



## *Flyktpodden: Migrant and Minority Voices that Matter?*

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### Abstract

In recent years, podcasting has frequently functioned as a tool 'to tell stories emanating from routinely marginalized lived experiences' (Vrikki and Malik, 274). *Flyktpodden* is a podcast aiming to facilitate intergenerational dialogue about escape, persecution, and migration, thereby challenging mainstream stereotypes and generating understanding of different people's lives. This article examines the podcast through the theoretical concepts of voice (Couldry) and listening (Bassel), addressing how the podcast uses life stories to broaden the cultural awareness of escape, persecution, and migration. This article further asks whether migrant and minority voices are ascribed agency and allowed to matter. Based on a qualitative content analysis, this article concludes that the podcast offers an eclectic collection of life stories on migration and persecution through which migrants and minorities are allowed to be both vulnerable and agentive. The podcast's intergenerational and dialogic format gives their voices legitimacy and recognition, thus challenging the hierarchy of value and attention. Moreover, it enables marginalized groups to formulate counter-narratives (Vrikki and Malik) on the historic and present-day situation in Sweden rarely heard in the public sphere.

*Keywords:* migrant media, voice, listening, podcasting

### Sammanfattning

De senaste åren har podcasting återkommande använts som ett verktyg för att berätta om marginaliserade livserfarenheter. Flyktpodden är en podd som syftar till att främja

dialog om flykt, förföljelse och migration över generationsgränser och därigenom utmana rådande stereotyper och öka förståelsen för olika människors liv. Artikeln använder de teoretiska begreppen röst och lyssnande för att undersöka hur podden använder livshistorier för att öka medvetenheten om flykt, förföljelse och migration och hur migranternas och minoriteters röster tillskrivs makt och tillåts vara betydelsefulla. Baserat på en kvalitativ innehållsanalys så konstaterar artikeln att podden presenterar en bredd av livshistorier om migration och förföljelse där migranter och minoriteter tillåts vara både drivande och sårbara. Dialogformatet och generationsöverskridningen ger deras röster legitimitet och erkännande och utmanar således värde och uppmärksamhetshierarkin. Podden ger även marginaliserade grupper möjligheten att formulera mot-narrativ om historiska och samtida Sverige sällan hörda i offentligheten.

*Nyckelord:* migrantmedier, röst, lyssnande, podcasting

## Introduction

Media play a significant role in orienting us toward the world. It is through the media that we learn about people who are both like us and different from us.<sup>1</sup> Migrant voices and experiences are rarely featured in mainstream media; and, when migrants are portrayed, they are mainly characterized as problems or victims.<sup>2</sup> As a result, agency is rarely ascribed to them.

At the same time, projects outside the mainstream media have always existed that, in different ways, aim to counter this one-sided reporting. Migrant media, for example, facilitate a space where migrants can produce content and tell stories on their own terms.<sup>3</sup> New digital communication technologies likewise facilitate new platforms where migrant voices can potentially counteract dominant mainstream media discourse.

Podcasting as a phenomenon has grown steadily since its advent in 2004; and due to its low financial and technical overheads,<sup>4</sup> marginalized groups have made frequent use of this medium as a new space 'to tell stories emanating from routinely marginalized lived experiences'.<sup>5</sup> Because of its use within nonfictional storytelling, scholars and commentators discuss podcasting as a digital audio-based form of life writing.<sup>6</sup>

In 2005, the media house Fanzingo was founded in the Stockholm suburb of Alby. They are a local, regional, and national media hub for underrepresented groups. Such

groups are composed of youths in the suburbs and newcomers who want to produce media and contribute to a more diverse image of contemporary Sweden. *Flyktpodden* (literally ‘flight podcast’) is one of their productions. Its first episode was released in 2018, and by September 2022 *Flyktpodden* had released ten. Since September 2022, one more episode has been released. *Flyktpodden* aims to facilitate intergenerational dialogue about escape and migration, thereby challenging mainstream stereotypes and increasing understanding of different people’s lives. In each episode, a young person, who has recently arrived in Sweden as a refugee or has experienced persecution, talks with an older person, with similar experiences that lie further in the past. Fanzingo also develops educational material to enable upper primary and secondary schools to use *Flyktpodden* as part of their curricular material.<sup>7</sup>

This article will explore *Flyktpodden* through theories of voice<sup>8</sup> and listening.<sup>9</sup> To do so, it brings together insights from migration studies, sociology, post-colonialism, media studies, and life writing. New digital communication technologies make it easier than ever for marginalized communities to claim a voice. However, if those who use it are not recognized and listened to, ‘voice’ remains an empty emancipatory promise. Voice needs to matter, be ‘valued, attended to and recognised’.<sup>10</sup> Through a theoretically-informed thematic analysis of the podcast’s first ten episodes,<sup>11</sup> this article addresses itself to the following questions: How does the podcast *Flyktpodden* use life stories to broaden listeners’ understanding of escape, migration, and persecution? How are migrant and minority voices allowed to matter and ascribed with agency in the podcast?

## Literature review

Several studies<sup>12</sup> document the tendency among mainstream media to discuss migrants and refugees in terms of problems and threats, while others have underlined how they are portrayed as speechless, passive victims. In addition, mainstream media often employ dehumanizing language,<sup>13</sup> such as evoking ‘floods’ or ‘waves’<sup>14</sup> to describe migrants, portraying them as masses of indistinguishable individuals.<sup>15</sup> These same media outlets tend to speak *about* migrants as a group rather than imparting upon them individual voices of their own. Consequently, migrants are thus interpellated as an anonymous, monolithic group and are easily constituted as ‘the speechless’ in the wider public sphere.<sup>16</sup> When mainstream media include migrant and refugee voices, they are often contextualized in a way that reinforces the image of dependent and powerless victims.<sup>17</sup> Since functionaries within the mainstream media

prioritize elite and professional sources, it is naïve to believe that the few migrant or refugee voices inserted in the news coverage are regarded with the same legitimacy.<sup>18</sup>

In reaction to this, some media projects outside the mainstream aim to counter this one-sided reporting and address ‘issues that are of specific interest for the members of diasporic communities’ or immigrant groups.<sup>19</sup> These media, often discussed as ethnic,<sup>20</sup> diasporic,<sup>21</sup> community,<sup>22</sup> or citizen media,<sup>23</sup> provide migrants or other marginalized groups with the opportunity to produce their own news, have editorial control over content, and tell their own stories on their own terms.

Myria Georgiou explores how digital platforms – two institutional initiatives (*I am a refugee/I am a migrant*,<sup>24</sup> 2017; and *Aware Migrants*,<sup>25</sup> 2016) and two grassroots initiatives (*Refugee Radio Network*,<sup>26</sup> 2014; and *Migrant Voice*,<sup>27</sup> 2010) – give voice to migrants. *I am a refugee/I am a migrant* allows migrants and refugees to narrate their personal success stories to challenge the view that migrants and refugees are opportunistic and not interested in integration. *Aware Migrants*, by contrast, focuses on migrants’ stories about trauma and remorse. Georgiou argues that these stories strongly correspond to western imaginaries, such as the dream of individual success; and that migrants’ experiences are portrayed as ‘inferior to European experience’.<sup>28</sup> Thus, these initiatives limit the conditions for recognition. Consequently, the voices of migrants are not properly heard.

The content of both of the grassroot initiatives (migrant media) is different from the institutional initiatives. They portray migrants and refugees as both vulnerable and agentive. Being seen as agents who suffer due to national and transnational injustice, migrants are also allowed to be political actors. They ‘speak as citizens, even when they lack citizenship rights: they have voice, they have demands, they contest injustice’.<sup>29</sup> Even if these initiatives help to advance ideas of hospitality, equality, and solidarity, it is mainly individuals who uphold some symbolic capital and managed to succeed who are allowed to speak. Georgiou concludes that, although including migrant and refugee voices does not necessarily ensure recognition, online spaces can, nevertheless, challenge existing power structures, allowing migrants to not only speak but also be heard.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, in her study of the *Once, I was a refugee* campaign, Kaarina Nikunen argues that the refugee selfies campaign offers former refugees the opportunity of becoming an individual in the public and reclaiming citizenship by representing ‘the multiple identities and cultures that are part of the nation’.<sup>31</sup> Yet, the study also underlines the conditionality of citizenship. The selfies display refugees as good and dutiful citizens who contribute to society as nurses and construction workers, which

also highlights how refugees must position themselves within a discourse of deservingness.

Podcasting has grown significantly since 2004, when the form entered the media landscape. Due to low technological and financial barriers, producers can develop podcasts independently of mainstream media and are not subject to the same regulations as broadcast media. This structure provides a space to ‘do radio on their own terms – free from industry and/or legal restrictions’.<sup>32</sup> Thus, producers and groups have embraced podcasts to fulfil the ambition of telling stories that are rarely taken up by the mainstream media.<sup>33</sup> It ‘provides unique opportunities for shifting how, who, and what we hear, and when’.<sup>34</sup> Several studies suggest that podcasts offer marginalized groups counter publics<sup>35</sup> and spaces where previously untold narratives can co-exist alongside dominant ones in history books.<sup>36</sup> Due to the nonfictional storytelling format, scholars often discuss podcasting as a digital audio-based form of life writing<sup>37</sup>; and life writing scholars are recently showing greater interest in marginal groups.

### Voice and listening

Voice is often referred to as an essential component in a democratic society.<sup>38</sup> When we vote, we ultimately make our voices heard in the political context.<sup>39</sup> In the public sphere, agency is often synonymous with having a voice, an ideal reflected in the prevalence of laws protecting freedom of speech.<sup>40</sup> When discussing marginalized groups, the lack of ‘voice’ is often pointed out as an issue by scholars and policy-makers, since voice is central to agency and participation in democratic life.<sup>41</sup> Commentators have also begun to recognize the importance of ‘voice’ for socially-inclusive societies.<sup>42</sup> ‘Voice’ is also central when discussing community or participatory media initiatives that often explicitly aim to ‘give a voice’ to ‘the voiceless’ by giving marginalized groups the opportunity to speak up or talk back to mainstream media and society.<sup>43</sup>

Lately, however, scholars have addressed the shortcomings of this metaphorical ‘voice’. They do not deny its importance, but assert that our conceptualization of it is too narrow,<sup>44</sup> and that we need to consider what structural changes voice can enact.<sup>45</sup> Nick Couldry, for instance, draws attention to this limitation by insisting that ‘voice’, seen as a social process, involves both enabling to speak as well as listening. Similarly, Kate Lacey states that ‘without a listener, speech is nothing but noise in the ether’ and asserts that ‘if the speaker is not also at turns a listener, only a perverted version of

communication remains'.<sup>46</sup> True communication, thus, is dialogic rather than monologic.

In other words, giving marginalized groups the opportunity to voice their concern means little, if no one pays attention to what they are saying. Even further, if it does not make any difference when it comes to influencing policies and decision-making – or even just the overall framing of a news story – then the efforts of 'voicing' lose impact. 'Voice' is, thus, 'inadequate unless there is also a shift in the hierarchies of value and attention accorded to different actors and communities'.<sup>47</sup> Having a voice is not enough in itself; voice needs to matter<sup>48</sup> or be 'meaningful'.<sup>49</sup> In other words, when discussing 'voice', we also need to consider 'listening'.

While the concept of 'voice' is mainly linked to participation, the concept of 'listening' involves those who are addressed and invited to respond.<sup>50</sup> Listening is 'a powerful metaphor for analysing "the other side" of voice – that is the importance of attention and response, openness, and recognition to complete the circuits of democratic communication'.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, Jim Macnamara argues that listening involves recognition, acknowledgement, attention, interpretation, understanding, consideration, and response, for voice to matter and be meaningful.<sup>52</sup>

Listening with humanity and ethical care can, according to Leah Bassel, be a great counterweight against polarizations and divisions in society. Politics of listening demand interdependence between speakers and listeners, requiring that the implicated parties equally take turns speaking and listening. The aim is the mutual creation of an 'us'; and for this to be possible, the parties involved must recognize each other as legitimate speakers. Existing 'us' vs. 'them' binaries are obstacles on the path to achieving this common 'us' since they preclude each interlocutor from recognizing the other's narrative as equal. However, when one manages to go beyond these binaries and create a common 'us', listening can be a source a recognition. Sharing stories and seeing how they are entangled can also reinforce the feeling of connectedness and, in turn, political recognition.<sup>53</sup>

Media play a significant role in orienting us towards the world, and how refugees and migrants are portrayed in media demands different moral responsibilities.<sup>54</sup> Through the media, we learn about people who are like us and those who are different from us. The 'other' appears to us and invites a moral response.<sup>55</sup> How media represent 'the other' is thus crucial, as it influences the public sphere's moral horizon.<sup>56</sup> Media can shape our ability to understand and perhaps identify with the distant other by activating feelings such as pity, sympathy, solidarity, and identification, rather than apathy and distance.<sup>57</sup> Even if there always is an option to foreground sameness and universality of human experience, and thus provide the conditions for recognition

and identification, ‘media trade in otherness, in the spectacular and the visible’.<sup>58</sup> Consequently, media often miss the opportunity to create connection and identification through their reporting.

Not being heard at all and being heard differently from what was intended are two different things. It is impossible for anyone to control fully how their utterances are received. The context and how an ‘event’ is framed influence the politics of listening, determining who is recognized as a legitimate speaker. Moreover, present power relations influence audibility, often privileging and strengthening established narratives and voices at the cost of minority narratives and voices. It is therefore difficult for marginalized groups to speak beyond elite-defined roles, as these forces of power tend to render their voices inaudible or delegitimized. Therefore, the only possibility for minority groups to be heard often means that they have to position themselves within the dominant narrative structured according to the us-vs.-them binary. Consequently, minority women are, for example, mainly heard as victims and must then accept the assigned role of ‘the passive and vulnerable victim’. Subsequently, the voices of minority women are not properly heard at all. Rather they play a role in a bigger pre-established narrative over which they have no control,<sup>59</sup> a line of reasoning strongly influenced by Gayatri Spivak’s *Can the Subaltern Speak*.<sup>60</sup> This explains the hypervisibility accompanied by inaudibility that some marginalized groups experience.<sup>61</sup> It is therefore crucial to try to challenge ‘those hierarchies of attention which produce unequal opportunities for speaking and being heard’<sup>62</sup> to provide equal opportunities for people to voice their concern and be heard.

### **A space of multifaceted and complex life stories**

The following analysis will consider ten episodes of the podcast *Flyktpodden* in terms of offering a space of multifaceted and complex life stories, a space of recognition, and finally a space to reflect on the past and the present. In each episode, a young person who recently came to Sweden as a refugee or has experienced persecution meets an older person with a similar story who came to Sweden decades ago. Each thirty-minute-long episode is the outcome of an intimate dialogue between two people who share similar experiences. In the beginning of each episode, the young person introduces the idea behind the podcast and the conversational partner before they take turns telling their stories. All episodes consist of dialogue, yet there are also parts where the young person re-tells parts of the stories.

All stories begin with stating where the interlocutors escaped from, and the podcast offers an eclectic collection of life stories. While some participants have fled from

Turkey, Serbia, Afghanistan, Peru, Syria, Somalia, Ghana, and Rwanda, almost half of the older generation, on the other hand, are Holocaust survivors. They are aged between 80 and 94 years at the time of the production and have fled from Poland and the Czech Republic in World War II. Additionally, two life stories centre around the situation of the Romani and Sami population – two ethnic minorities in Sweden who, like Jews, Tornedalers, and Sweden Finns, have held minority status since 2000. One life story focuses on an old Finnish woman who came to Sweden as a labour immigrant to escape poverty.

*Flyktpodden* provides refugees, migrants, and ethnic minorities with the opportunity to narrate their individual life stories in their own voices. The life stories that emerge through the dialogue between the two conversational partners in each episode are complex. Thus, in contrast to the portrayals of refugees and migrants in mainstream media, these life stories are not reduced to fit narrow pre-defined frames such as ‘the victim’,<sup>63</sup> ‘the threat’<sup>64</sup> or ‘the successful and well-integrated’.<sup>65</sup> Instead, elements of vulnerability, trauma, empowerment, aspirations, difficulties settling in, and social critiques of Sweden are allowed to coexist.

In episode 3, we get to know Roda, 26, who came to Sweden as an unaccompanied minor from Somalia. In the region where her family lived, it was common and socially acceptable for richer older men to have bought young girls to marry. Consequently, her parents sent her away to help her escape forced marriage at the age of 12. Today, she is a filmmaker and a spoken-word poet. Her story reveals that she has always been an outspoken girl who questions inequalities. Yet, her story also reflects trauma and vulnerability. After she was sent away, she lived in different camps and, upon arrival in Sweden, in different family- and youth-homes until she turned 18. She has not seen her parents and siblings for 14 years; and as much as she is content with her current life, the pain of separation from her family still troubles her:

Roda, 26: And when I think back on it now, I think it was good that they did it, because I live in Sweden. I’m doing fine. Yes, I live here, I can express myself however I want to – in my films, in my spoken words, and everything I wanted to do culturally. And then, the other side is: poor me, who was handed over to someone else as a 12-year-old. And I think [sic!] I left it behind, but I didn’t, because I never got any explanation other than that ‘it was for your own sake’. And it was for my own sake, but I wanted, I always wanted, more explanation as to why it happened to me and not to my siblings.<sup>66</sup> (#3, 11:18-12:09)



Roda's story dramatizes the loss of family and, by extension, the loss of childhood. Despite the heterogeneity of the life stories in *Flyktpodden*, family or loss of family are central themes. That most interlocutors were young when they fled their home countries and experienced trauma explains and validates this focus.

In episode 1, we meet Piotr, a Jewish man who in 1942, at the age of four, was smuggled out of the Warszawa Ghetto through the sewer system to reside at a monastery in the countryside. In the process he had to give up his identity, his past, and his family:

Piotr, 80: I learned during my time after the escape that the most important thing for me was not to attract attention. To be as small as possible, as quiet as possible – and it continued even there. [...] I learned to pretend to be a Polish Catholic child. So, I learned prayers and I got a fake name and identity. And I also learned – that's what they told me – to always remember never ever to tell anything about my history and my parents, about the ghetto, the escape. So, I was someone else and it continued. (#1, 4:02-4:57)

A few months after the end of World War II, Piotr was reunited with his mother. In the podcast, Ferry, 17, Piotr's interlocutor, responds to his story by concluding:

Ferry, 17: Yes, I think so too. That identity plays a rather large role. When you got to meet your family then you were yourself. You are not as afraid to show who you are. (19:00)

Piotr, 80: No, then I was myself (#1, 19:12)

The excerpts above illustrate how family is central to a child's sense of security, identity, and home. From a child's perspective, family equals home. Avtar Brah argues that home is both a mythic place and lived experience of a locality for migrants and diasporic subjects.<sup>67</sup> Being forced to leave your home and/or home country is challenging. The familiar life is replaced by the unknown. In the process, Alexander (20, from Afghanistan) felt that he lost the innocence of childhood:

Alexander, 20: I was 14 when I ran away. When I escaped, I was forced to become an adult. All my childhood memories are from Afghanistan. Sometimes I wonder what that does to me. (20:17)

Terttu, 74: But you process your childhood and the negative, what has been and the positive and what experiences you gained. (20:29)

Alexander, 20: I think, you talk about Sweden and Finland in a relaxed manner. For me it has been more difficult. Sometimes I've felt that I can't be both (#10, 20:43)

Living in exile entails coming to terms with one's losses and building a new coherent identity. This process involves, as Terttu suggests, merging happy memories with the traumatic ones and converting the new situation into a whole. For Alexander, this has been difficult; because he feels that in trying to find a new identity, he must give up his former identity and detach from his past. He does not acknowledge that identity is a process, something which is constantly revised and modified as new experience and knowledge are acquired.<sup>68</sup> Instead, he feels he must choose one – a belief further illustrated on the occasion when he changes his name to Alexander, due to being called names at a school where no one could pronounce his name properly. 'After I changed my name to Alexander, I no longer received questions about where I come from, and how long I have lived in Sweden' (#10, 16:31). A new name helped erase part of himself in the quest to fit in. Yet, he also recognizes that it might not be that easy:

Alexander, 20: I feel, I feel Swedish. After all, I have entered Swedish society and I will live in Sweden; so there is no point in calling me an Afghan. I would say I am Swedish. I would like to become Swedish, to feel Swedish. If Afghanistan had been good to me, it would have catered for me. (#10, 17:58)

Belonging is punctuated by political and personal struggles,<sup>69</sup> as the personal experience of inclusion and exclusion determines when a location transforms itself into a home.<sup>70</sup> Due to Alexander's experience of complete exclusion in his home country, which eventually forced him to flee, and his mixed experience in Sweden where he is only partly included, he is trying to eliminate his otherness to gain full inclusion.

Alexander recognizes that Terttu can navigate between two identities, being Finnish and Swedish; or rather that she is able to choose not to choose. She, on the other hand, has incorporated elements from the past and the present, the homeland, and the host land, and taken on board several histories and cultures that belong to several 'homes' in the formation of a new identity. She enacts an identity that 'lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity',<sup>71</sup> as Stuart Hall puts it. Due to cultural proximity, this process might be easier for Terttu than Alexander. However, Vilém Flusser argues that 'the migrant does not become free by denying his lost home, but by overcoming it'.<sup>72</sup> Instead, freedom lies in 'remaining a stranger.

Different from others'.<sup>73</sup> Migration thus transforms subjectivity, something Ferry acknowledges:

Ferry, 17: We have a little more understanding than everyone else. We have experienced a bit of war. Everyone has a different background, everyone has their difficulties; but experiencing war and having to flee is something else. Your eyes are opened in a different way. You begin to see things from a different angle and perspective. (#1, 22:59)

In fact, Flusser<sup>74</sup> argues that migration is a potentially creative process, whereby the migrant or 'expelled' detangles himself from the habitual home, and as a stranger can unravel what is taken for granted, and see the real order of things. Herein lies the potential for the formation of political subjects to speak the uncomfortable truths. Yet, it is a process, and a key step in that process is remembering:

Berolin, 39: It is very important to remember. For the individual, it is important to remember in order to understand who I am, here and now. My history is a part of me, and I think it is the same for the whole society. A society must remember. If we don't remember what we've done, how are we supposed to know what's right and wrong? We need to know where we came from, to know where we are going. [...] That is why it is so important to remember. It is our compass and GPS. [Laughs] It is our compass and GPS. (#9, 16:41-17:52).

Berolin's reasoning of memory as both internal (personal) and external (social) resonates with Flusser's idea of how the expelled handle information.<sup>75</sup> He argues that to be free is not to forget, but rather to make meaning out of the chaos of information brought along 'and the entire ocean with waves of information that toss around him in exile'.<sup>76</sup> One must allow it to transform them as well as those around them. Having encountered acts of neo-Nazism, several of the Holocaust survivors felt a sense of urgency to speak out – to share their experience and knowledge with the world:

Emerich, 94: For 45 years I have kept quiet about my experiences during World War II. I haven't even told short episodes to my closest friends, but one day when I was walking down the street, I saw a group of young people shouting 'Sieg heil! Sieg heil!' and doing Hitler salutes. I was completely horrified. Primarily because of what I saw and heard; but what touched me the most was that no one reacted. I understood then that it was time to break the silence. (#4, 11:43-12:34)

The bystanders' complicity bothered Emerich. No one intervened to inform the youngsters about the historical context of their actions. He continues, 'a generation without history has no chance of preventing history from repeating itself' (#4, 20:34). As a consequence of this insight, Emerich and other Holocaust survivors tour schools in Sweden to talk about the atrocities of World War II. Due to 'remaining a stranger. Different from others',<sup>77</sup> they are not compliant; rather they become political subjects with the agency to change the future.

### A space of recognition

One can consider the life stories in *Flyktpodden* to be constructed or 'written' in dialogue. Most collaborative autobiographies are produced through dialogue, but the text that emerges out of this dialogue is often monological. When autobiographies are truly co-authored, the collaboration is often stressed in the text.<sup>78</sup> Rocío Davis argues that collaborative autobiographical texts that are constructed around dialogues challenge the autobiographical process as well as claims to self-representation.<sup>79</sup> 'To have one's opinions, perspectives, and stories complemented or challenged by an (ostensibly) equally authoritative voice *within the text itself* stresses the dialogic element, making the relationship, rather than the individual subjectivities, the center of the text'.<sup>80</sup> The dialogic format also promotes reflexivity.<sup>81</sup> This explains the life stories' complex nature in *Flyktpodden*. The dialogic form makes them fragmented; but, most importantly, the participants shape the conditions for their voices and how the stories are constructed and told.

In fact, collaborative autobiographical writing consists of three stories: the stories of the two interlocutors, and the joint one that is written in dialogue.<sup>82</sup> Since the ideal of truly equal interlocutors is rarely realized, it is crucial to reflect on the power relations of this relationship.<sup>83</sup> In the case of *Flyktpodden*, generational aspects may influence the power relations between the two interlocutors, as the older interlocutors of each episode have more experiences and education, but are also more established in Sweden compared to most of the younger dialogue partners. This disparity is partially corrected by the fact that the young interlocutor leads the conversation. Furthermore, the two interlocutors do not represent different standpoints as such, but rather share similar experiences, even though those are from different decades.

According to Bassel, the 'politics of listening'<sup>84</sup> demand interdependence between speakers and listeners. Yet the context and how an event is framed influences the 'politics of listening' and who is recognized as a legitimate speaker. In the podcast, the

conversational partners take turns telling their stories. They also respond to each other's utterances, which is the ultimate stage of listening.<sup>85</sup> By expressing words like 'exactly', 'wow', 'as you said', 'that is wonderful, so nice that you understand', and 'yes, I can imagine', they demonstrate attention, interpretation and understanding, as well as recognition, acknowledgement, and consideration – all of which are elements of 'listening'. They also pose questions to encourage the narrative to develop further, such as 'what happened next?', and 'How was it for you? Did you feel lonely?'

The goal of the 'politics of listening' is to create mutual recognition.<sup>86</sup> Often 'us'-vs.-'them' binaries prevent the creation of a common 'us'. Yet, in the podcast conversations, two parties are discussing something in which they share a common experience. This is further reflected in the quest to create a mutual understanding by focusing on similarities:

Ferry, 17: More than sixty years separate me and Piotr, and the circumstances of our escape were very different. But when we talk, we notice that we still have a lot in common. (#1, 19:41)

Ali, 19: The conversation with Susanna raised many thoughts. Both of us belong to groups that still face persecution. I recognized myself a lot in what she told me. (#2, 26:25)

Sharing stories and seeing how they are entangled reinforce the feeling of how we as humans connect,<sup>87</sup> providing the conditions for recognition and identification.<sup>88</sup> It is a banality to conclude that two people who discuss similar experiences of persecution, escape, and migration can relate, recognize, and identify with each other. However, in this context, it is crucial.

In mainstream media, voices such as Ferry's and Ali's are seldom heard; and when they are, they are often contextualized in a manner that further victimizes and marginalizes them.<sup>89</sup> Since several of the older generation are Holocaust survivors, some of whom are fairly well-known in Sweden, their stories give legitimacy to the younger generation, some of whom still have not secured a residence permit. This occurs because the Migration Board questions their stories' veracity. Against this background, it is far from banal that these voices are endowed with legitimacy and recognition.

One could thus argue that *Flyktpodden* challenges the hierarchy of value and attention.<sup>90</sup> It signals to the intended audience (i.e. those listening to the podcast) that these voices and stories are worthy of recognition. Without a conversational partner,

their voices risk remaining ‘noise in the ether’<sup>91</sup> – i.e., speech that does not meet with any ‘listening’ ear. It would also demand more of the audience to properly listen, due to their inexperience of listening to marginalized voices. They might also experience difficulties creating a common us due to lack of similar experiences. The dialogic format does that job for the listeners.

*Flyktpodden*’s focus on similarities is also crucial in this aspect.<sup>92</sup> In the previous section, this analysis identified family and the loss of a parent as a common theme. The podcast’s audience might be able to relate to this aspect of the stories, as everyone has been a child and can relate to the fear of losing a parent. Fanzingo has also developed educational materials to encourage the use of the podcast in schools when discussing issues of minorities, World War II, and democracy. Inevitably, the young audience might relate more easily to the young persons in the podcast; and through that connection they may also recognize the importance of the older generation’s stories.

### A space to reflect on the past and the present

*Flyktpodden*’s intergenerational format allows it to be more than a mere collection of migration and persecution stories. In fact, the podcast offers an opportunity to see the present through the past. This is especially apparent when the podcast’s participants discuss the situation of the Sami and Romani population; but audiences also see this when reflecting on the rise of far-right politics in Sweden and how the asylum-process has become tougher and more restricted. *Flyktpodden* thus utilizes intergenerational dialogue to comment on present-day Sweden, but to also highlight historical injustices.

In episode 6, we meet Dusan, 22, and Singoalla, 86, both of whom are Romani. Dusan was born in Serbia and fled to Sweden at the age of five; and Singoalla was born in the south of Sweden. In their conversation, Singoalla reveals how the situation was for the Romani population in Sweden during the 1930s and 40s when she grew up:

Singoalla, 86: [...] Yes, but sometimes they came to throw stones at us and wanted to beat us. No one cared that we didn’t go to school. We did not receive child support. We didn’t get food coupons. It was during the war, so there were food coupons, and we didn’t get any because they called us vagrants. We didn’t have an address. We didn’t have a mailbox and then we were maladjusted. (#6, 4:40-5:12)

The Romani population was also persecuted by Nazi Germany during World War II; and when Dusan asks Singoalla how she feels about the rise of the far-right party Sweden Democrats, she responds:

Singoalla, 86: Yes, you get scared. If there's a war now, then they'll take us first. Yes, I think so. As my father said, 'now you run into the forest and hide because they can come at any time'. We were afraid, the older ones, then. And now when they talk on TV about this Jimmie Åkesson and stuff like that and then you get a little scared. Because if he becomes [elected], that racist party, then it is dangerous for gypsies. (#6, 13:48-14:25)

Singoalla clearly sees parallels between the past and the present. She still remembers the persecution of her ethnic group so clearly, leaving her terrified of the current political development in Sweden. The conversation between her and Dusan also highlights how the situation for the Romani population has improved, but also how they are still discriminated against:

Dusan, 22: Much has improved today. The Church has publicly apologized for the way it has treated Romani throughout history. Today we have the right to both education, healthcare and housing and we also have the right to vote, but the prejudices, slurs and antiziganism still exist [...] At the end of the twentieth century, the Swedish state wanted the Romani to abandon their culture and become Swedish. Today, people have changed their minds and want us to keep our culture and our language. Despite this, Romani is the group most exposed to discrimination and xenophobia throughout Europe. The police's Romani register, which became known in autumn 2013, and begging are two of many signs of our situation in Sweden today. (17:40-18:01; 21:25-21:58)

Mainstream media and society at large hardly discuss or acknowledge the historical injustices towards the Romani population in Sweden. Ignorance and denial of the historical injustices explain why prejudices against them persist.<sup>93</sup> Obscuring the connection between the historical injustices and their present-day situation makes it easier to blame the Romani people for their own exclusion,<sup>94</sup> especially when Swedish laws in the twentieth century directly and indirectly discriminated against them.<sup>95</sup> This episode of *Flyktpodden* corrects this narrative, tracking the Swedish state's oppression of the Romani population and how some aspects of it still exist, considering the police has kept secret its enforced registration. The podcast engages

in life writing in a way that illuminates how ‘the past reverberates in the present, how “history” is always “contemporary”’,<sup>96</sup> enabling the audience to see both the past and the present in new light.

Since 2000, the Romani population is one among Sweden’s five recognized minority groups.<sup>97</sup> Another one is the Sami population.<sup>98</sup> In episode 8, we met Irma, 21, who is a Sami; and Josée, 44, who survived the genocide in Rwanda. When talking about their life experiences, they enter into a conversation about racial biology. Irma reflects on the historic and present situation of the Sami population in Sweden:

Irma, 21: In Sweden, unlike in Rwanda, you are one people, says Josée, but to me it does not feel that clear. Many still see Swedes and Sami as different groups. [music] The consequences of racial biology against the Sami are very much alive, I think. You can see it. There have been many examples now in recent years, I think. Like when Björn Söder said that Sami were not Swedes. [...] There is still a lot to be desired regarding how people perceive the Sami. We were also divided into groups; we were short skulls. They also measured us. And when I’m out meeting friends or out in a bar and someone knows I’m Sami, they can say ‘But your cheeks should be higher up, otherwise you don’t look Sami’ and all those ideas come from racial biology. (#8, 17:45-19:14)

Irma regularly experiences prejudices due to being Sami. From here, she highlights the connection to scientific racism that informed the state-sanctioned discrimination against the Sami population in the past. She also mentions how a Sweden Democrat recently announced that he did not consider Sami Swedish. The podcast episode clarifies how political ideas and common prejudices originate from historical injustices – an aspect that Sweden has not completely come to terms with.

Another aspect of the Swedish society on which *Flyktpodden* sheds some light is how, in recent years, the migration process has become more restrictive. In episode 7, Sillvie, 17, from Syria, shares the difficulties she has experienced trying to secure a residence permit in Sweden. She compares her situation to Nalin, 51, who escaped just before the military coup in Turkey in 1980, and who easily attained a residence permit in Sweden:

Sillvie, 17: For me, it was difficult to come to a free country, where it was still not stable for me. Like many others, I have not received a residence permit yet and the Swedish Migration Agency does not seem to believe me. And I need to stay. I am afraid of being sent back to Syria where it is the death penalty if you, like me, are



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homosexual. And I don't want to be sent back to Armenia where I am a citizen, although I have only lived there for a few months and there are no laws to protect me either. Nalin and many who came with her originally had a plan to return, but I don't want to. I don't want to be someone else, I don't want to live anywhere else, because here I am free. (#7, 18:26-19:12)

In episode 5, Tobias, 83, a Holocaust survivor, meets Sara, 19, from Afghanistan, a young woman who has received several rejections on her asylum application. In reaction to her situation, Tobias argues that everyone who needs it should be given the same opportunity that he was given:

Tobias, 83: [...] I have come here because I was persecuted during the Second World War and afterwards in Poland, and I came to have a normal life. I demand nothing else but to be allowed to come here and be respected for the person I am. [...] And that should apply to everyone. It should apply to everyone. (#5, 16:41)

The intergenerational conversations in the podcast suggest how much harder it is to be granted asylum in Sweden today compared to a few decades ago. Nonetheless, the conversations also reveal that people still flee from similar situations. Persecution of minority and marginalized groups has not stopped, neither have wars and genocides. Yet, the requirements for being granted asylum in Sweden have changed. In the case of Sara, the Migration Board questions whether she has legitimate reasons for receiving asylum, despite the current situation in Afghanistan. The conversation between Tobias and Sara underlines the unfairness of her situation, as no one who knows and acknowledges what happened during World War II would question Tobias' need for protection. Again, the intergenerational dialogue manages to draw attention to the similarities of fleeing from war and oppression. As a result, they provide legitimacy to the stories of the younger generation.

The intergenerational character of the podcast and the collection of stories about oppression also manage to demonstrate that these human rights violations from which people are fleeing also exist (or used to exist) in Sweden. The podcast facilitates a platform for counter-narratives of the historic and present-day situation for marginalized groups in Sweden. Taken as a whole, these narratives suggest that Sweden might not be the humanitarian superpower it wants to portray itself as.

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## Conclusion

In *Flyktpodden*, migrants, refugees, and minorities are allowed to tell their life stories on their own terms and in their own voices. The stories that emerge are complex and made heterogeneous by bringing together elements of trauma, aspiration, agency, and vulnerability. These aspects enable the narratives to reject and break free from the pre-established narrative positioning of refugees as vulnerable and passive.<sup>99</sup> The podcast offers migrants and minorities an avenue for the formation of political subjects who speak out against injustices<sup>100</sup> and uncomfortable truths.<sup>101</sup>

The intergenerational format allows for historical comparisons and commentary on present-day Sweden, but also enables its participants to underline historical injustices. The life stories highlight that the human rights violations that cause people to flee have also long existed in Sweden, even though they are rarely acknowledged.<sup>102</sup> Through intergenerational dialogues, the podcast makes apparent how present-day political ideas and common prejudices originate from historical injustices, and how the past and the present are connected.<sup>103</sup> The podcast challenges this silence<sup>104</sup> and allows marginalized groups to formulate counter-narratives<sup>105</sup> on the historic and present-day situation in Sweden.

One can consider the life stories in *Flyktpodden* to be constructed or 'written' in dialogue. The dialogic format makes the relation between the two interlocutors central;<sup>106</sup> and, in the case of *Flyktpodden*, it is two people with similar experiences yet from different times – a dynamic that encourages reflexivity.<sup>107</sup> Thus, the context and the way the conversations are framed<sup>108</sup> are based on mutual recognition and a co-constructed 'us'. This system shapes not only the conditions for 'voice', but also the stories which emerge, and how they are received. In the podcast, the opportunities for speaking and being heard are equal<sup>109</sup> among those participating. Their voices are allowed to matter<sup>110</sup> and be made 'meaningful'.<sup>111</sup> These characteristics communicate to the intended audiences that these voices and stories are worthy of recognition. The dialogic format is thus crucial; as without it, their voices risk remaining 'noise[s] in the ether' – i.e., speech without listening.<sup>112</sup> It helps audiences to listen to unfamiliar marginalized voices. The focus on similarities in the life stories in the podcast also reinforces the universality of human experiences. As a result, they illustrate how we are connected to each other, thereby providing the conditions for identification and recognition.<sup>113</sup> Thus, the podcast challenges the hierarchy of value and attention.<sup>114</sup>

Faningo has developed teaching material for the podcast to be used in schools in Sweden and thus broadens the scope of listening. Several of the Holocaust survivors have actively toured schools to talk about World War II and the Holocaust, ensuring

that the younger generation are informed about the atrocities. In the podcast, they tell and share their experiences with young people who have similar but more recent experiences of war, genocide, and persecution. The younger refugees' stories and those of the members of minority groups dramatize the relevance of the stories of the older generation. In turn, they provide historical context to, and strengthen, the legitimacy of the younger interlocutors' life stories. Several of the young refugees witness the recent difficulties of acquiring asylum in Sweden, as the Migration Board does not find their life stories credible. *Flyktpodden*, however, provides a space of recognition whereby the stories are given legitimacy. When used as teaching material, the podcast can help a new generation understand how the present and the past is intertwined<sup>115</sup> and the importance of historical knowledge to create a better future. Finally, the podcast offers an eclectic collection of life stories and testimonies of migration, oppression, war, and genocide that will live beyond the people who produced them. Several of the Holocaust survivors are getting very old, and one has died; but their stories are now documented for others to hear, even when they are no longer with us.

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### Acknowledgements

This work has been supported by the research project 'Post-Migrant Voices in the Baltic Sea Region', diary number 3786-3.1.1-2020, financed by the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies (Östersjöstiftelsen).

### Notes

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- <sup>11</sup> The first step was to identify common content-based themes in the transcripts of the episodes. These were later grouped into three conceptual themes: 'a space of multifaceted and complex life stories', 'a space of recognition', and 'a space to reflect on the past and the present'.
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- <sup>43</sup> Ibidem; cf. Gustafsson, 2012.
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- <sup>53</sup> Bassel, 2017, 7–9, 38, 72.
- <sup>54</sup> Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017, 4.
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- <sup>56</sup> Idem, 11.
- <sup>57</sup> Idem, 17.
- <sup>58</sup> Idem, 47.
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- <sup>65</sup> Cf. Georgiou, 2017.
- <sup>66</sup> All quotes are transcribed and translated by the author of the article and kept as close to the original as possible.
- <sup>67</sup> Brah, Avtar, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, London: Routledge, 1996, 192.
- <sup>68</sup> Cf. Woodward, Kath, *Identity and Difference*, London: Sage, 1997.
- <sup>69</sup> Brah, 1996, 194.
- <sup>70</sup> Fazal, Shehina, and Roza Tsagarousianou, 'Diasporic Communication: Transnational Cultural Practices and Communicative Spaces', in: *Javnost – The Public* 9:1 (2002) 5–18.
- <sup>71</sup> Hall, Stuart, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in: Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, Chadwell Heath: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, 235.



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- <sup>72</sup> Flusser, Vilém, 'Taking Up Residence in Homelessness', in: Andreas Ströhl (ed.), *Writings*, trans. Erik Eisel, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, 95.
- <sup>73</sup> Flusser, Vilém, 'Exile and Creativity', in: Andreas Ströhl, (ed.), *Writings*, trans. Erik Eisel, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, 108.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>75</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>76</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>78</sup> Cf. Couser, Thomas, 'Collaborative Autobiography', in: Margaretta Jolly (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms*, London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001, 222-223.
- <sup>79</sup> Davis, Rocío, 'Dialogic Selves: Discursive Strategies in Transcultural Collaborative Autobiographies by Rita and Jackie Huggins and Mark and Gail Mathabane', in: *Biography* 28:2 (2005) 276-294, 276.
- <sup>80</sup> Idem, 279.
- <sup>81</sup> Idem, 289.
- <sup>82</sup> Idem, 278.
- <sup>83</sup> Cf. Couser, 2001; Davis, 2005.
- <sup>84</sup> Bassel, 2017, 7, 38.
- <sup>85</sup> Macnamara, 2013, 163.
- <sup>86</sup> Bassel, 2017, 8.
- <sup>87</sup> Idem, 9.
- <sup>88</sup> Silverstone, 2006, 17.
- <sup>89</sup> Cf. Georgiou, 2017; Malkki, 1996.
- <sup>90</sup> Dreher, 2009, 159; Tacchi, 2012, 232.
- <sup>91</sup> Lacey, 2013, 166.
- <sup>92</sup> Silverstone, 2006, 17.
- <sup>93</sup> Delegationen för romska frågor, 'Romers rätt - en strategi för romer i Sverige', in: *SOU* 55 (2010) 1-582, 512-514.
- <sup>94</sup> Idem, 535.
- <sup>95</sup> Idem, 513.
- <sup>96</sup> McCooey, David, 'The Limits of Life Writing', in: *Life Writing* 14:3 (2017), 280.
- <sup>97</sup> These are Tornedalers, Sweden Finns, Jewish, Sami, and Romani people.
- <sup>98</sup> Delegationen för romska frågor, 2010, 516.
- <sup>99</sup> Bassel, 2017, 26; cf. Georgiou, 2017.
- <sup>100</sup> Cf. Georgiou, 2017.
- <sup>101</sup> Flusser, 2002, 'Exile and Creativity', 108.
- <sup>102</sup> Delegationen för romska frågor, 2010, 512-514.
- <sup>103</sup> McCooey, 2017, 280.
- <sup>104</sup> Cf. Tran, 2019.
- <sup>105</sup> Vrikki and Malik, 2019, 276, 280.
- <sup>106</sup> Davis, 2005, 279.
- <sup>107</sup> Idem, 289.
- <sup>108</sup> Bassel, 2017, 38.
- <sup>109</sup> Dreher, 2009, 446.
- <sup>110</sup> Cf. Couldry, 2010; Macnamara, 2013.
- <sup>111</sup> Dreher, 2012, 2; Macnamara, 2013, 171.
- <sup>112</sup> Lacey, 2013, 166.
- <sup>113</sup> Silverstone, 2006, 17; Bassel, 2017, 9, 72.
- <sup>114</sup> Dreher, 2009, 159, Tacchi, 2012, 232.
- <sup>115</sup> McCooey, 2017, 280.