeing the state of rest as normal to seeing motion as a special case" (Elias, 1978, p. 115). Media and communication research is similarly obsessed with "change", having a tendency to focus on the latest media developments and innovations. However, Elias' request for a process perspective is more fundamental, proposing an understanding of both individual existence and the existence of society as ongoing processes of originating and constructing. From such a point of view, inertia is not a "fixed state", but part of an ongoing process of rearticulating a social environment constituted by the interplay of psychological and sociological transformations. The important theoretical and methodological implications of these insights are that we should focus on the processes of constructing the psychological and the social, instead of taking these as something given. Here, Elias' arguments are reflected in more recent developments within media and communication research, which ask for a "practice" (Couldry, 2004) and "communicative constructivist" (Knoblauch, 2013) analysis of media and communication.

Third, connected to this process perspective, and particularly pertinent to the contemporary context, is Elias' analysis of the distinction between transformation and social change. Change is the norm in modern society, and everything is in a constant state of

flux in contrast to more fundamental social transformation that arises from dynamic social change. Examples in sociological theory are processes of individualization, urbanization and rationalization. History suggests that to live in times of "acceleration" (Rosa, 2013) is not exclusive to late modernity and to mobile phones and other recent technologies, but a general impression which has also accompanied the emergence of "slower", linear media (cf. Tomlinson, 2007). Indeed, the feeling of living in times characterized by dynamic change has a long history. Simmel (1971), for example, wrote elegantly of the emerging metropolis at the end of the 19th century in Europe as an environment in which dynamic social interaction created a new structure of consciousness and apparently a chaotic society. Therefore, it is no easy task for critical analysis to work out the more fundamental transformations that lie beneath the surface impressions of change that accompany modernity.

3.   A communicative figurations approach

Elias identifies two problems for the sociology of modernity: the relative autonomy but co-dependence of individuals and society, and the distinction between social change and structural transformation. His solution was to argue that structural transformation could be explained in terms of the shifting relation between individuals and society over time; this, he called figuration. Figurations are "networks of individuals" (Elias, 1978, p. 15) which constitute a larger social entity through processes of human practice and interaction. It is a "simple conceptual tool" (Elias, 1978, p. 30) used to understand sociocultural phenomena in terms of "models of processes of interweaving" (Elias, 1978, p. 130). And transformation can be understood as the change from one figuration to another.

We suggest that the notion of figuration can be used to explain changes in media and communication as *communicative figurations* (Hepp, 2013b; Hepp & Hasebrink, 2014). These are patterns of interweaving processes across various media platforms that combine a thematic framing that orients communicative action (Hepp, 2013b), and that can be identified at different scales. For example, a micro-level example is the way that migrant families are separated in space but connected through multimodality such as letters, the (mobile) phone, and social web through communication channels that keep family relationships alive. A meso-level example of communicative figurations of social organizations such as databanks may include the internet as well as printed flyers and other public relations (PR) media intertwined to create its social order. A macro-level example of communicative figurations of public spheres might consist of a wide range of traditional mass media and emerging online outlets (Hasebrink & Hölig, 2014).

A communicative figuration has four features (Hepp & Hasebrink, 2014). First, we are dealing with *forms of communication*, the patterns of communicative practices. Second, each communicative figuration refers to a specific *media ensemble*, or a set of platforms and services that are involved in the communicative practices that constitute the figuration. Third, each communicative figuration is characterized by a *constellation of actors* that can be regarded as its structural basis, a network of individuals being interrelated with each other. Fourth, each communicative figuration has a *framing* (Goffman, 1974) that serves to guide concrete actions and practices such as those in migrant families, social organizations, and public spheres.

Grasped in this way, communicative figurations have constructive capacity. They are the means by which we communicatively produce *rules* (both resources and constraints) and construct our social identities and sense of *belonging* to various communities. Meanwhile, they also *segment* individuals and groups by excluding them from spheres of communicatively constructed social reality. Moreover, communicative figurations are marked by *power*. They work as forces of empowerment and disempowerment through the way that they give voice to some individuals or groups and exclude others. However, communicative figurations are not "given", but articulated in an ongoing process. Within this constitutive process communicative figurations change and may become part of deeper processes of transformation.

4.   Media ethnics and "the good life"

How are these reflections on communicative figurations connected to questions of the relationship between media and "the good life"? First, figuration reminds us of the complexity of the media environment that an individual is embedded in, and that the change of a particular medium is far less important than the potential transformation of the communicative figurations they are engaged in. Furthermore, this perspective allows us to identify at least three types of transformation in media that are potentially part of communicative figuration. First is an increasing *multi-optionality* arising from the availability of an increasing variety of new media technologies that interweave to constitute the technical infrastructure of communicative figurations. In this, individuals are "plural actors" (Lahire, 2011) who are engaged with a variety of "particular inclusions" (Burzan, Lökenhoff, Schimank, & Schöneck, 2008) in various communicative figurations. Second, there is an increasing *mediacy* (Schütz, 1967) in which mediated social practices are distributed in space and time. For example, increasingly global media mean that communicative figurations are often translocal, extending across various localities. Third, *asynchronicity* refers to the continuing importance of inequalities in access and use of communicative figurations.

To what extent would these communicative figurations and transformations support the needs of this person in the pursuit of a good life? Couldry (2012, 2013) argues that with the increasing mediatization and related media saturation of our contemporary lives, this means that virtuous social practice raises questions involving us all, and not just media professionals. Therefore, the ethical question we all face is, "How should we act in relation to media, so that we contribute to lives that, both individually and together, we would value on all scales, up to and including the global?" (Couldry, 2012, p. 189). The ethical implications of communicative figurations therefore raise the question: "How should we act in relation to certain communicative figurations, so that we contribute to lives that, both individually and together, we would value on all scales?"

One way to approach this question is to consider the various needs a person has in such a context (Couldry & Hepp, 2012). Adopting a conception of human needs based on general human "capabilities" (cf. Sen, 1992, 1999), we see needs as socially constructed and shaped by the common pressures of material and historical conditions. Couldry (2012, pp. 163-179) offers the example of seven fundamental needs based on these assumptions: "economic needs" (related to economic security), "ethnic needs" (the togetherness in ethnic groups), "political needs" (political inclusion and participation), "recognition

needs" (reflecting social "acceptance" within various contexts), "belief needs" (concerning the field of religion), "social needs" (those of social connection), and "leisure needs" (recreation). While these needs intersect and might be extended based on further empirical research, these examples offer a point of departure to reflect on the way that particular communicative figurations might enable or constrain the satisfaction of such needs by affording the relevant capability.

5.   Empirical analyses of communicative figurations

Ontological security and the communicative figurations of homeless people

"Economic needs" are often at the forefront of discussions of homeless people as they shape their everyday life experiences. However, we would argue that their "social needs", "recognition needs", and "political needs" are also equally important given their close link to communication (e.g., being spoken about, being recognized). As quoted in Roberson and Nardi (2010), Jackie, a 61-year-old homeless woman in Los Angeles, said, "So you need to have a cell phone. Most people can't afford it. People go out and pick up cans just so they can have something to eat, but these other things are necessities too" (p. 447).

It is not surprising, then, that in 2000 a politician in Berlin asked for mobile phones to be given to the homeless, and this was not greeted with much enthusiasm because the framing of needs in this case were primarily as "economic needs" (http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/gruenen-politiker-fordert-handys-fuer_obda-chlose-a-87615.html). We argue that a focus on communicative figurations helps to broaden our understanding of needs as capabilities, and to recognize that the homeless tend to be excluded from parts of the communicative construction of reality: they are *segmented* or excluded from communicative opportunities that might enable them to express their capabilities. Digital media use can potentially alleviate this problem and contribute to demonstrate broader understanding of the ethical potential of media use in contexts of social exclusion based on an analysis of the communicative figurations at play (e.g., resources and constraints) for a homeless person living in a media-saturated society.

This argument intersects with research on the perspective of homelessness and the experience of homelessness as ontological (in-)security (Hartmann, 2014). What is at stake here is the conceptual link between "home" and "security." Although homeless people by definition lack home and shelter, they also lack the feeling of belonging, or *ontological security*. According to Laing (1960), ontological security provides people with a sense of "presence in the world as a real, alive, whole, and, in a temporal sense, a continuous person," with a clear sense of individual and social identity and perceptions of reality. Ontologically insecurity, equally, can be defined as when a person has no "parents, home, wife, child, commitment, or appetite" (Laing, 1960, p. 39).

There is an interesting tension here in relation to Elias' distinction between change and transformation as in which "change" is the norm, and the expectation is that the next day will be different from the day before. In this context, ontological security is not about stability, but about the degree, complexity or manageability of change, and the recognition of the potential of transformation in response to change. For example, Winnicott (1971) introduced the idea of the transitional object, which helps children to develop the

idea of "not-me" and thereby to eventually be able to separate themselves from their parents (the feeling of ontological security originally provided by the mother is temporarily substituted by the object). The transitional object is important in terms of the development of the child's identity and thereby also of security. The term "transitional object" also implies that Winnicott did not think of ontological security as something fixed, but rather as a process. This emphasis on security, then, is not necessarily a contradiction of the understanding of change as the norm, even if the apparent aim of everyday life puts security at the forefront. At the same time, there is potentially too much change ahead for a homeless person so that constant flux becomes a threat. Therefore, routines are also developed to keep at least the minimal level of reliability and continuity. One important aspect about ontological security is the need for a sense of place or home, because "having a house is viewed as a normative base from which to achieve ontological security and stability […] because it is a place where tensions that build up from constant surveillance in other settings can be relieved" (Brueckner, Green, & Saggers, 2011, p. 3). Security, according to this interpretation, is about providing a place that acts as a secure foundation from which we can enter into and act on the world, and be able to retreat from the world when necessary.

In relation to the new media environment, the question we ask is whether communicative figurations in which homeless people can construct their day-to-day routines and create connections might develop a sense of control and identity which is not in any sense a substitute for the security of place and home. The suggestion here is that digital media can partially offer a process for the development of a sense of security, a feeling of independence, and a context for self-development (Hartmann, 2014; Tomas & Dittmar, 1998). For example, studies have suggested that at least the younger homeless (especially in the US) tend to use social media fairly extensively, including frequency of access, content consumption, and social networking (Rice, Monro, Barman-Adhikari, & Young, 2010). The differences lie more in the points of access and the need to invest (effort mostly) to get this access (Pollio, Batey, Bender, Ferguson, & Thompson, 2013, p. 174). As Woelfer and Hendry (2012) suggest, in addition to organizing their everyday life on the street, the exploration of identity and the cultivation and exploitation of social ties are at the forefront of the home inasmuch as "the social networks of homeless young people can be exploited for opportunity but, even more, for human well-being" (p. 7). This supports the idea that digital media, and especially social media, can at least in principle "help the individual and the collectivity to define and sustain their own ontological security wherever they happen to be" (Silverstone, 2006, p. 233), including the homeless. Social media can serve as the "transitional object" for at least some of the homeless, building up communicative figurations that help to construct the ontological security and potentially building a good life.

This argument also picks up the focus on exclusion from media life as communicative figurations outlined above, and the importance of a minimal ethics of communicative commitments through engagement in networks of social interaction. Indeed, one of the problems for many homeless people is their exclusion from many communicative figurations, which are taken for granted by others. All forms of life are partly constituted through communicative figurations, and homelessness is no exception. However, in the case of the homeless, most of these figurations are not mediated by the homeless themselves. The constructions of the sociocultural reality and symbolic meaning of the homeless are there-

fore limited (albeit differently so in different contexts). Communicative figurations of the homeless tend to be mostly exclusive. They work on an "us vs. them"-structure, or a differentiation between the established and the outsiders (Elias & Scotson, 1994). Communicative figurations play a part in the creation of such differences through segmentation. They can, however, potentially create conditions for inclusion through communication.

How does this conception of digital and mobile media provide the potential for ethical commitment and realization of the social self? One way is to provide opportunities for all to play an active, constitutive role in communicative figurations. We would probably need to become even more normative if we wanted to live up to the notion of an extended media ethics in this context, especially in relation to "social needs" and "recognition needs", for example, through a general public commitment to include the homeless more actively. In one of the few attempts to apply virtue ethics in the context of homelessness, Burkum (1999) argues, "First, homelessness is not just the condition of lacking a home in the sense of a 'roof over one's head.' It is the situation of one who does not participate in the 'sphere of membership' […] It is the condition of not being acknowledged as belonging to society. […] we act as if they do not even exist" (p. 79). Burkum goes on to argue that membership in the community is the basis for human existence, and non-membership, as in the homeless, violates ethics (see also Silverstone, 2006). Their inclusion, on the other hand, would be the virtuous thing to do, and thereby provides an appropriate ethical stance. The community that Burkum speaks about, however, needs an ethically enabling environment in relation to "social" and "recognition needs".

To summarize, digital media may enable the homeless to overcome some of the risks to existence that they face. A potentially easier step of inclusion might work through to the offer of (somewhat) surveillance-free digital media access accompanied with training. If the homeless are not visible (as they tend to be overlooked), but are at the same time under constant surveillance and therefore nowhere at home, this could be an initial "hideaway" as well as a possibility to develop everyday routines and to build an additional identity. This could be seen as one initial gesture to extend membership in our existing communities to the homeless in Burkum's sense.

One example is the recent online protests against the architectural exclusion of the homeless through the erection of bumps in floor areas where the homeless sleep, known as the "anti-homeless-studs" in the public debate in UK. The widespread argument was that this kind of active exclusion was not acceptable, especially since the devices looked similar to those intended to deter pigeons. The original tweet that caused the outrage included a picture of the studs, and a statement saying "Anti homeless floor studs. So much for community spirit :(" (https://twitter.com/ethicalpioneer/statuses/474981723022049280). This reinforces the idea of community ideally aiming at something more communal. The particular user who introduced the tweet (he calls himself 'Ethical Pioneer') clearly displays signs of being a virtuous character. In addition, because individual acts are never enough, the interplay of such individual virtuous acts together with communities of action and communicative figurations may begin to address the social problem of exclusion of the homelessness.

This example is less an example of the transformation of communicative figurations, but more of how critical changes in the life course of a person (becoming homeless) are related to radical changes of the communicative figurations the person is involved in. In this

case, the media are not the driving forces of change, but they can help to make radical changes to insecure life situations more manageable for the people involved.

Social relationships and the communicative figurations of transnational families

In a number of studies of Filipino families separated by migration, Madianou and Miller (2012) examined how mobile and digital media are used to sustain family relationships and to create content that represents the views and experiences of parenting at a distance. Madianou has also explored the broader context of migration as a social phenomenon with a variety of stakeholders including migrant families, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and telecom providers (see Madianou and Miller, 2012).

The question about migrant and transnational families that many scholars, including Madianou, are now asking is whether the combination of mobile phones, broadband connections, digital cameras, and social media help to articulate communicative figurations that extend these transformations further than linear and traditional mass media managed to. In this sense, Madianou's study is an examination of contemporary forms of the mediation of family life which links to mediatization in two ways: in the sense that we can interpret the new communicative figurations of the family as being media-saturated social relationships that are, in significant ways, transformed by the extension of the capacity to communicate over space and time, and that the choices and actions of families take place in a broader social and institutional context involving government policies, NGOs and providers of digital communication technologies.

The Philippines are a particularly appropriate context for such a study as the country has one of the highest per capita proportions of people working abroad, and this disproportionately affects women of childrearing age, creating a widespread phenomenon of "left-behind" children. In addition, the Philippines, along with other South Asian countries, have been at the forefront of developments in mobile technologies (Madianou & Miller, 2012).

Madianou's work initially came out of the emerging field of media and digital anthropology (Miller & Horst, 2012), and she emphasizes that the social change related to the appropriation of new media of migrant families is likely to be an example of cumulative cultural change rather than an example of mediatization as the influence of "media logics" on social institutions (Livingstone & Lunt, 2014). This works well for the dimension of her project focused on the mediation of family relations; however, her second focus on changing government policy, NGO activity, and the representation of migrants may be better thought of as an example of the institutional approach to mediatization (Hjarvard, 2013), and a particularly interesting one in which the aggregate factors (numbers of migrants) of a cumulative cultural change (distant family relationships) results in a shift in the orientation of social policy on migration. Here "recognition needs" have a high importance.

The family relations side of Madianou's study applies the traditions of ethnographic research to the emerging field of media and digital anthropology. Madianou and Miller's (2012) work, then, provides an empirical demonstration of the adoption of diverse digital media technologies that contextualizes the features of the communicative figurations identified at the beginning of this article (forms of communication, a media ensemble, a

constellation of actors, and a framing of 'family'). This communicative figuration further-more demonstrates how we construct social relationships as family, or motherhood as an ethic of care that addresses our "social needs". This is similar to suggestions made by Livingstone and Lunt (2014), that one way of linking the insights of mediatization theory to empirical studies of the media may be a collaborative venture with different academic theories and studies of the different aspects of culture and society that are implicated in mediatization. A key reason for this is that the mapping of mediatization onto complex social phenomena requires a grounding that is sensitive to the complexity and contrariness of processes of change – as Madianou (2014) puts it, "Although the title of [this] chapter is 'the mediatization of migration' it is evident that migration is too complex and diverse a phenomenon for a single type of social change to occur" (p. 325).

Madianou (2014) outlines the development of the emerging field of media and migration as an interdisciplinary field of study. Traditionally there has been little research on media in migration research. This demonstrates, in a sense, one of the core features of how the contemporary developments of digital media and convergence culture have relatively penetrated in the societies so that the question of the role of media in migration can no longer be ignored. The focus of transnational media studies has traditionally been on production, textual and audience studies of migration representations. Madianou sees most value in previous audience studies in which the complexities of identities in migration have been an interesting development (Georgiou, 2006; Siapera, 2005; Sreberny, 2005). Notwithstanding the difficulties of interpreting a complex, dynamic social and cultural phenomenon, such as migration in terms of identity, the advent of new media opens up a new research agenda focused on the practices of sustaining transnational relationships while preparing for migration, in enhancing existing separate relationships, and sustaining family life at a distance. This new research agenda extended to begin to examine how migration itself was being potentially changed through the adoption of new media communication technologies by separated families.

Madianou's starting point for this new research agenda is, within an ethnographic approach, to examine the way the adoption and use of new media might become part of the context within which participants establish social constructions of reality. A number of ecological metaphors have been proposed as potentially fruitful ways of understanding the cultural consequences of mediation, and Madianou and Miller (2013) offer a new conceptualization of media ecology as "polymedia." In essence, we are witnessing a transformation of the communicative figurations by which transnational migrant families (here, especially mothers and their children) develop their social relationships through their "social needs." This is a move from communicative figurations based on a small number of media partly with a time delay of communication (letters, audio cassettes) to communicative figurations of polymedia. The media ensemble of these figurations includes the mobile phone, internet, telephony, etc. As a consequence, there is a shift "from a focus on the qualities of each particular medium as a discrete technology, to an understanding of new media as an environment of affordances" (Madianou & Miller, 2013, p. 170). Madianou adopts a focus on polymedia in which media are defined in relation to other media technologies in the context of the thesis of the social shaping of technology (Wajcman, 2002), in which technology and social relations are mutually constituted. This gives the ethnographic work a particular focus on the way in which people engage a variety of different combinations of media technologies, thereby transcending the affordances of discrete

media (Hutchby, 2001) as people mix and match different combinations of mobile, digital and social media to sustain their relationships at a distance.

Madianou (2014) interviewed mothers in the UK and young adult children in the Philippines in addition to a variety of policy and community stakeholders on migration, such as government and NGO representatives. A critical finding from the interviews with institutional stakeholders is optimism concerning the potential value of new media technologies for families separated by migration, by potentially sustaining family relationships, overcoming social problems related to separation, creating a market for mobile services, and enabling further migration (Madianou and Miller, 2012). This optimism was, to some degree, shared by the migrant mothers in offering what they regarded as intensive mothering at a distance achieved through more frequent points of contact and the capacity to "see" children (via, for example, Skype), and greater knowledge of the minutiae of their children's lives, addressing the "social needs" of the migrant mothers. At the same time, increased contact and knowledge of the circumstances back home could also lead to conflicts, such as the lack of ability to deal with problems back home, and a visual co-presence was often accompanied by a reminder of physical distance, creating emotional challenges (Madianou, 2014).

For the children and other family members left behind, a number of factors influenced the practices and quality of relationships sustained partly through new media, such as the age of the child at separation and the quality of the existing relationship between mother and child. Younger children and those in which there were existing relationship problems found less value in new media. There were clear distinctions between families that adopted and found value in new media in these circumstances, and those that did not, and between the accounts by transnational families and the stakeholders' optimism about new media.

Madianou links these findings to mediatization by suggesting that a number of unintended consequences of these patterns of adoption can be seen to affect migration. The consequences of new media are best understood at the level of the communicative figurations of everyday life, of the taken-for-granted interaction rituals of mediatized life. In addition, decisions to migrate for work and to extend the stay in the UK are being influenced by the potential of new media as reflected in policy discourse rather than by the lived realities of mediated family life at a distance.

Madianou and Miller's (2012) work therefore illustrates both the key features of communicative figurations by identifying communication forms, identifying a media ensemble, a constellation of actors and a framing (of family). In this sense, although locally dispersed and mediated, this communicative figuration constitutes a social practice that is grounded in tradition, enables the maintenance of a coherent sense of social identity and affords the expression of capabilities. In a certain sense, this example represents the transformation of the communicative figuration of the traditional family to that of the transnational migrant family. This media-saturated social practice also illustrates the way that communicative figurations can provide a context for an ethical form of life grounded in multi-optionality, mediacy and an asynchronicity or asymmetry of roles.

6.   Conclusion

The argument formulated at the beginning of this article is that we cannot understand present forms of mediatization and their relation to "the good life" by focusing on only one single medium – we must consider the complexity of the present media environment. Following the process sociology of Norbert Elias brings a focus on the transforming communicative figurations people are embedded in within their everyday lives. In relation to questions of "the good life", this understanding of media and social transformation maps well onto an extended media ethics inquiry, which is based on a broader sense of human needs.

Our examples of homeless people and transnational migrant families demonstrate a range of communicative figurations and their challenges. Homeless people are confronted with the situation that the media ensemble of more and more communicative figurations is based on new technologies. Consequently, there is a high risk of them being excluded from many relevant communicative figurations of contemporary life. In the meantime, the availability of mobile, digital media is increasingly important for them to address their "economic", "recognition" and "social needs." Therefore, access to the mobile phone and its multi-optionality to communicate becomes an important potential means of overcoming the exclusions of being homeless in a mediatized world. The use of a communication technology such as mobile phones offers them the chance to be involved in various communicative figurations that potentially overcomes aspects of the ontological insecurity of living on the street.

The communicative figurations of everyday living have also changed for transnational migrant families. They engage with the strategic use of an ensemble of digital media – polymedia. The potential to select different combinations of media to articulate social relationships within the family at a distance results in new possibilities, but also new forms of complexity of daily life. In the best case, polymedia communicative figurations address the "social needs" of the migrant mothers and their children to sustain family relationships. Simultaneously, the new complexities become part of these social relationships, which are not caused by the migration as such, but by the affordances of the different combinations of new media.

These two cases of contemporary uses of new media were presented as examples of a mediatization process on a long-term scale. Because homeless people and migrants live in more or less precarious circumstances, having access to the media becomes important for them. The main point here is that the generally increasing multi-optionality of communication provides a variety of options for them to handle their lives communicatively – in the case of homeless people, by constructing a degree of ontological security; in the case of migrant families, by appropriating the options of polymedia for sustaining social relationships. In addition, the increasing mediacy of communication is important for them, creating a challenge for homeless people who struggle to access the mediated chains of communicative action, and allowing migrant families to sustain their social relations across a long distance. In these differences the two cases demonstrate altogether the asynchronicity in which mediatization takes place: being homeless in a mediatized world is a more open situation, and might result in the feeling of a far-reaching exclusion and, we have suggested, requires a more expanded ethical commitment of a broader community of users to create a viable communicative figuration that would include the homeless. Living as

a migrant in times of polymedia is a mediatized experience that offers new possibilities to actively address "social needs".

These are the ambivalences surrounding mediatization. On the one hand, mediatization offers opportunities for addressing the various needs of our everyday lives, even in rather precarious situations. On the other hand, it can also be a burden as it might mean that people cannot address their needs without having access to certain media. This is the reason why mediatization as such is not simply good or bad. If we consider mediatization normatively, we have to frame it in a kind of extended media ethics that moves the virtues of daily life to the foreground. Only in this way can we offer arguments about the possible role of media for "the good life" – especially through the perspective of communicative figurations.

7. References

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