

Article – Theme section

## Podcasting mundane practices of solidarity and resistance in post-migrant Sweden

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### **Abstract**

*Sweden is a post-migrant society where the suburbs of the largest cities in Sweden have become the symbol of failed integration in public debate and media. To broaden the representation, young people from the suburbs use podcasting to challenge and present their own perspectives. Based on content analysis and interviews with selected podcasters, this article explores how they position themselves in relation to mainstream media and society by focusing on their distinct media practices. The study suggests that these podcasts can be perceived as sites of cultural production where the articulation of mundane practices of solidarity and resistances are central. This is illustrated in the content and the guests that are invited and reflected in how the podcasters articulate their aims and goals, as well as how they position themselves in relation to other actors and spheres.*

### **Keywords**

*solidarity; racialised suburbs; polarisation; podcasting; post-migrant media*

## Introduction

Sweden is nowadays a post-migrant society (Foroutan, 2015). By 2023, 20.6% of the Swedish population was born abroad (SCB, 2024a), and 27% had foreign origin, i.e., having both parents born outside Sweden (SCB, 2024b). Due to the so-called migration crisis in 2015 and increased instability in other parts of the world, the immigrant population in Sweden has rapidly increased recently, but so has the anti-immigrant sentiment among the population. In the last two elections, the anti-immigration party Sweden Democrats has gained popularity. Presently, they are collaborating with the government on key political issues, immigration being one of them (Tidöavtalet, 2022). Consequently, the public discourse on immigration and related topics have become much harsher.

In the public debate, the suburbs of the largest cities in Sweden have become emblematic of unsuccessful integration efforts (Ekman & Krzyżanowski, 2021; Sernhede et al., 2019). These areas have a high immigrant population and are considered to have significant socio-economic issues. In the international media, these areas are frequently referred to as “no-go zones” (Milani, 2020). When these social issues are discussed in the Swedish mainstream media, they are labelled “suburb problems”. This suggests that they are not perceived as societal problems that concern all members of society, as if they do not belong to the nation of Sweden (Sernhede et al., 2019, p. 10, 17). It can thus be argued that these areas are racialised and othered, in a similar manner to the majority of the population residing therein (Molina, 1997). This is evident from the recent public discourse on criminal gangs and shootings. Consequently, Sweden is presently a nation that is characterised by polarisation and division.

The field of research on media, migration, and ethnic diversity is a relatively marginalised area within the broader domain of Swedish media research (Graf, 2021, p. 109). Most research in this field concentrates on the content of traditional mainstream media and their portrayal of immigration and immigrants. The research demonstrates how immigrants are othered and mainly depicted as problems and threats (Brune, 2004; Hultén, 2009; Nohrstedt & Camauër, 2006). Furthermore, studies have shown that there is a lack of journalists with immigrant backgrounds in traditional mainstream media, and those who do exist often have fewer opportunities for advancement (Camauër, 2006), despite several mainstream media houses having policies to enhance diversity (Hultén, 2011). Furthermore, editorial offices that are dedicated to issues related to diversity and integration receive fewer resources and are often marginalised (Camauër, 2006) and short-lived (Hultén, 2009).

The number of studies analysing minority or immigrant media is limited (Graf, 2021, p. 114). The most significant contribution to this field is a study conducted in 2005, which aimed to map and comprehend the production and institutional conditions of minority media in Sweden, encompassing print, television, radio, and online news outlets. The study concluded that most minority media were established by organisations that relied on voluntary contributions due to a lack of financial resources (Camauër, 2005).

The contemporary media environment, in which social media platforms are assuming an ever more significant role, has transformed the dynamics and public discourse on immigration (Ekman, 2019; Horsti, 2015). Far-right and immigration-critical groups have effectively utilised the affordances of the Internet and social media to enhance their visibility in the public. They label themselves alternative media, using this space to incite hate and promote anti-democratic attitudes (Ekman, 2019). A study of editorials in two Swedish newspapers reveals that the anti-immigrant sentiment prevalent on social media has entered mainstream media, resulting in a more hostile discourse on immigration (Ekman & Krzyżanowski, 2021). Similarly, Horsti (2015, p. 366) posits that “the anti-immigration movement and ‘uncivil’ public spheres are not distinct from traditional politics and the mainstream media”.

Notwithstanding the expansion of opportunities for immigrants and their descendants to produce their own media, these types of media outlets have been largely overlooked by media scholars in Sweden (Graf, 2021, p. 115). The objective of this article is to address this gap in the literature by examining the media practices of two podcasts from the racialised suburbs of Stockholm.

The popularity of podcasting has grown significantly since its inception in 2004. Due to low technological and financial barriers, and not being subjected to the same regulations as traditional broadcast media, producers can develop podcasts independently of mainstream media. Podcasting therefore offers an opportunity to “do radio on their own terms—free from industry and/or legal restrictions” (Markman, 2011, p. 555). Consequently, podcasting “provides unique opportunities for shifting how, who, and what we hear, and when” (Rae et al., 2019, p. 1039). In their study of BAME (Black, Asian, and minority ethnic) podcasters in the UK, Photini Vrikki & Sarita Malik (2019) conclude that podcasters “can explore issues that interest or concern them” (p. 285) “to tell stories emanating from routinely marginalised lived experiences” (p. 274).

In a study published in 2022, the sociologists Sara Uhnöo and Ove Sernhede (2022) examine the evolution of the podcast landscape in the suburbs of Sweden. They trace its origins to the pioneering work *Menåge a Tugg* from 2009. In 2018, several podcasts started and a more established podcast scene emerged. In their study, the researchers analyse the content of four podcasts and situate them as part of a wider movement demanding social justice. The article emphasises the podcasts’ potential contribution to contemporary non-degree further education and as an emerging counter-public, providing spaces where young people from these areas can develop counter-narratives (Uhnöo & Sernhede, 2022).

This article builds on previous research by focusing on two podcasts, *Galdem a Talk* and *Edu Orten*, which are identified as part of the emerging counter-public in the suburbs of Sweden (Uhnöo & Sernhede, 2022). Moreover, based on their own descriptions, these two podcasts seem to adhere to traditional ideals of community media. Consequently, an investigation of their media practices and their positioning in relation to traditional

mainstream media is warranted. This article addresses the following questions based on interviews and content analysis: What are the podcasters' aims and visions, and how do these manifest in their media practices? How do they position themselves in relation to the local society and society at large, including mainstream media?

The aim of this article is to enhance our understanding of the dynamics of the current Swedish media landscape in relation to immigration-related issues by examining an under-researched media segment. To this end, theories of post-migrant societies (Foroutan, 2019), community media (Carpentier et al., 2003), post-migrant media (Ratkovic, 2019), voice (Couldry, 2010), and participation (Carpentier, 2011) will be employed. Furthermore, this study will assist in elucidating the function of the media in periods of crisis. This is particularly pertinent given the rising polarisation in post-migrant Sweden and the fact that a significant proportion of the population is discursively othered in and excluded from the public debate.

## Post-migrant societies

The concept of post-migrant societies emerged in Germany as a critique of methodological nationalism (Çağlar, 2016, p. 2). It urges scholars interested in migration to "take migration as its perspective rather than its subject" (Römhild, 2017, p. 73). The rationale behind this is that countries like Sweden are nowadays countries of immigration – post-migrant societies – where migration has affected all aspects of society. The pre-fix post does not, therefore, indicate that we put migration behind us, but rather that migration is the new normal. These societal changes involve everyone, no matter their stance towards migration itself (Foroutan, 2015).

Post-migrants refer to individuals who have not migrated themselves but who are still structurally categorised as migrants or foreigners in public discourses (Jacobs, 2022, p. 1; Yildiz & Hill, 2017, p. 277) even if they have citizenship and identify as Swedish (Bacia, 2019, p. 29). The concept aims to break with the idea of second and third generations of immigrants but at the same time acknowledge that the migration history still could bear traces on their subjectivities and practices (Çağlar, 2016, pp. 3–4).

Post-migrant societies are characterised by conflict between those who embrace diversity and those who fight it (Foroutan, 2019, p. 153). It is, therefore, a framework to understand conflicts, identity constructions, and social and political transformations that emerge when migrants and their descendants struggle to be recognised as equal stakeholders in society (Foroutan, 2019, p. 150). It points to deeper-rooted conflicts over power and resources that arise when the subaltern starts to talk and demand justice (Foroutan, 2019, p. 152). When post-migrants call for greater representation in all areas of society, they challenge the privileged positions of the majority, which activate and reinforce anti-diversity sentiments that perceive migration as the main problem in society (Foroutan, 2019, p. 156). Post-migrant societies are therefore "defined by tension-ridden processes

where forms of (forced) togetherness are negotiated on different social and political levels” (Kruse et al., 2019, p. xvi).

In diverse societies, “people of different origin and trajectories have become increasingly entangled through personal, professional and social ties” (Foroutan, 2019, pp. 157–158). These connections can produce a “new kind of knowledge, empathy and attitudes” – post-migrant alliances that transcend ethnic subject positions and form around shared attitudes, neighbourhood, and opportunities (Foroutan, 2019, p. 158). These alliances are powerful tools to fight discriminatory structures (Foroutan 2019, p. 158) and “shaping desirable convivial futures” (Stehling et al., 2019, p. 13).

### *Sweden as a post-migrant society*

As noted above, post-migrant societies are often conflict-ridden societies. In recent years, the immigrant population in Sweden has increased, but so have anti-immigrant sentiments among the population, and the public discourse on immigration has become much harsher (Ekman & Krzyżanowski, 2021; Sernhede et al., 2019). A discourse on order, which blames all social problems on migrants and immigration, is often the result when right-wing politics enter the parliament. Curbing immigration is argued to be the only way to restore order and social harmony (Foroutan, 2019, p. 161).

The ethnically diverse suburbs of Sweden’s largest cities have become symbols of failed integration in the public debate (Sernhede et al., 2019). Yet, scholars underline that it is the state and society that have failed these areas. Consequently, it is not the suburbs in Stockholm that are segregated, it is Stockholm itself that has become increasingly segregated due to inequalities fuelled by neo-liberalism (Sernhede et al., 2019, p. 54). Sweden is the country where inequalities rose most rapidly between 1985 and early 2010s (OECD, 2015).

The current debate about criminal gangs and street violence has further hardened the tone of the debate about suburbs and the people who live there and increased support for the militarisation of suburbs (Sernhede et al., 2019, pp. 16–17). Politicians have, for example, proposed depriving an entire family of citizenship if their children are involved in serious crime (SVT, 2022). In addition, Sweden is in the process of introducing visitation zones to combat crime by giving the police the power to search people in certain areas without reasonable suspicion of a crime. Critics point out that this can be used in a discriminatory way (Civil Rights Defenders, 2023).

The Swedish mainstream media tend to group these neighbourhoods together to contrast them with affluent areas, thus portraying ethnic minorities as the problem. The most common themes in media coverage are hopelessness, violence, un-Swedishness, terror, and Islamophobia (Backvall, 2019, pp. 23–24). These dominant discourses that stigmatise the suburbs have real consequences for those who live there (Dahlstedt, 2017, p. 343). It can be understood as a form of place-ism, where the status of a place is the basis for prejudice and mistreatment of people associated with that place (Sernhede et

al., 2019, p. 85). As a result, many young people from these areas explicitly state that their suburb is their safe space, free from society's condemning perceptions (Dahlstedt, 2017, p. 344).

To challenge these perceptions, the para-national identity construction "Orten" (an abbreviation of the Swedish word "förorten", which means suburb) has emerged and is used by young people in these areas to emphasise shared experiences and togetherness (Sernhede et al., 2019, p. 11). However, the term has increasingly been adopted in a derogatory way by people outside these areas (Valizadeh, 2023, p. 22).

## Community and post-migrant media

There are numerous labels (ethnic media, minority media, citizen media, diasporic media, or community media) that groups marginalised by the mainstream media can use to claim the right to participate in the public sphere with media. The myriad of concepts reflects the great diversity of these types of media, and in order to analyse and understand them properly, Nico Carpentier, Rico Lie, and Jan Servaes (2003) propose a multidimensional theory consisting of four approaches to capture the identities, goals, and practices of community media. Media practices here refer "to what people are doing in relation to media in the contexts in which they act" (Couldry, 2012, p. 35). These four approaches are not mutually exclusive and are best combined to fully capture the complexity of community media.

The first approach, media serving the community, emphasises the close relationship with the community and how they promote community involvement and participation by giving ordinary people the opportunity to have a voice and control the distribution of their own ideologies and representations (Carpentier et al., 2003). Nick Couldry distinguishes two levels of voice: voice as process and voice as value. Voice as a process refers to the process of giving an account of one's life (Couldry, 2010, p. 7), while voice as a value "refer[s] to the act of valuing, and choosing to value, those frameworks for organizing human life and resources that themselves value voice (as a process)" (Couldry, 2010, p. 2). According to Couldry, voice is the value that motivates the production of different kinds of alternative media, which must also include, at least to some extent, the possibility of being listened to (Couldry, 2015).

The second approach, alternative to mainstream media, focuses on the characteristics that distinguish community media from mainstream media, whether it is the provision of counter-hegemonic narratives and perspectives or the way they are organised and operate (Carpentier et al., 2003). The former often means being guided by different criteria for news and content selection and resisting or reversing dominant discourses or representations by expressing alternative versions of hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives. The latter includes horizontal organising to facilitate access and full participation by non-

professionals or ordinary people and rejecting funding from advertising and institutional grants.

The third approach links community media to civil society and sees community media as part of civil society because of their independence from the state and the market (Carpentier et al., 2003, p. 58). Similarly, Ellie Rennie (2006) suggests that community media should be perceived as “means to the maintenance and extension of civil society by civil society itself” (Rennie, 2006, p. 36).

The fourth approach, community media as rhizome media, emphasises how community media can act as a crossroads for civil society groups, cutting across and connecting pre-existing groups within civil society to strengthen networks (Bailey et al., 2008). Finally, it also highlights that the relationship between community media and other institutions in society (state, market, mainstream media) may not be as antagonistic as often assumed (Carpentier et al., 2003).

## Participation and collaboration

Participation is central to these types of media. Carpentier (2011) introduced the AIP (Access, Interaction, Participation) model to develop the concept of participation and make it more analytically useful. He argues that the concept is overused by including audience activities such as watching TV and going online, which obscures the fact that power is a key feature of participation. The AIP model therefore distinguishes between access, interaction, and participation, but also links them together, as access and interaction are conditions that make participation possible. First, access “articulated as presence” (Carpentier, 2011, p. 28) refers to access to media technologies, content, and the ability to access media feedback discussions as well as presence within media organisations, offering the opportunity for people to get their voice heard. Second, interaction focuses on the socio-communicative relationships that are established within the media sphere. It can include various forms of interaction between audiences, but also between audiences and the media. Participation, which is strongly linked to power, refers to decision-making processes in media companies, both regarding media content and media policy.

Miriam Stehling, Tanja Thomas, and Merle-Marie Kruse (2019) underline that access, interaction, and participation, must be understood “as an outcome of structural as well as cultural dimensions of patriarchal, neoliberal, and post-colonial social order and knowledge production” (Stehling et al., 2019, p. 11). They suggest that collaboration should be added to Carpentier’s AIP model, as diversity can only be fully achieved when a variety of voices are heard and different people work together. Collaboration is seen as a form of teamwork that transforms all individuals involved, who also embrace this transformation (Stehling et al., 2019, pp. 11–12). Furthermore, they argue that participation in a post-migrant society needs to be realised in terms of collaborative spaces of encounter, where

people with different backgrounds come together based on their mutual interest “of shaping desirable convivial futures” (Stehling et al., 2019, p. 13).

Victoija Ratkovic (2019) uses the term post-migrant media, which, like community and ethnic media, challenges media power by making it visible and actively works to include marginalised groups in media production. Furthermore, post-migrant media offer “alternative representations of everyday life in heterogeneous societies” (Ratkovic, 2019, p. 147). However, unlike ethnic minority media, the producers are not members of one ethnic community. Many may be post-migrants, but people without a migrant background “who have adopted a post-migrant perspective” are also often involved (Ratkovic, 2019, p. 147). In this sense, post-migrant media could be understood as arenas where collaboration between different groups with similar views on diversity can be facilitated.

## Material and method

This article focuses on two podcasts: *Galdem a Talk* and *Edu Orten*. *Galdem a Talk* is a podcast run by three young Black women from the racialised suburb of Husby in Stockholm. In addition to hosting the podcast, they run an organisation for local youth and organise a podcast festival exclusively for podcasts from racialised suburbs. In November 2023, they also hosted their first talk show, *Galdem a Talkshow* in Folkets Hus Husby. By March 2023, they had produced 105 episodes. *Edu Orten* was founded 2018 by a young Black Muslim woman in the racialised suburb of Bredäng in Stockholm. She also organises workshops and has set up a youth leisure centre with an educational focus. By March 2023, *Edu Orten* had produced 48 episodes.

These podcasts are available on several platforms (SoundCloud, Apple Podcasts, and Spotify), making it difficult to estimate the exact number of listeners. *Galdem a Talk* states that most episodes have around 600 streams on SoundCloud alone, and some between 1,000 and 2,000. *Edu Orten* estimates that the podcast has around 1,000 loyal listeners across all platforms. Both podcasts are mainly listened to in Sweden, which is partly explained by the fact that they are broadcast in Swedish. Therefore, all excerpts from the podcasts and interviews have been translated into English by the author of this article.

Based on the descriptions of the podcast episodes, 14 episodes of each podcast that focused on issues relevant to post-migrant societies were selected. These included episodes that focused on the suburbs, critiques of media representations, racism, and other forms of inequality, as well as some that discussed popular culture. In addition, episodes were included that dealt with the development of the podcasts or Question and Answer episodes, where the podcasters answer questions from the audience. Episodes that focused on topics such as friendship, education, and mental health were not included. 14 episodes were deemed appropriate to illustrate the characteristics and diversity of the podcasts. A qualitative content analysis was carried out on selected episodes, looking at



themes, perspectives, us/them constructions, voices (present and absent), and the construction of the relationship with mainstream media.

In the spring of 2023, interviews were conducted with the podcasters. The semi-structured interviews focused on their aims, visions, media practices, and their relationship with the community, civil society, mainstream media, and society at large. Prior to the interviews, I listened to several episodes of the podcasts, but the structured analysis was conducted afterwards and informed by the interviews. The combination of content analysis and interviews provides a richer understanding of how the podcasters work to achieve their goals and how they position themselves in relation to society, including the mainstream media, by considering not only what they say they do, but also how this is visible in the content.

### **Podcasting mundane practices of resistance and solidarity**

*Galdem a Talk* and *Edu Orten* are strongly embedded in the racialised suburbs. *Edu Orten* even has the slogan “for us by us”, emphasising its mission to serve the community, while *Galdem a Talk* aims to broaden representation by offering an alternative to mainstream media. The aims and identities of the podcasts thus strongly echo traditional community media ideals (Carpentier et al., 2003), suggesting that they are using a new media format – podcasting – to fulfil community media functions. The following analysis explores in more detail the media practices that the podcasts use to achieve their goals and position themselves in relation to mainstream media and society.

#### ***React, reverse, and resist!***

Although the podcasts are not primarily platforms for explicit discussions of the media, the mainstream media and its portrayal of the suburbs and the people who live in them is a recurring theme. In episode 78 of *Galdem a Talk*, the Swedish comedy show *Parlamentet* (TV4) sparks debate and anger. In a sequence in which the comedy show discusses the ongoing gang violence in Sweden, a famous comedian begins to sing a classic children’s song with new lyrics that comment on the current situation. The podcasters argue that the lyrics mock and make fun of the killing of young people, which triggers a discussion about media representation, (lack of) media diversity, and polarisation in Sweden.

The podcasters perceive the song as a symbol of the deep-rooted divide in Swedish society between the majority society (Swedes) and people in the suburbs (non-Swedes): “For them it is fun, because it is not the Swedes”, “we are not worth anything in their eyes”. They also underline that most people in the suburbs know someone who has been killed, because it is “people’s children who die, people’s siblings, people’s cousins, people’s friends”. So it affects everyone in the suburb. As a result, the podcasters feel that people from the suburbs are not part of the Swedish “we”, but are othered and “dehumanised”. Research has highlighted how the public debate in Sweden has become increasingly

polarised, positioning the suburbs as if they do not belong to Sweden (Backvall, 2019, pp. 23–24; Sernhede et al., 2019, p. 10, 17) by racialising (Molina, 1997) these areas and the people who live there. The podcasters argue that the nursery rhyme reinforces this phenomenon, as it is no longer subtle and disguised, or as they put it: “They never had the guts to make fun of our pain, but now, wow, they are doing it on national television”.

The nursery rhyme is seen as part of, and an escalation of, the normalisation of the dehumanisation and othering of people from the suburbs by making fun of people being killed – on national television. The podcasters link this development to a lack of internal representation in mainstream media, which they argue results in a lack of gatekeepers to prevent inappropriate content from being broadcast.

This example illustrates several points: First, by reacting to the stereotypical and otherising media content, they are speaking out against the media, but also reversing the perspective. In their podcast, people in the suburbs are “us” and the majority become “them”. The “us versus them” dichotomy is thus present but reversed in order to resist the negative portrayal of people in the suburbs. By reversing the perspective and presenting their point of view, they resist the representation by showing that it is inappropriate and flawed. The critique is thus multidimensional. It highlights shortcomings in the content and perspectives of the mainstream media, but also shortcomings at an organisational level, suggesting that more radical measures are needed to bring about change. Research has shown that diversity in Sweden is not reflected in the journalistic workforce (Hultén, 2016, p. 338; Camauër, 2006), although several media houses have policy documents to increase diversity (Hultén, 2011, p. 97).

Episode 52 of *Galdem a Talk* discusses a famous TV personality who, in her own podcast, portrays young women from Husby in a derogatory way. Again, the mainstream media is accused of adopting the classic “us versus them” dichotomy, portraying people from the suburbs (non-Swedish) as rude and loud, contrasted with collected and well-behaved people from the inner city (Swedish).

The criticism here is that famous people use their platforms uncritically to reinforce and strengthen the negative image of the suburbs and the people who live there. The podcast episode deals not only with the misrepresentation and stigmatisation of the suburbs, but also with the inability of white people to take responsibility for their racist actions or slurs when called out and criticised. In this case, the TV personality later excused her actions by saying it was humour or irony. The *Galdem a Talk* podcasters stress that by focusing on how it was received, she did not properly acknowledge her mistake or apologise. Furthermore, by expressing that she is hurt and offended because she feels misinterpreted, she demonstrates a twisted contradiction: “You are allowed to be offended by being called a racist, but I am not allowed to be offended by being subjected to racism” (*Galdem a Talk* #52). By discussing these media representations, the podcasters are resisting these images by speaking out and back to the mainstream media.

The interviews with the podcasters revealed that the antagonistic relationship with the mainstream media is not only based on the podcasters' readings of the mainstream media but is also based on personal interactions (Carpentier, 2011) with the mainstream media. The girls from *Galdem a Talk* were interviewed by one of Sweden's largest newspapers in 2018, and they were told that the interview would focus on their podcast. However, during the interview, the questions changed character and the focus shifted to insecurity and crime in Husby. After the article was published, many TV stations contacted *Galdem a Talk*, but since then they have been reluctant to participate in mainstream media:

We know that the only thing they will ask us about is crime, and safety [...] we have learnt from this article that we are not going to say yes to something that we know will not benefit us and we know we cannot support. Because we have nothing to do with criminality [...] of course we can talk about it, but we will not do it on TV. We will do it in our podcast or in our room, yeah on our terms. (Interview, Nada, *Galdem a Talk*)

*Edu Orten* has similar experience with established media. She was part of the reference group for a documentary series on gang violence at SVT. The TV production said that it would break with the dominant narrative, but in the end it did not, in her opinion, so she refused to be part of the final production because she "did not want to appear in it or put my name on it. Because I also value my work and what I have built" (Interview, Jasmin, *Edu Orten*).

In these cases, the podcasters have gained access to mainstream media, but not full participation, as they have no influence on editorial decisions (Carpentier, 2011). As a result, they feel that the mainstream media is trying to force them into the dominant narrative by asking them to comment on crime and gang violence simply because of where they live. Thus, they express that they are subject to place-ism (Sernhede et al., 2019, p. 85). This shows that the mainstream media focuses too narrowly on these issues when reporting on the suburbs. Popular culture and TV series also reproduce this narrative:

95% of series about the suburbs deal with some kind of criminality or misery. There is never anything about the positive aspects of living here. And that is where we want to come in and fill that void. But we have realised that what we fill it with is apparently not interesting enough according to the big media companies. It is a shame, but it is what it is. (Interview, Sara, *Galdem a Talk*)

When *Galdem a Talk* made it clear that they were not interested in conforming and contributing to the dominant narrative, the mainstream media lost interest in them. When asked under what conditions their attitude towards the mainstream media would change, they say:

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If we see that the rest of the journalism is broad and inclusive and has that understanding and respect, then I believe that we, or you would be willing to. And then I also think it depends how you are treated before, during, and after the interview or the participation. And that your opinions and thoughts are properly heard. (Interview, Fatuma, *Galdem a Talk*)

This interview extract encapsulates important features of the mainstream media that need to change. Media representation needs to become more diverse and respectful, both in terms of how people and places are represented, and how people who participate in the media are treated and listened to. This clearly shows that not all participation is necessarily constructive for marginalised groups or ultimately does not qualify as participation, as power relations remain unequal (Carpentier, 2011). Furthermore, minority voices are often contextualised in a way that renders them insignificant and used to reinforce the dominant narrative (Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou, 2016).

In other words, it is both the representations and the practices of media that need to change for media to become more diverse and inclusive. *Edu Orten* takes this criticism further:

When society recognises the structural problems and really wants to work on them. Or rather, when Sweden wants to do it, then I think a lot will change [...] I think the US and England are very good examples, where you recognise structures and where you just say, OK, what are we going to do about it? In Sweden we are not there yet (Interview, Jasmin, *Edu Orten*)

The failure to acknowledge the structural racism that permeates Swedish society prevents Sweden from becoming a society where everyone has equal opportunities, the conditions necessary for her to feel comfortable participating in established media.

They are, in the meantime, very reluctant to participate in the mainstream media unless the conditions are clearly stated in advance. *Galdem a Talk*, for example, were guests on *Din Gata* (P3), a radio show dedicated to the hip-hop scene, to talk about the podcast festival they were organising:

There is another narrative and a clear theme for the conversation. You cannot go left when you talk about the podcast festival because it is so clear what the conversation should focus on. (Interview, Sara, *Galdem a Talk*)

Participation in the radio show was conceived differently because it was not part of the dominant narrative, probably because it was embedded in street culture, but also because the topic of the conversation was clearly defined in advance. The podcasters also have positive experiences and perceptions of the local newspapers *Mitt I* and *Nyhetsbyrån Järva*:

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Respect as well! Yes, I think that when you are constantly seen as something bad, our home is bad, immigration is bad, and Muslims are bad. Everything about our existence is bad, you start to feel that you are bad. You read about it all the time and you are always asked where you come from, why you have a certain religion, and you speak the way you do. To have media such as *Nyhetsbyrån Järva* that doesn't even mention any of that, that's really nice. And I don't read any other newspaper apart from *Nyhetsbyrån Järva* and *Mitt i, Mitt i Järva* and *Mitt i Kista*, because I don't feel that I have a need to read about how bad things are all the time and how bad we are. (Interview, Nada, *Galdem A Talk*)

The quote above illustrates the emotional pain that mainstream media representation contributes to (Dahlstedt, 2017, p. 343), which is why the podcasters turn to local media. Even if they are commercial media, local media have a different starting point for their reporting due to their local embeddedness, and therefore the prevalence of place-ism (Sernhede et al., 2019, p. 85) is low. This is also reflected in the number of articles in the local media reporting on these two podcasts. It can therefore be argued that they have developed strategies to control the narrative they want to be part of and contribute to, by rejecting mainstream media unless the terms and conditions are clearly defined, and by collaborating with media they trust and that share their interests and perspectives.

### ***Creating alternatives and forging alliances of solidarity***

Rather than waiting for mainstream media to change, these podcasters have created their own spaces where they control the narrative by setting the terms and conditions – in other words, in a do-it-yourself but also do-it-your-own way (Rennie, 2006, p. 186). The girls behind *Galdem a Talk* started the podcast because they saw a need for wider and more diverse representation:

We felt that there was no representation of girls from the suburbs, Black girls, Muslim girls, and just generally people who look like us. [...] So ok but let's create a room for ourselves and at the same time lift girls in the suburb. (Interview, Nada, *Galdem a Talk*)

The topics of the podcasts are varied because “it doesn't have to be so stereotypical” (Interview, Jasmin, *Edu Orten*), and not everything has to be political because you represent a marginalised group, as the girls in *Galdem a Talk* suggest:

Demonstrate representation rather than talking about it all the time. This is what representation looks like. We are three girls from Husby who talk about exactly what we want to talk about. (Interview, Fatuma, *Galdem a Talk*)

One of the aims of the podcasts is to break away from society's urge to put everything and everyone in a box. They feel that they are either stereotypically associated with criminality or forced to speak as spokespersons for Black women or Black Muslim women. The podcast gives them a space to just be themselves and talk about whatever is on their minds and encourages other suburban girls to claim their space. This is an implicit critique of mainstream media representation, to which they offer an alternative (Carpentier et al.,

2003) that demonstrates authentic self-expression. Topics range from popular culture, friendship, feminism, racism, role models, and everyday life in the suburbs, often highlighting the positive aspects of living in an ethnically diverse area (Ratkovic, 2019).

*Edu Orten* started because she felt that stories and knowledge that could benefit others were getting stuck locally:

When you grow up in a country that isn't really your own or have a different background or grow up in social and economic vulnerability or neglect or whatever you call it, you don't have the networks that other people have. And then you need to take part of it together [...] if you could just connect all these threads people would have more knowledge and experience about a little bit of everything. (Interview, Jasmin, Edu Orten)

Therefore, she aims to connect stories, people, and knowledge from different suburbs in or through the podcast to build alliances between people who normally lack these networks. Building post-migrant alliances is important to fight discriminatory structures and demand equal rights and opportunities (Foroutan, 2019). To do this, she almost always invites guests to the podcasts. Many are representatives of different organisations, but others are just ordinary people who share their stories and personal journeys:

It doesn't have to be about what's happening in society, it can be about what it's like to start a business, what it's like to be in love, what it's like to have anxiety about school or just about anything. (Interview, Jasmin, Edu Orten)

Even if topics vary, there is a focus on education, as the name of the podcast suggests, and some episodes explicitly discuss formal education and the educational journey of ordinary people. The platform also contributes to informal education (Uhnoo & Sernhede, 2022) by bringing in local expertise from local civil society. Organisations based in the suburbs that work with sports, youth, civic engagement, mental health issues, and so on, are invited as guests. The podcast gives them a platform to talk about their work and share their experiences and knowledge, while empowering the audience:

[They] should benefit from it emotionally and knowledge-wise. Not that I must profit from it financially or in terms of money, and that is a difference between our podcasts and other podcasts. (Interview, Jasmin, Edu Orten)

The goal of improving the suburb permeates the content; thus, *Edu Orten* has strong similarities with the motto of serving the community (Carpentier et al., 2003). This is further emphasised by the solidarity expressed in the extract above, where the common good is placed above financial self-interest (Smith, 2009). This is also illustrated by another feature of these podcasts, the shout-outs, which endorse the people, organisations, and causes they support. In addition, both *Galdem a Talk* and *Edu Orten* extend the podcasts through local engagement. *Galdem a Talk* has funded an organisation that supports local youth, and *Edu Orten* has funded a youth leisure centre dedicated to learning. This

illustrates their embeddedness in local civil society (Carpentier et al., 2003) and how their platforms are not only part of but also promote and strengthen civil society (Rennie, 2006, p. 36).

Several episodes of *Edu Orten* feature representatives of organisations that explicitly work against street violence, and by giving them a voice, the dominant narrative in the mainstream media is challenged. Instead of arguing for tougher measures, blaming parents for being irresponsible and reporting the violence in a dehumanised way, it is discussed as a national crisis caused by inequality. The human aspect of street violence is also emphasised to counter the dehumanisation of victims as mere statistics. In episode 37, two representatives of *Kollektiv Sorg* talk about their campaign as a platform where people can speak out and express their feelings, as it causes collective trauma and grief that people need help to deal with. As “grief is something that everyone can relate to”, they hope to reach people who were previously unaware of how the situation was affecting ordinary people in the suburbs:

This is something that we must involve everyone into, not just the suburbs, the red line, the green line [referring to different subway lines]. It's also them in the inner-city. They also need to understand what is happening in the suburbs and that is not just a number in an article. Like “young man shot here”. No, it was someone's child, it was someone's brother. (#37, *Edu Orten*)

They stress that the “us and them” mentality must be abolished. Sweden must unite because this is a national issue, a national crisis. A lost life is a lost opportunity, it is a failure for the whole of society, and it causes collective trauma and grief that people need help to deal with.

In episode 23 of *Edu Orten*, a mother who lost her son to the deadly violence shares her personal story and grief, bringing a human perspective to the issue. She also points out that the way the mainstream media covers the issue is part of the problem. It prevents understanding between different groups and fails to hold politicians to account:

Yes, I think there is an ulterior motive. Because if we write that they are criminals, then it does not apply to ordinary people. Because if it turns out that it applies to ordinary people. That we in the suburbs are not animals but people, then there would be panic in Sweden. They try to cover it up and then nobody must take responsibility. Because we hear all the time, “Where are the parents? Why didn't they educate their children? They are criminals, it is their own fault”. Parental responsibility 100%, number one, of course it is, but what mother dreams of such a future for her children? There is no mother who raises her children to be criminals or murderers.

A common aspect of the discussion in the podcasts is the use of the term “street violence” rather than “gang violence” as used by the mainstream media. This emphasises

that not all victims are criminals, but also that they are first and foremost young people. It is a strategy to combat the normalisation of deadly violence.

By giving voice to people and perspectives that are rarely properly heard in the mainstream media, it gives ordinary people and civil society organisations access to the media (Carpentier, 2011). It demonstrates a do-it-yourself, but also a do-it-your-own way (Rennie, 2006, p. 186), which is further reflected in the media practices of the podcasts. The guests are not just guests, they are involved and influence what they want to talk about and the structure of the episode as it should be “on their terms” to benefit them (Interview, Jasmin, Edu Orten). She also states that it is important to leave enough time for the guests to finish talking, as this is “a way of showing respect” (Interview, Jasmin, Edu Orten). The podcasts not only facilitate voice as a process, but the media production is also organised to value voice (Couldry, 2010). The guests have agency and are allowed to participate in the decision-making process (Carpentier, 2011), which breaks with traditional mainstream practices. The podcasts are thus the result of genuine collaboration (Stehling et al., 2019) between actors who share the same vision and who are working for the same cause, and together they show how things could be done differently from the status quo.

*Galdem a Talk* also regularly invites guests based on the criteria that the person is someone they can relate to and is relevant to their work on representation. Several of their episodes are collaborations with other podcasts from the suburbs, as they visit each other as guests:

We call each other podcast colleagues too; it’s a lot of fun and you send each other opportunities. Like if we can’t do something [event, collaboration etc.] we can suggest “but maybe this podcast would do this and maybe this podcast would fit in this” and when we listen to each other’s episodes maybe they talk about us, and we talk about them. (Interview, Nada, *Galdem a Talk*)

As this quote from the interview shows, suburb podcasters refer to each other as colleagues and help to promote each other. The relationship with other podcasts from other suburbs is thus one of solidarity, where mutual interest and common goals are achieved through collaboration rather than competition (Smith, 2009), which is also reflected in the organisation of podcast festivals:

The only requirement to be part of the festival is that it comes from a suburb [...] the aim was to give them attention. [...] They should be allowed to represent themselves. It’s like their time. That way they get a forum to discuss. (Interview, Sara, *Galdem a Talk*)

By facilitating platforms for interaction where people working for the same cause can come together, the podcasts facilitate and harness alliances and networks of solidarity that can challenge dominant perceptions of the suburbs and strengthen and uplift these areas and the people who live in them.



## Conclusion

To fully appreciate and understand these podcasts, they need to be situated in contemporary post-migrant Sweden. Sweden is increasingly polarised, with the suburbs and the young people who live there becoming symbols of failed integration and subject to place-ism (Sernhed et al., 2019) by being repeatedly othered, racialised, and dehumanised in mainstream media and public debate (Backwall, 2023). The post-migrant framework is helpful in understanding the growing divisions in Sweden. By framing the current crisis in terms of a struggle for or against diversity, the possibility of building alliances beyond ethnicity is enhanced.

These podcasts are part of this struggle by facilitating platforms where different voices, stories, and perspectives come together to form an alternative discourse that challenges the dominant one by highlighting its inadequacy (Carpentier et al., 2003). Voices that explicitly criticise and respond to the mainstream media's stereotypical reporting and present other perspectives thus resist it, often by reversing the "us versus them" dichotomy or urging the media to stop using it. People whose voices and perspectives are rarely heard in the mainstream media, even though they are affected by the deadly violence in the suburbs and the symbolic violence of the dominant narrative.

The podcasters' critical stance towards mainstream media is also based on personal interactions (Carpentier, 2011) with mainstream media. As much as they have an antagonistic relationship with established media and regularly refuse to participate in media productions, they do appear in media that share their perspective or when the terms of the conversation are set in advance. Often, these are local media that, because of their embeddedness, do not reinforce the dominant narrative. This illustrates the complexity of the relationships, links, and functions that these podcasts have with different spheres of society, suggesting that they could also be said to have rhizomic characteristics (Carpentier et al., 2003).

*Galdem a Talk* and *Edu Orten*'s belief in doing things differently, in a do-it-yourself and do-it-your-own way (Rennie, 2006, p. 186), is reflected in their media practices in general, but especially in the way they work with and together with their guests, be they ordinary people, representatives of organisations, or other podcasters. The podcasts not only give guests access to media, by allowing their voice to be heard. They also incorporate them into the decision-making process to facilitate full participation (Carpentier 2011). Furthermore, the relationships with ordinary people, other podcasts, and organisations in the suburbs are characterised by solidarity, as mutual interest and cooperation are placed above self-interest and competition (Smith, 2009). These podcasts are thus sites of cultural production where the articulation of mundane practices of solidarity and resistance are central.

Although the podcasters themselves do not use labels such as community and post-migrant media, this article demonstrates the usefulness of these theories in understanding these podcasts. This demonstrates that the distinction between mainstream and

community media is still fruitful. Previous research on far-right and immigration critical groups' use of social media suggests that it is increasingly difficult to make a sharp distinction between mainstream media and uncivil publics (alternative media) (Horsti, 2015) and that the rhetoric of mainstream media has in turn become more aggressive (Ekman & Krzyżanowski, 2021). By focusing on an unexplored media segment (Graf, 2021), this article contributes with an enhanced understanding of the dynamics of the Swedish media landscape in relation to immigration-related issues.

In contrast to alternative far-right media that incite and contribute to polarisation (Ekman, 2019), these podcasts promote unity and understanding, despite being critical of the content and practices of mainstream media. This may sound contradictory. However, they provide platforms where different groups that transcend ethnic subject positions and share similar views on diversity and the suburbs can collaborate (Ratkovic, 2019) and form alliances to talk back and fight discriminatory structures by demanding justice and greater representativeness (Foroutan, 2019). As such, they are part of and strengthen local civil society (Carpentier et al., 2003) and can be understood as post-migrant media (Ratkovic, 2019).

Guided by solidarity and collaboration, these podcasts can potentially play an important role in promoting social cohesion in post-migrant Sweden. Their audience and reach may be limited, but as previous research (Uhnöo & Sernhede, 2022) has suggested, they should be understood as part of an emerging counter-public within a wider social justice movement in the suburbs. Furthermore, these podcasts are an important but under-utilised resource as they offer different voices and perspectives that should be recognised. Including them in the public debate would make it more balanced and inclusive and potentially prevent further polarisation by increasing understanding.

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