

Journalists, Narratives of European Enlargement, and the Man-on-the-Sofa

ALEXA ROBERTSON¹

ABSTRACT

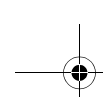
Against the backdrop of EU enlargement, the article is concerned with the possible interconnections between 'mediated worldliness' and 'banal' or everyday cosmopolitanism. Based on field work at Swedish Television, focus group interviews and an analysis of news reporting in the period leading up to enlargement, it asks what can be learned about the work of the cosmopolitan imagination by exploring the relation between journalists, narratives of enlargement and the perceptions of Swedes from various walks of life.

'Imagination' is a term that recurs in the scholarly literature on cosmopolitanism, which can be defined as having to do with a sense of 'being at home in the world', an ability and readiness to engage with people and cultures beyond the borders of the nation, with the widening of consciousness and a willingness to confront alterity (Vertovec and Cohen 2002:2). Appadurai, for example, writes about the 'work of the imagination' when referring to the annexation of the global by individuals and groups who work with ideas and images that come from elsewhere (Appadurai 1996: 4 and 54). To the researcher interested in how cosmopolitanism can be a quotidian experience as well as a theoretical construction, these 'workers of the imagination', and the products of their imagining, are a valuable source of insights.

Their workplace (to pursue the metaphor one more step) is a mediated one. Before Appadurai, social, historical and media theorists from Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan to Benedict Andersson and John Thompson had reflected on how the evolution of the media matters to people's sense of place and belonging. While face-to-face interaction continues to play an important role, our experience of the world is increasingly shaped by mediated symbolic forms. Thompson calls the result 'mediated worldliness' and explains it as follows:

as our sense of the world and our place within it becomes increasingly nourished by media products, so too our sense of the groups and communities with which we share a common path through time and space, a common origin and

1 Alexa Robertson är verksam vid Statsvetenskapliga institutionen i Stockholm. E-post alexa.robertson@statsvet.su.se



a common fate, is altered: we feel ourselves to belong to groups and communities which are constituted in part through the media (Thompson 1995: 35).

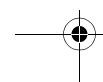
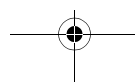
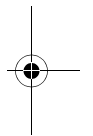
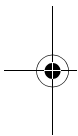
Thompson is not writing about the experiences of passive media consumers, into the empty minds of which broadcasters deposit messages. He and others working within the hermeneutic tradition are concerned with what has been called the 'active audience'. The idea here is that the consumers of news and other media products actively engage with them, work with them, and create meaning in their meeting with the text, and indirectly with the authors of those texts, rather than having the message imposed upon them. While using different terminology, these scholars – and such kindred spirits as Barker (2000), Stevenson (1995), Morley (1980), Ang (1985) and Liebes and Katz (1991) – are in effect writing about the work of imagination.

Literature on cosmopolitanism tends to take a bird's-eye-view, and for good reason: we are, after all, talking about global issues and a myriad of actors. But the work of imagination does not allow itself to be studied from such a vantage point, at least not empirically. It must be seen close up, and the voices of individual workers of the imagination must be made discernible and placed in a meaningful context. For this to be possible, the scope of analysis must be radically narrowed. This article thus focuses on two sorts of imagination workers – journalists, and the people they make news reports for – and on the news texts they shared in the weeks surrounding the symbolic date of 1 May 2004, when countries that had once stood on opposing sides of the first, second, and cold wars became members of the same European family. Material on which this article is based includes field notes and the transcripts of interviews conducted with journalists at Swedish Television (SVT) during the week before the enlargement of the European Union, transcripts of nine focus group interviews conducted in a small town in Östergötland and in Stockholm during the subsequent fortnight, and recordings of the main SVT news programme *Rapport* for the entire period.

We are not surprised to find cosmopolitans in front of the check-in counter at the airport; the study reported here asked whether they could also be found behind the wheel of a tractor or the desk of the local library. It asked, further, whether their sense of the world seemed to be constituted through the media, as suggested by Thompson and Appadurai, or whether face-to-face interaction was apparently still more important. There is a methodological inquiry here too: what can be learned about the work of cosmopolitan imagination by exploring the relation between journalists, narratives of enlargement, and the man-on-the-sofa?

Analysing Imagination: narratives as a point of entry

Appadurai argues that imagination has become social practice and is "the key component of the new global order". The building blocks of what he calls 'imagined worlds' are five dimensions of global cultural flows, the by-now-famous 'scapes' – ethnoscapas, technoscapas, financescapas, ideoscapas and mediascapas. The last of these, in Appadurai's account, offer repertoires of images and narratives that can be used in making sense of our lives and others (Appadurai 1996:33-35).



Appadurai's perspective is in keeping with that of scholars of the narrative, who argue that we are better understood as storytellers (people with imaginations) than rational actors (people with behavioural strategies). Our identities are not givens, according to scholars inspired by the 'narrative turn', but are continually negotiated through narrative acts. Telling stories creates community: it is through the stories we tell and are told that we make sense of society; it is through narratives that our situation in the political and cultural landscape, and that of everyone else, is reinforced. For these reasons, narrative analysis can be thought particularly well-suited to the study of cosmopolitanism, and the possibilities that phenomenon entertains of forming new communities at the post-national level.

The research focus here is on interpretative frameworks "of common, cultural references and thematic codes", incarnated in narratives which help make things comprehensible and relevant to the public (Birkvad 2000:295). These tend to be experienced as something innocent, Barthes tells us, not because their intentions are hidden, but because they are naturalized (Barthes 1993:131). What narrative analysis tries to get at, and what tends otherwise to elude the researcher, is the generation of these sorts of understandings – what we take for granted, or that which goes without saying.²

In keeping with Chatman (1978:19), a narrative is defined here as a text that is comprised of a story (or a 'what' – the abstract, situation, actors, complicating action or disequilibrium and resolution outlined by structuralists such as Labov and Waletzky (1967)) and a discourse (a 'how'; with a focus on the way a story is communicated, and not just its structure). By paying attention to 'story' it is possible to identify reiterated issues and themes over time. By paying attention to 'discourse' it is possible to study how naturalisation can happen through journalistic conventions that work to tell those stories in one way rather than another.

Illusions of verisimilitude, explains Brinker, are based on the viewer's "thoroughgoing familiarity with the conventions of representation" at work. Audiences recognise and interpret these conventions without even noticing them, 'forgetting' their conventional character (Brinker 1983: 254). Chatman (1978: 41-2) uses the term 'reading out process' to refer to this behaviour – to our routinely employed abilities to decode from surface to narrative structures.

Graddol identifies two traditions used in television journalism to tell stories about the world. The dominant one is 'realism', a term originally used in this tradition to refer to a literary convention (rather than to an ontological standpoint or perspective within the study of international relations). The narrator in this tradition tends to be omniscient – "one who can see things which individual characters cannot see and who is in all places at once" (Graddol 1994: 140). Other characters can also contribute to the narrative, of course, but they are encompassed by the omniscient narrator's voice. The other tradition is that of 'naturalism'. Used more often in documentaries than in news bulletins, it provides "a representation of the world as it might be directly experienced by the viewer [...] From the naturalist perspective, a news report pro-

2 Lieblich *et.al.* advocate the use of narrative as a way of gathering valuable data, for example about experiences of discrimination, that would be impossible to get at otherwise. Lieblich *et.al.* 1998:9.

vides vicarious experience, an image of the world as we might expect to experience it if we were to stand where the reporter stands". (Graddol 1994: 145). The objective, omniscient narrator's voice is absent from reports in which such narrative techniques are used.

Undertaking close readings of television news reports, it is possible to explore such techniques by posing questions to the text to establish the perspectives or vantage points from which it is told. Is the reporter 'omniscient' – standing above a dispute between two or more parties, for example, or commenting on what was going through a decisionmaker's head? Or is he or she *engagé*, ostensibly committed to one side or the other? Is the account of an event given by a local villager rather than the reporter? Is one side of a conflict invisible, underrepresented? And where is the viewer situated in all this? Do we find ourselves in the middle of a crowd or do we view a given celebration or demonstration from the vantage point of a distant rooftop? Do we look at the actors through a window or fence, or are we invited to enter the room in which they lived and join in a conversation? Are we detached observers, to which information is imparted "just to let us know", or are we asked to respond in some way to the reported events, if not by acting then at least by feeling? By looking in the text (in this case, television news reports) for answers to these questions, the discourse of the narrative can be analysed.

These, then, are the methodological premises on which the larger study rests, of which the following is but an excerpt. There is not space here to present a complete narrative analysis of the *Rapport* items concerning the EU broadcast in the sample period. This article contains a glimpse of what can be considered the most interesting – perhaps telltale – features. Before looking at them, however, let us rewind the tape, or rather retrace our steps, back to the SVT newsroom and the week before enlargement, to listen to what one set of workers of the imagination had to say about what they had in mind when making such news reports and, more importantly, how they said it. A formal analysis of the 'story' of their narratives will not be presented at this point: the focus, instead, is on the 'discourse'.

Journalists taking a bit of the world into your living room

It is important, said the deputy head of the SVT foreign news desk a few hours before flying to Poland to cover the World Economic Summit and EU accession, to highlight positive things in bringing news about the outside world to the Swedish public, and not just to problematise:

You shouldn't confirm people's views. You should continually change the perspective and in that way arouse more interest.

One way of doing that is to take the perspective of the average viewer, she said. Vox pops (interviews with the man-on-the-street) are important, as the issues they refer to have consequences for ordinary people. It is even better if the reporter gets to 'come in' somewhere.

SVT was devoting extra coverage to the new member states on the eve of enlargement, which was important, in the view of this journalist, given the widespread EU-scepticism in Sweden. “We want to bring out other aspects,” she said, “get people to meet on an equal level. We are not better than they are.” Globalisation in general and Europeanization in particular means you have to think along different lines than before, in her view.

I think it is extremely important to understand that we are a part of Europe. We are still our little edge of the world.

A man who has worked at SVT for 25 years, with periods in Stockholm interlaced with stints covering Latin America, the US and Asia, spoke of the trick of “seeing the world with Swedish eyes”. He thought it made a difference if viewers saw him rather than an American reporter standing on a roof in a distant city – taking a bit of the outside world and putting it into your living room, as he put it. “Because I’m Swedish, I have the same frame of reference” [as the views in the aforementioned living room]. This feeling of identification was, in his view, extremely important. In this respect, Swedish journalists tend to work differently than their colleagues from other countries. This correspondent had been to many places, he noted, where he was the only reporter who had gone up to people and talked to them.

Being around ordinary people is important. You mustn’t raise your voice.

He tried to get people to pay attention by pointing to “the black woman on the outskirts of town who is like you”. Asking how this strategy is to be understood – this strategy of speaking *to* ordinary people, not over their heads – the term ‘dumbing down’ cropped up in the interview. The journalist responded forcefully: the strategy he had been describing was absolutely *not* a question of that. What happens is something else.

You find a red thread and hold onto it. You don’t leave the viewer with seventeen unanswered questions after the report is finished. You don’t confuse: you give them something.

You had to give the viewer an experience, he said. There is so much you want to tell, and the reporter has to do it in his or her own style. This man’s style was ‘shoulders down’, relaxed, so that people could keep up. “It shouldn’t feel like breaking news,” he said.

Another man on the foreign news desk, who was SVT’s Moscow correspondent between 1998 and 2002, was responsible for putting together the foreign news telegrams in the week before enlargement. He thought the extensive focus on the new EU members was a good strategy:

It’s a good method (*grepp*) to let the viewers meet their new neighbours. I think it’s fun with lots of new countries.

The most important task a journalist has, in this respect, is to



acquaint the viewers with the new countries. We have created a consciousness that Slovakia is a neighbour and just as good a country as ours.

Having said that,

we can never create belonging. We can't raise people [*uppföstra folk*].

Adult education is a lovely idea, he said, "but who has given me the right to tell people how to think?"

For this journalist, the key word is 'meeting'. A good meeting between him and someone he encounters in the field can be seen as a meeting between the man-in-the-field and the man-on-the-sofa. "I'm not the star," he said. "It's the old man on the ski slope and the woman in the Coptic village," he said, referring to people far from the halls of power on whom he had filed reports in the past. When asked of a tendency observed in Swedish television news reports (Robertson 2000, 2002) to bring the viewer (metaphorically) into someone's home or the café they frequent (more on this below), this journalist explained that it is a typical attitude among Swedish journalists. "We want to be offstage, like an invisible choir". They still have a role to play, however, even if they are not on centre stage, namely that of a figure that the viewer can relate to. "They want to see themselves," he said, referring to the people watching *Rapport*: they want to see something that symbolises common sense and coffee in the midst of a chaos that is incomprehensible.

When we see starving children with flies on their faces we distance ourselves (*skärmar av oss*). When we see a Swede brush the flies away we notice, "Oh, look, there are flies".

One of the younger reporters on the foreign desk recalled following reporting on the war in Kosovo, and how it took 2-3 months before reporting "took hold" of her. Then one day she saw a picture of a woman carrying a Samsonite suitcase, with her daughter, dressed like any teenager familiar from a Stockholm setting.

Then I realized, "Help! This could happen to me!".

What bothers her is the likelihood that there are a lot more Samsonite suitcases where that one came from. "We are terrified of the modern," she said. "We don't think it has to do with us unless we see pictures of a starving African child."

Asked who or what she had in mind when putting together a story, she replied that she thinks a lot about her father, who has a general, but not specialised, interest in the news. It is, she says, important to provide him and viewers like him with a 'context so that it becomes comprehensible'.

When it came to coverage of Europe, and especially enlargement, this journalist thought the heightened emphasis on reporting from the new member states to be a good idea, as it was important to "reduce the distance between us and them". Was it not editorialising, taking sides in favour of enlargement, telling people they should admire Slovenians and Poles? She thought about this for a moment before replying, "As a journalist you always take a stance". This was not about information-relaying here:

It should engage. Journalism means pointing at unsatisfactory conditions. A journalist should be the voice of the weak.

A journalist should ‘widen the viewer’s horizons’, let the man-on-the-sofa know that “this is how these people live, this is how they think”. Television is a powerful medium and such images are, in her view, important.

What is the result, the purpose of this? What are people supposed to do with these images, reports, messages, and challenges? This sort of work, in her eyes, should contribute to making “a citizen who thinks more democratically with more respect for others”.

Finally, a senior reporter who had been covering Europe since 1996 expressed the decided view that many political journalists covering domestic politics made their reports for politicians and other political journalists, rather than the license-paying viewers. These political journalists don’t have to make an effort to explain things, she said: they can use code words and ignore the need for pictures. This is not the case if you shift the perspective to that which takes place outside the country, in her view.

The task, as this woman identified it, is to make that which takes place abroad comprehensible to people in all parts of the country – in Sundsvall as well as Stockholm – and with different levels of knowledge.

You have to make it understandable. You have to explain it in a way that arouses the interest of the average guy and enables him to understand it straight away. [...] You have to make your story fun and interesting – you have to tell your story in an exciting way so that it stays with them. [...] You can’t expect everyone to recognize themselves. But you can use ordinary people that you can feel identification with, that you can relate to.

It is from the perspective of these ‘ordinary’ people out in the world that events must be depicted “because if people feel that ‘if this happened to them’ they can draw the conclusion that ‘it can happen to me too’”.

We think that we in Sweden are so much better, have a better society than others. But we are just like everybody else in the whole world. We get up in the morning, go to work, deal with traffic and so on and so do they. We face the same everyday problems. There are greater similarities than differences that we can exploit when we make tv programmes.

In this way, this journalist believes “we can create identification”. She said she hoped the viewer would react by thinking “Hey, I recognise this.”

Summary: the narrative of the newsroom

The interviews with these journalists contain many stories – about turning over a new leaf at the beginning of a career as Europe correspondent; about trying to get the home desk interested in German news; about interviewing an old man in the Carpathians; and about ‘the woman with the Samsonite suitcase’, among others. But for the purposes of this article, it is more pertinent to reflect on the discourse of these

narratives. If the interviews are analysed according to the categorical-form approach whereby sections or single words belonging to a defined category are collected from texts belonging to a number of narrative actors (Lieblich *et.al.* 1998: 12-13), then a newsroom narrative (or, to be more precise, foreign-desk-narrative) emerges – an aggregate narrative as opposed to the discrete ones of the individual journalists. In this narrative, five themes, or what Riessman would call underlying propositions, are discernible.

The first has to do with the importance of identification, or incorporating the perspective of ordinary people in news reports about the outside world and showing viewers individuals they can relate to. “Being around ordinary people is important,” said the Latin American/Asian correspondent. It’s good if a report “conveys how people on site experience their reality”, said the youngest of the three women interviewed. A journalist can “use ordinary people that you can feel identification with”, let them be aware that “this can happen to me too”, said the European correspondent. “People want to see themselves,” said the former Moscow correspondent: a report should be about, or interest “Nisse in Hökarängen and his auntie”.

The second theme has to do with the tone of voice in which the correspondent should tell his or her stories to the man-on-the-sofa. “It shouldn’t feel like breaking news,” said the shoulders-down correspondent. “You shouldn’t speak too loudly”. Swedish journalists “want to be offstage, like an invisible choir” said the Moscow correspondent, echoing what several of his colleagues said less poetically. A good report should engage the viewer and not leave him or her with “seventeen unanswered questions”, but the viewer would seem to be thought capable of making up his or her own mind about the issues presented. “Who has given me the right to tell people how to think?” says something revealing about the journalist’s view of the audience.

The third theme to emerge from all the interviews is the notion that Sweden is not the centre of the universe, and that Swedes have a lot to learn from others. “We are still our little edge of the world,” said the German correspondent: “we are not better than they are.” Slovakia “is just as good a country as ours,” said the Moscow correspondent, and according to the European correspondent, “we are just like everybody else in the whole world.”

The fourth theme is structured around the metaphor of ‘meeting’: “we want to get people to meet on an equal level”, said the German correspondent, referring to enlargement coverage. The Moscow correspondent used the same word, saying it was a good strategy “to let the viewers meet their new neighbours”. And the younger woman stressed the importance of “reducing the distance between us and them”.

The fifth and final theme to emerge from the discourse of the journalists has to do with the importance of resisting stereotypes. A journalist has to “highlight positive things, not just problematise,” said the German correspondent. “You shouldn’t confirm people’s views. You should continually change the perspective.” Similarly, her younger female colleague emphasised that a journalist should “widen the viewer’s horizons”, let the man-on-the-sofa know that “this is how these people live, this is how they think”.

It is not difficult to relate these themes to cosmopolitanism, however defined. The question is, can they be related to the narratives in the work they produce – news re-

ports of the outside world and, more specifically, Europe on the eve of EU enlargement? And (at a later stage) can they be related to any themes that may emerge from discussions with the people for whom these news stories were intended? These are the questions to be addressed in the next two sections.

News Narratives of European Enlargement

As can be seen from Table 1, the *Rapport* broadcasts referred to in this article contained a total of 203 news items, including both telegrams (items less than a minute long, usually 'voiceovers') and reports that varied in length from one to seven minutes. Ten percent of the items in the sample had to do with EU enlargement, and 24 percent had to do with events taking place in Europe or involving Europeans. For the narrative analysis, a selection was made of all news items of at least a minute that pertained to Europe or European countries or Europeans. Together, these 13 items represent 25 percent of all broadcast time.

In the first stage of coding, two simple questions were posed to the 14 broadcasts as a whole:

- How much of my field of vision is taken up by my own country/community, and how much by the outside world?
- How does the world I live in look through the window provided by my television news screen?

Answering the first of these questions was quite straightforward, and involved comparing the amount of purely domestic news with other news in each broadcast. The second was somewhat more challenging, but had to be answered nonetheless, be answered in terms of overall impressions rather than minute quantitative calculations, partly because such reception is more faithful to the activity of the viewers for whom the broadcast were made, partly because the size of the sample made any other strategy untenable.³

Table 1. Distribution of television news reports on which this article is based

Distribution of material	n	%
Total number of news items in <i>Rapport</i> 26 April-9 May 2004	203	100
Number of news items about Europe (telegrams and longer items)	49	24
Number of news items about Europe a minute or more in length	27	13
Number of items pertaining to EU enlargement (incl. Telegrams)	21	10
Total time of news items in <i>Rapport</i> 26 April-9 May 2004	371 min	100
Total time items about Europe a minute or more in length	87 min 41 s	24

Table 2. The different sorts of people interviewed in Rapport news items about Europe of a minute or more in length, 26 April – 9 May 2004

Category	Number	Proportion of all actors
Workers, people in service industry, students, pensioners, 'man-on-the-street'	26	33%
Entrepreneurs, engineers, management	19	24%
Officials and politicians (including government members, foreign heads of state, municipal officials, trade unionists, police, and 8 Swedish EU parliamentarians)	32	40.5%
Experts	2	2.5%
Total	79	100%

In order to answer the question of what the world looks like when refracted through one's television screen, it is not enough to ask what goes on there. It is also necessary to ask who populates that world. Apart from the many figures referred to and glimpsed in the background, the 27 items about Europe in this sample contained interviews with a wide range of people, including a waitress, a worker, and an entrepreneur from Estonia, a farmer, environmental activists and engineers from Poland; a young, blue-jeaned Lithuanian lawyer; an optician and a Latvian economist working for a Swedish bank in Riga; a middle-aged woman who said...

In my view we've always been part of Europe. This is our place. It's where we belong...

...and a young Polish woman who explained to the reporter that enlargement was a good thing, because "our country will be opened up to other cultures and European countries. It's important for young people to be able to study and work wherever they want."

The variety of voices and faces is more easily overviewed when organised in the form of Table 2. What the table does not take into account is which of these interviewees can be judged to be the 'primary definers'⁴ of the news stories they appear in and which occupy the most space. If these things are taken into account, the first two categories in the following table become more prominent. Even at this stage in the analysis, however, it is clear that 'ordinary people' and the middle and entrepreneurial class of the new member states are a notable presence in these reports. This would seem to provide confirmation of the strategies spoken of in the newsroom, to give viewers people they can relate to.

What about the journalists' ambition to demonstrate that 'we' are no better than 'they' are, and to challenge stereotypes?

3 The enlargement study reported in this article is part of a larger project comprising the analysis of 56 days of reporting by 5 different national and international broadcasters – a total of 280 programmes.

4 The term originates from Stuart Hall, et al. *Policing the Crisis*.

Narratives of Enlargement in Rapport 26 April – 9 May 2004

Two recurrent themes are discernible in the news stories about Europe contained in *Rapport* broadcasts in the sample period. In one, enlargement is framed as a threat; in the other it is framed as a source of potential. In the first of these themes, three risks associated with enlargement were outlined: the threat posed to Swedish jobs and welfare by cheap labour migrants from the new member states; the influx of crime from 'the East' accompanying the relaxation of border controls; and the opening of the floodgates for cheap liquor (here Swedish 'alco-tourists' were repeatedly depicted as blithely crossing the Baltic to stock up, delighted at having found such bargains in liquor stores on the other side of the sea). This theme originates in the political discourse prevailing in Sweden during this period. The second theme paints a different picture of enlargement, and it is not unreasonable to argue that it originated in the *Rapport* newsroom (and field in which SVT journalists work). Four examples of reports exemplifying the enlargement-as-potential theme will be presented in what follows.

Estonian manpower agencies

In one of these reports, viewers were told that Estonian manpower agencies had found an inexpensive way of getting around the transition rules that several EU countries were planning to impose by renting out cheap labour from their home base. The journalist visited one of the agencies that had 'mushroomed' on the eve of enlargement, and talked to both the Swedish-speaking Estonian who owned the agency, a man who wanted to go abroad to improve his income, and a young waitress who was interested in finding out how other people lived. She wanted to go to Finland because it is "another country, a different country. I'd like to get new experiences and see how the Finns really are".

From an optimistic, proactive Estonia, the viewer's gaze was directed back to Sweden, where the Prime Minister could be seen warning in parliament against 'social tourism', and where a trade unionist expressed concern about what such labour migration would mean.

This is what could be called an 'open text' in that different readers could make different sense of it. A Swedish construction worker could well be thought to pay most attention to what the trade unionist said, and find the prospect of encountering an Estonian at his workplace a matter of concern. A young Swede, however, could be thought to identify with the 19-year-old waitress, who was prepared to venture abroad in search of new experiences, and who was not depicted as threatening. It is important to note that she was a key figure in this story, while an implied Swedish construction worker (or waitress) was absent. As an open text, the evaluation is also open: the Estonians are not presented in a threatening light, but the summing up would seem to say that this was no straightforward issue. In any case, an impression the viewer may have been left with was that these new members were outgoing and enterprising, while Swedes were conservative and unprepared for change.

The ecological Polish farmer

In another item, viewers were told that the modernization of agriculture was turning out to be a fateful issue for the entire Baltic region. Polish farms were small and environmentally friendly, but changes were required if they were going to be able to compete with agriculture in the rest of Europe. The plot of the report that followed was basically that Poland was preparing to enter the EU as an old-fashioned but respectable member, when it came to farming. The disequilibrium of the narrative consisted in the fateful question: would its modernisation turn it into an environmental abuser, like farmers in Sweden and elsewhere in the EU, as it caught up to the others with the help of artificial fertilizers?

Aided by reporter voiceovers, the story was told by the farmer Barbara, who was interviewed in the field of her farm outside Gliwice. She was worried that small farmers would disappear with EU membership, and hoped that Poles would avoid the mistakes of the European Union when it came to overproduction. Another woman, an environmental activist, said there were hopes that organic farming in Poland would develop further, and that the challenge facing Polish farmers was to aid this development. According to this woman and the reporter, should Poland industrialise its farming, the fate of the Baltic lay in the balance. It was Barbara, the farmer, who gave the evaluation:

The future is not bright for us all, but those who are prepared to work and put their heart in it will succeed.

There seems to be a subtext in this report, as if the journalist was saying to the viewer: “this isn’t what you expected, is it?”. In the first place, Poland was a model country in this text, rather than a wannabe with a lot to learn from a purportedly environmentally-friendly country like Sweden. The hope expressed by all who had a voice in this story was that Poland would not become a polluter like its counterpart on the other side of the Baltic. In the second place, the actors and primary definers in this story were both women, which could challenge the stereotype of Poland as a male-dominated society. Neither was presented as an anomaly. The story, in other words, would seem to offer new perspectives, challenge stereotypes, and resist confirming people’s views – to use the words of one of the SVT journalists encountered in the preceding section.

The Polish Engineer

Men did, of course, feature in news stories about the new member states in general, and in Poland in particular. In another item addressing the problem of the environment, four were interviewed: two engineers, a member of the Polish Green Party, and the head of the municipal water company in the city of Krakow. In what narrative terminology would label the abstract of this story, viewers were told that the environment was the area that was going to require the heaviest investments when the EU’s new members harmonize with the rest of the Union. Poland, the biggest of the new member states, also had the biggest environmental problems, but was investing heavily in sewage treatment plants. The ‘disequilibrium’ in the plot was introduced when

the Green Party member challenged the view of the municipal official that as much as was being done as possible. It was an exchange familiar from the Swedish political context.

What is interesting about this particular story is its subplot. The primary definer – the man whose account opened the story and who provided the evaluation that ends it – was an engineer who had recently returned to Poland after twenty years as an émigré. To him, the sewage treatment plant he was building, and which would clean up the accumulated poison of generations, was a symbol of the ‘new’ Poland. “When I came back”, he said,

It was a different country, for us it was like a second emigration because it felt like we’d come to a different country, with different mentality, different needs, with development we couldn’t imagine, and now we’re adding more to this.

In the past, he said, people looked and saw only industrial development, because of the propaganda, and they were proud of it. But now when they looked around them they saw problems, and wanted to make improvements. They were sorting their waste and this, he said, was promising.

The symbolism is unmistakable: apart from the metaphor of ‘cleaning up the waste’ of generations, there is the interesting image of the émigré encountering a new country when he returns home. Given that Sweden, since the end of the 19th century, has been a nation of emigrants (some of whom remained in their new domiciles, others of whom returned), it would be interesting to know whether this theme finds any resonance ‘on the couch’.

The Lithuanian entrepreneur

In the final example to be sketched here, the success story of Lithuania – the ‘tiger’ of Europe, viewers were told, and one of the fastest growing economies in the world – was related through the eyes of Tomas Juska, an entrepreneur who was 21 years old when the country became independent. With four classmates and no money, he started a flooring company that now had an annual turnover of half a billion kronor. Juska described Lithuania using the following points of reference:

We are a society of 3.5 million people and on our roads there are about 1.2 million cars. I can pay for parking by sending an SMS message and our mobile phone penetration is more than 60 percent. Just these few examples tell how healthy our economy is.

Unease that Sweden would be invaded by Lithuanians who wanted to piggyback on the welfare system feels distant here, said the reporter in a voiceover, before introducing what, according to the terminology introduced earlier, could be thought of as the disequilibrium. One million people still lived in poverty (this to a shot of a man with his horse and plough in the fields); it took Juska twelve years to scrape together the money for his dream house (to which he could be seen driving up in a new car); and it would take another fifteen years for the whole country to attain the average EU living standard. In the elegant living room of his house, with brandy and a cordless



phone on the table beside him, Juska spoke less of what Lithuania hoped to get from the EU (“it is a nice label”, he said) than what that country could offer the Union:

I believe we can give to all the Europe, more developed Europe, our hunger, our energy, our readiness to work hard, and I would say exploit these things. Because otherwise not only we will maintain as province, all Europe will maintain as province in global processes. So the only way is to put together our strengths.

Even more clearly than in the other three stories, personification strategies are put to use in this item. The Lithuanian tiger is embodied in the self-confident, energetic businessman, who although young is already established. What is interesting here is that despite the disequilibrium of continued poverty for a third of the population, the dominant theme of this report is “ask not what Europe can do for Lithuania, ask what Lithuania can do for Europe”, to paraphrase John F. Kennedy. Unlike the open text in which the Estonian waitress figured, this can be seen as a ‘closed’ text, i.e. one which urges the viewer to see the situation in one rather than several ways. This brings to mind the comment by one of the SVT journalists about giving viewers ‘a red thread’ to hold onto.

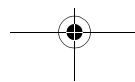
Summary

These four texts – and others in the sample – draw on the naturalist tradition in telling the story of various ‘new Europeans’. It is the accounts of the Estonian waitress, the Polish farmer, the returning émigré and the Lithuanian entrepreneur which further the narratives in which they are actors. The perspective throughout is that of new member states (and more precisely inhabitants of new member states) looking into the European family they are about to join, rather than of established union members on the inside looking out.

An unmistakable feature of these stories is the determination and energy with which the encounter with other Europeans is contemplated by these new neighbours. The Swedes in these news items, by way of contrast, tend to be sceptical and on their guard (in the case of some leading politicians, trade unionists, customs officials and police) or irresponsible (in the case of the alco-tourists). It is not inconceivable that they would come across to culturally competent viewers as conservative, as compared to the dynamic newcomers.

Nevertheless, there are repeated occasions on which the Swedish viewer is invited to identify with his or her counterparts on the other side of the Baltic, who are beginning to buy ecological food and sort their waste, for example, who are filmed eating at elegant restaurants and walking city streets in designer jeans rather than tramping along on foot behind a horse and plough, as was the case in the mid-1990s. Nor are these entirely foreign countries, the viewer is invited to note, through shots of a familiar Swedish grocery store chain and Swedish banks in Latvia.

The question however, is whether evidence of such identification can be found. How does the average viewer make sense of such news stories, if in fact he or she



takes notice of them at all? Focus group interviews in the weeks that followed the broadcasting of these and similar news stories sought an answer to that question.

The View from the Couch

The focus group study was intended to generate insights into how people make sense of the outside world, and into how the media might contribute to that sense-making, i.e. the role television reports, for example, could be thought to play in developing mental ‘maps’ (Hall 1994:207, Ruddock 2001). It included a group of pensioners, workers, musicians and librarians in the small town and corresponding groups in the capital, plus a group of farmers (an equivalent of which was not found in Stockholm). While concerned to exclude obvious candidates for cosmopolitanism like political elites, university academics, activists and businessmen, no attempt was made to include or exclude, or even to find out whether groups contained, people who were particularly bound to local environments or who had experience of living and working abroad. It can thus be seen as a finding, rather than a methodological problem, that in using this approach I ended up fishing up many people with what could be thought of as cosmopolitan experiences abroad. Walking into the pensioner’s collective in a Stockholm suburb or a local branch of the library, I found myself talking to people who had lived in Africa; in the countryside I found myself talking to a farmer who helped a Swiss friend deliver dairy equipment to Chinese entrepreneurs; over pizza in the little town, music teachers and dairy workers told me about how they travelled to Germany every summer to play in the symphonic band and discuss war experiences with their elderly hosts. In every group, immigrants made their presence felt, in several cases by their participation – be they a Finnish librarian or an American or Polish musician. It ultimately occurred to me that to put together a ‘pure’ sample of Swedes without experience of the world outside their nation’s border would have been to construct a problem of representativity, not the other way around. In sum, I have found the ‘go fishing’ method fruitful and defensible. While more, and perhaps larger, groups would have been an advantage, it should be pointed out that there is no definite answer to how many people should be interviewed in a good focus group study (Stokes 2003:151).

There is not room here to present an exhaustive narrative analysis of the nine discussions, or, again, to maintain the distinction between ‘story’ and ‘discourse’ involved in that analysis. What follows instead is a summary of what I take to be key aspects of a few of the discussions and particular features of them that are relevant to understandings of EU enlargement.

An attempt was made in these discussions to leave open the question of how the outside world (*omvärld*) was to be defined, as it was the respondents’ definition that was of interest. The conversation started with the question of what came to mind when the word ‘home’ was mentioned, and progressed to what they associated with the word ‘community’, then ‘EU’ then ‘*omvärld*’, with follow-up questions in between these key points in the discussion. Other questions probed where they got images of these things from, if they travelled, where and why, and if they ever felt at home when somewhere else. Finally, their media consumption habits were discussed, and wheth-

er they ever felt that they recognised, or felt connected to, the people in news reports about other countries.

The farmers readily gave an account of themselves as men who have stayed close to home throughout their lives. It was only in passing that it emerged that one of them had travelled extensively throughout Europe in connection with previous employment, and that another had travelled throughout the world helping a friend of his youth, from Switzerland, sell dairy equipment as far away as China. As for the EU, the farmer who had travelled in Europe in an earlier occupation said:

Farmer 2: I think, I feel a bit far away. You are too far away from it somehow. So it's hard to *ta till sig*.

Interlocutor: Enlargement, or the EU in general. It feels...?

Farmer 2: The EU feels far away. Enlargement too, I think.

Farmer 3: The EU feels so bureaucratic, I think. [*The others agree.*] It's just a lot of bureaucrats who sit in Brussels and decide everything.

Farmer 1: This is the way I see it: the bigger we get, the closer to downfall we come. If you look at it historically, *no* big constellation has held. You can go back to the Mayas, Incas, Roman Empire, Soviet Union, whatever you like: *everything cracks* ultimately. Because you can never unite so many different cultures and so many different ways of doing things under one and the same roof.

Interlocutor: So it's not just the practical aspects of enlargement, but also the cultural...?

Farmer 1: Yes, it is, it is like, if you look at our own sector, if we were to have a common seed date in the entire EU, should the Greeks sow the same day as they do in northern Sweden? [*crash with coffee cup*] My view is: you can't have it!

Interlocutor: [*laughs*] No!

Farmer 1: I think it's like [Farmer 3] says, there's a bunch of people down there in Brussels who call all the shots (*styr och ställer*) and they're, they're not living in the real world.

Interlocutor: Your image of the EU, is it bureaucrats then?

Farmers 2,3: Yes, exactly.

Farmer 2: That's the picture [...]. When it comes to enlargement, I think there's going to be ... how to put it, there will be a bigger difference between them... how should I put it...

Farmer 1: I know what you mean.

Farmer 2: ... that the East- Baltic are a bit farther down, and then we have the others who are a bit higher up. This, there'll be too big diff., there'll be too big a range now, the gap between the good and the less good will be even bigger.

Interlocutor: An A- and B-team?

Farmer 2: Yeah, maybe you could call it that. Then the B-team wants to grow up to the A-team's level, but then the A-team has to pay for it somehow.

As can be seen from this excerpt, a clear 'Other' emerges in the discussion with the farmers: the bureaucrats in Brussels. They are not alone, however, but have the Swedish government for company, as well as the rich landowners who are seen as running the Swedish Farmers Union, all of which are pitted against an 'Us' that is comprised of the 'little people'. The key actors in the stories of the farmers are the Government, the Bureaucrats in Brussels, Regulations, Taxes and Subsidies, and the discourse is materialist, rather than one characterised by ideas or visions. As to the human actors on the other side of the Baltic Sea, they are absences rather than presences in this talk. Shown the report about the Polish farmer presented in the preceding section, they don't comment on her situation at all, either in terms of recognising it or failing to recognise it, but they *do* relate the item to their own problems and situation. The question is: is this evidence that the news item doesn't touch them, or is it evidence of the invisibility of the conventions at work in it, rendering them oblivious to

the personification/identification strategies but immediately ‘internalizing’ the text by associating to their own situation?

Hostility towards the EU and Brussels bureaucrats does not necessarily find a twin in hostility to the outside world and non-Swedes in general, it is interesting to note:

Farmer 1: Everyone who talks about EU, about how it’s all about justice and peace, they seem to forget that the EU is building a wall around itself.

Interlocutor: And what do you think of that?

Farmer 1: I think it is utter nonsense. There we are, you know, either we’re going to open outwards. Or else I don’t understand what they want.

But this particular farmer *does* find one good thing about the EU and, by corollary, enlargement:

Farmer 1: What I think is positive about the EU is this possibility to travel, you know, in an easier way. Because travel, I’ve always been fascinated by that, and I like different people, different food cultures, where there are all sorts of things. It is fascinating. It’s enriching, quite simply.

A preliminary interpretation of this exchange, then, is that even when rooted physically and discursively in a particular patch of a particular countryside, people like this farmer can express what could be thought of as cosmopolitan sentiments.

The farmers told stories of going away and coming back – one grandparent had tried living the life of the émigré in the US once upon a time, for example, before giving up and heading back to their Swedish homesteads, and the farmers themselves had travelled abroad and felt it right to be back home. This theme is also in evidence in the discussion with musicians who had left Boxholm to study in Stockholm, who had worked with major orchestras in big cities in Sweden and Denmark, but who had made a conscious decision to give that life up for the quiet, good life of a music teachers in the small town. Like the farmers, they readily depict themselves as provincials, rooted in their community, and it is only in passing, and in response to gently reiterated questions, that it emerges that they have in fact been abroad, living, for example, with older Germans while on a symphonic band exchange, and quizzing their hosts about how the Second War looked and felt on their end. In one way, such activity is not unrelated to the work of the cosmopolitan, who is open for vantage points that are not his own. In another way, these experiences seem to be anything other than essential to these respondents, even in a discussion devoted to their view of the outside world.

The point to be made here is not that indications of cosmopolitanism are lacking in this discussion. Rather, it is that they contain evidence of non-cosmopolitanism (not to be confused with anti-cosmopolitanism, which can be thought to have more to do with fundamentalism and xenophobia). These men are quite simply satisfied with their plight and can see no reason to improve it or to share it with others. This is evident in talk of the EU, for example:

Interlocutor: If I say the word ‘EU’, what sort of pictures do you get in your head?

Musician 2: [*chuckles*] Red tape.

Musician 1: Yes.

Musician 2: It’s mostly negative, actually.

Musician 1: Yep. The first time, when we were going to vote on the EU, then it was mostly focussed on how good and nice...

Musician 2: I don’t understand why they tried that one on, when we have it so good here anyway. We managed on our own, like, we had... I don’t get it, we had no need of Europe.

Interlocutor: Does it still feel the same?

Musician 2: Of course it does. It feels more like we're being used by others, if you know what I mean. Because it costs a lot to be in now.

Musician 1: Right. Plus there's such a state apparatus down there, with thousands of employees...

Musician 2: ...social, secure networks, networks that we have here in society anyway: what's going to happen with them now, when there's going to be more and more coming who *don't* have that, if you know what I mean. Will we be *worse* off, like? There's unease. You feel uneasy about it. So there's nothing positive in it.

Interlocutor: Nothing at all?

Musician 2: No.

Interlocutor: If you think about... the French or British and so on, you don't think, us, that's us. You think 'them', or?

Musician 2: I don't know.

Musician 1: Sure, we're Europeans. So you have a certain community.

The second musician, in particular, expresses the opposite of "excessive imitation of traits of others at the expense of the integrity of one's own land", or someone who learns to live with diversity in modes of thought and ways of life, which are dictionary definitions of cosmopolitanism. He is, rather, the opposite: "provincial, local, limited or restricted by the attitudes, interests or loyalties of a single region".

A rather different pattern emerged in the discussion with four librarians who, as they themselves joked, represented all the generations of working life, as two were in late-middle-age, with grown children, one was heavily pregnant, and one, barely out of her teens, was just finishing her studies. Compared to the participants in the other four focus groups in the small town, who tended to give static replies, these women were quick to build on the replies of their colleagues, interweave story with story, and note the connections they themselves had made to earlier responses. Emotions could run high as, for example, when speaking of the frustration they experienced as consumers of news:

Librarian 1: The awful thing about tv news is that you stop thinking. I mean, I've almost *stopped* looking at the news because of that. I think there is *report* after *report* after *report* after *report* and I'd don't have a chance to react. And I think it's *awful*. [*The others murmur agreement.*] I think it's *terrible*. That it's like that. So I much prefer to watch, you know, *slower* programs and reportage. When you keep up, like. Because it's, it's pure violence, I mean it's terror, terror, terror, terror. And maimed people.

Interlocutor: And you mean that it's not enough just to know about what's going on, it's important to react somehow –

Librarian 1: Yes, for *me* it's important to react. Because I think sitting and being spoon-fed and not reacting, it's somehow, well you feel numbed. And anything at all can happen without you reacting, in the end.

Interlocutor: And the image you get of the outside world from the tv news is a lot of conflict and war then?

Librarian 1: *Absolutely.*

The problematic relationship these women experienced with the media, or with what was referred to at the beginning of this article as 'images from elsewhere' was illustrated vividly in response to the question of whether they had ever felt 'at home' when abroad. The experiences that sprang immediately to their minds were the very opposite, yet clearly relevant to the dynamics of sense-making being explored here. One occasion was the murder, in September 2003, of former Foreign Minister Anna Lindh, the other was the murder of two policemen in the idyllic nearby town of Mal-

exander one bright spring morning. The librarians told the following stories about receiving the news:

Librarian 1: I was in England, you see, and it was *anful*. We were a group of librarians in England, who suddenly got the news. And we stood there and felt completely *outside*, we wanted to be *home*. When it happened. And we *cried* together and it was, it was *anfully* strange. And then you saw all those pictures on tv, crying people, and you felt that *that's* where we should be. It was, it was strange. I got behind.

Librarian 3: I know, it was the same with the police murders.

Librarian 1: Exactly.

Librarian 3: And it took a long time before I caught up. On the airplane there were *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet* and it was all about my little home town Malexander, it was so strange, it was so far away to read all about that. And then *everybody* had to tell about it and I wanted to hear where everyone had been and what everyone had experienced. To be able to keep up somehow.

Librarian: It was strange.

Librarian 3: But what you said about news [Librarian 1], it's, it's so strange when you see lots of people, because obviously, all that about 9/11, it's stuff you just stand and think about for a long, long, long time, about individual cases and so on, but otherwise it's war and so on when you see that there are lots of people dying, and you aren't moved as much as when you see *one* single story, *one* person who tells it. It's easier to put yourself in the tragedy then. I don't know, that's just how it is. It's like you say [Librarian 1], you have to distance yourself, you have to screen yourself off, because if you started *thinking*, if you're going to take in *everything* and start thinking about environmental damage, all the wars, all the people in need – well, all the misery there is, well, you almost wouldn't want to go on living. That's how it feels.

Librarian 2: It feels so hopeless, I think you have to, I think you have to try to distance yourself and come back to your own little reality and try, well, do the best you can. With your own little life. That's where we usually end up when we discuss things. Sometimes we discuss all the misery but we try to do what we can in our own little library.

There are many insights to be gleaned from this dialogue, not least when it comes to the work of imagination. For these women, it was not enough to follow the aftermath of the murders in the media, or from afar. Despite all that is said about the “breaking news” pace of reporting, these women felt they would not be able to “catch up” until they were back home. They reflect on their relationship to media reporting, and find it problematic, ultimately removing their gaze from the turbulent outside world, to which they apparently feel some sort of responsibility, and return to their ‘little library’.

Another difference between these women and the men in the other focus groups in the small town is their tendency to talk about people, rather than rules and regulations. When asked what they think of when the word ‘EU’ is mentioned, they immediately mention enlargement, which means a broadening of *their* horizons, a going out of Swedes rather than a coming in of new members:

Librarian 2: I think, I think it feels positive. It's like [Librarian 1] says with the new countries, above all the younger generation, that they want to get out and travel more and get in touch. And it's also the case that Sweden is too small a country, for many who have lived here their entire lives. They think that the whole world looks like this. And that we do the right thing and that it's best here and all that. I think we can learn a lot from each other and...and I think it's good that...we broaden somehow, that people, that we can travel easily between countries and see how others do things and pick up the good things and the bad things, or good things. Yeah, I think it's good. I think it feels positive. And I also think, when I look at the celebrations, you know, from those countries that haven't had

it so easy, you can feel, bah, it's so *good* that they are joining now, they are really wonderful and celebrate and all that. Somehow they must have felt like second class people all the time, we've had so much, we've had it so good and all that and everything for them has been a bit worse, it feels, *I'd* feel like that if I lived in that country and saw how everyone else had it...

Librarian 1: I think they're going to go *really really far* now, it's going to be the rest of us left standing there and...cheering. [*All laugh.*] Or trying to keep up with them. Because I can almost *feel* how they want revenge, now they can try too and...be as good as the others. [...]You can imagine these people who have so much, a lot of knowledge and potential to be something – they haven't been able to, because they live in a country where there aren't those possibilities. And suddenly the possibilities are *there*. Yes, I can really see before my eyes how they are going to work to be...*better*.

Librarian 2: It's going to be exciting to see. You *really* admire them...I saw a program about a computer guy, with a computer company in Poland, a *big* company, with *lots* of people. It was so easy and so... fantastic.

Interlocutor: What program was that?

Librarian 2: It was on...some news program.

There is an interesting contrast between this exchange and the first one between the librarians quoted above. While the first one would seem to indicate the presence of a certain degree of resistance to media messages and the various strategies of journalists, the image of the new EU members that emerges from the passage above is very much in keeping with that which emerges from the textual analysis of *Rapport* news items and the views of the journalists themselves. So while on the one hand, this woman feels she has become immune to news reports of a violent world, she would appear, on the other, to be making sense of other news – such as the meaning of enlargement – in the way that accords with journalistic perspectives. There is evidence, in the librarians' talk, of identification with individuals in news reports from abroad rather than the many thousands who are in trouble. For want of a better word, this could be called the woman-with-the-Samsonite-suitcase syndrome, and it is worth considering whether it is as problematic as the librarians think it is. Translating their sentiments into the language of this research, the question is whether this 'syndrome' is evidence of cosmopolitan susceptibilities, or a symptom of the difficulties that may be encountered on the way to forming a cosmopolitan outlook?

Conclusion

A feature of these and the other focus group discussions that have not been documented here is that in the discourse of the respondents, globalisation emerges as something natural, almost organic, while the EU is artificial, the product of a bureaucratic inclination to complicate the life of the average person, and an entity held together by red tape. Another feature is that 'home' is somewhere secure and pleasant. Its opposite, 'not-home', is not a place full of foreigners, but a place defined by the presence of conflict, violence, and the aforementioned red tape (although ask a farmer and you'll learn that there's a lot of the latter at home too).

The discussions excerpted here suggest that we should not be hasty about concluding that mediated worldliness is the most important factor when it comes to making sense of the world and relations with people beyond the borders of the nation. In these and the other discussions, face-to-face interactions with Chinese entrepreneurs

and Asian tobacconists in London, and talking to people who were 'at home' when Lindh was killed or in Germany when Hitler was waging war leave their impression on the respondents and come more easily to mind than flashbacks from news reports when discussing their 'take' on the outside world. How these face-to-face and mediated interactions work together (or conflict) is one task for further research.

Cosmopolitans, it would seem, are to be found behind the desk at the local library and in the Swedish Television newsroom, at least that corner of it occupied by the foreign news desk. This is hardly a surprise – as Hannerz has noted, foreign correspondents are “key players in today’s globalization of consciousness” (Hannerz 2004:2) – and indeed any other result would have been disquieting. What is striking here is, rather, the clear stance adopted in their reporting in the week before the fireworks and Beethoven of May 1st. Enlargement was a Good Thing in the view of these journalists, and their message was that Swedes and other member states should be prepared to welcome these new family members, and recognise them as kin. This emerged not only from interviews with the journalists, but also from analysis of the reports they produced during this period.

The question is whether the journalists and librarians share cosmopolitan perspectives because both these groups have similar political and moral outlooks, or because the librarians have been looking at the world through the window of SVT news reports for the greater part of their lives. Whatever the answer to that question may be (and it is, of course, a question that can never be answered), both these groups would seem to be engaged in the social practice Appadurai had in mind, a practice that may be called the work of cosmopolitan imagination.

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