

# The Mediatized Zlatan, Made by Sweden

## *An Immigrant's Path from Provincial Otherness to a Western Literary Space*

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### **Abstract**

The present article analyses the mediatization of the brand and celebrity Zlatan Ibrahimović using the reception and marketing of the footballer's life story and autobiography as its main case. It is shown that the construction of a myth such as Ibrahimović transcends the materiality of the book as well as geographical, vernacular and media boundaries, as it is constituted as content in a digital network that produces signification. This 'Zlatan content' is framed by national Swedish values and a traditional Western myth of individual masculine excellence. It is also marked by emotions, class and race, telling a tale about the marginalized emotive immigrant becoming both a national icon and part of an imaginary Western ghetto experience and global literary canon formation. It is argued that the performance of excitable speech acts is crucial in the mediatization and branding of mass market literature and celebrities such as Ibrahimović.

**Keywords:** mediatization, autobiography, emotion, race, class, celebrity

### **Introduction**

In *New Statesman*, author Simon Kuper praises *I am Zlatan Ibrahimović*, the English translation of the Swedish footballer's autobiography (2013), and repeats a story that has become an internationally mediatized tale or myth: "Zlatan tells an immigrant's tale that resonates across Europe as he guides us through the milieu of toplevel football. .../ the book offers a rare insight into European ghetto life" (Kuper 2013a).

In the present article, the mediatized 'Zlatan tale' is explored using the reception of the autobiography *I am Zlatan Ibrahimović* as a main starting point. The purpose is not only to explore this tale, but also to draw a few, but decisive conclusions regarding the effects of mediatization on the materiality of the book as well as to discuss the construction of affectivity<sup>1</sup> and authenticity in the mediation of mass-market literature and celebrities such as Ibrahimović. Digitized book reviews and articles, pod-radio, websites and other digital material related to the footballer constitute the primary empirical material under analysis.

The general theoretical frame of the present article is the concept "mediatization", that is, the assumption that media today interact with cultural institutions, cultural produc-

tion, distribution and reception, thus leading to mutual interdependence.<sup>2</sup> The media in general constitute a crucial – but not exclusive – condition for contemporary literary or celebrity hype to emerge in the first place as well as to be widely spread.<sup>3</sup> In a culture industry of increasing commodification of literature, marketing of authors by publishers is performed in close relationship with the media and other public arenas (Squires 2007: 37). In the case of *I am Zlatan Ibrahimović*, the subject was a celebrity long before the book appeared and 'Zlatan' is a registered brand within the EU.

Olivier Driessens has outlined a conceptional model of celebritization. He identifies "three (meta-)processes as its moulding forces, namely mediatization, personalization and commodification" (Driessens 2013: 649). Personalization is a synonym for individualization, another meta-process in Western (post)modernity; it expresses a (neo)liberal ideology that promotes individual excellence and self-fulfilment. Commodification transforms individuals into commodities in a cultural industry "by bestowing economic value on them" (2013: 652). Driessens concludes that celebritization "should be conceived as a product of" these three factors (2013: 653). Mediatization is one meta-process among others that produce, maintain and enable a celebrity culture. This conceptual model is used to avoid a media-centric take and what Nick Couldry (2003) calls the "myth of the mediated centre" or "the myth that the media are the essential gatekeepers to the imagined society's centre" (Driessens 2013: 643).

Three propositions concerning this conceptual model will inform the discussion below: literary celebrity hype is created, received and distributed through media; the media have effects on how a book's literary content can be recreated, fragmented, reframed and its author turned into a mediatized persona; finally, the media allow readers and users to establish identificatory and affective relationships with literary content, a literary character and a mediatized author. Notwithstanding, having a presence in the media is not sufficient. The mediatized tale of Zlatan constructs emotions related to a gendered, racified, Western liberal myth of the underdog's road to excellence, thus enhancing the tale's attractiveness and impact.

First, methodological issues will be outlined in relation to how literary concepts, such as the text and the book, are affected by mediatization. Thereafter the mediatized myth or tale of Zlatan will be explored. Finally, the construction of provincial otherness will be discussed as well as its transformation into an imaginary Western literary space and common Western 'ghetto experience'.

## **Methodological, Empirical and Conceptual Considerations**

Before *I am Zlatan Ibrahimović* was released, recipients were already well acquainted with the celebrity Ibrahimović: The mediatized buzz about the autobiography becomes part and parcel of the ongoing representation of the footballer. This is also due to the fact that the autobiography was released both as a book, an e-book, an audio book, an mp3 file, a biography application and as an easy-to-read version in Swedish, aimed at consumers who usually do not read books. In the biography application, the story from the book is transformed into an interactive storyline with added material such as videos, links, short narratives not presented in the book, memorabilia, tattoo stories, statistics and visualizations showing a number of Ibrahimović's boots and his tattooed body. The life story told in the book is changed by narratives being added, which fragments

the storyline and develops certain moments, e.g. his childhood experiences, through visualizations and timelines. In a trailer made by the Swedish publisher promoting the biography application, the footballer utters the following one-liner: "Remember there is only one Zlatan, and this is Zlatan and this is my story" (*I am Zlatan* 2014). By performing an assertive speech act,<sup>4</sup> Ibrahimović is construing an ethos and expressing: *This is the true story of my life*.

The autobiographical life story is thus mediated through different channels, the book being one of them, and its content becomes part of other digitized mediations. While browsing, the user/reader encounters a number of Zlatans that are probably hard to distinguish from one another. Which is the one from the autobiography (the book) and which is created in other media or through marketing strategies? An innovative part of the mediatized branding of Zlatan is the mobile phone application called *Zlatan Unplugged* (2013).<sup>5</sup> In this application, which is free to download, interviews, photographs and personal information are transmitted to the public: information that is controlled by Ibrahimović himself. This application is another public arena for constructing Zlatan.

Thus, it is not enough to rely on book reviews or to exclusively follow the book's traces in publics to understand the construction of Zlatan. A global celebrity such as this must be viewed as cultural *content* in a mediatized network. The materiality of the book is no longer a necessary condition for literary content to be made public and known, as users and readers can easily pick and choose content to be commented upon as well as rewritten and interpreted in different media. Bits and pieces of a literary story, as well as a variety of mediated paratextual material,<sup>6</sup> ranging from news coverage to amateur users comments, related to the author and his or her works, can be highlighted, distributed and integrated into mediatized narratives to be circulated ad infinitum.<sup>7</sup> The mediatized, signifying 'Zlatan content' appears in the form of fragmented and displaced narratives, transmitted through different channels and not exclusively through a clearcut book that frames the life story, thus keeping it 'in place'. You do not have to read the book to be acquainted with its content or with the persona's life story.

The signifying content related to the footballer and his life story is a highly efficient contemporary myth-making vehicle: Narratives from the life story told in the book and other media transcend media, geographic, vernacular and social contexts and thus attain a seemingly atemporal and universal status. This is one main part of global literary myth production: The content has to be valid and attractive beyond these boundaries. Another main factor is the signifying condensation expressed by Ibrahimović in the trailer promoting the biography application: "Remember there is only one Zlatan, and this is Zlatan and this is my story." Thus, the narrative fragmentation is condensed in and framed by the celebrity brand Zlatan performing an authentic self by claiming that 'he' is telling, for the first time, the true story of 'his' life.

The methodological question is, however, how one should analyse this ongoing representation and signifying Zlatan content, which transcends boundaries such as those mentioned above? One suggestion is to analyse digital material as content in an ongoing signifying mediatized chain: the text is hence no longer understood as equivalent to one specific materiality, such as a book, but as acts of signification performed through the media. Like Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault conceives of texts in terms of networks interacting and creating signification beyond the boundaries of the book or work: the "frontiers of a book are never clear-cut" as books are "caught up in a system of references

to other books, other texts, other sentences; it is a node within a network / ... / [a] network of references” (Foucault 1976: 23). From book or work to text – which is the well-known poststructuralist and deconstructive view on (inter)textuality – to digital material, linking to one another in ‘chains of narratives’ creating and distributing signification.

The term “tale” used by Kuper in the introductory quotation indicates fiction, fairy tale – a story already known and told with a seemingly atemporal status. This resembles Roland Barthes’ definition of a modern myth: It means a delusion to be exposed (which indicates the myth’s closeness to the concept of ideology), but myth is also, in the Barthesian sense, a form of communication, a system of second-order meaning (a crown signifies the king), with particular recourse to a presumed natural and ahistorical order of signification that in reality is historically contingent (Barthes 2012: 216). What is seductive – and thus has attention producing potential – in mediatized myth construction cannot be underestimated due to its seemingly universal status, which tells the recipient: This story is valid and ‘true’ and generally applicable to Everyman.

## **Mediatization of the Zlatan Myth**

### *Commodifying and Construing a Star as an Exemplary Immigrant, Made by Sweden*

The subject of the life story told in the autobiography has made a famous career as a footballer as well as a social career, moving from poor immigrant circumstances to wealth. This is a commonplace story, constructed in various media over the years, long before the autobiography appeared. The story of Zlatan is both a myth of the alienated male outsider and his road to fame – *and* a myth of the autonomous Western subject or lone ranger who – against all odds, and due solely to his own merits – succeeds. Thus, the life story of Ibrahimović fulfils a major Western ideal, connected to the liberal male individual and his fight for autonomy, self-respect and self-fulfilment.<sup>8</sup>

Biographies and autobiographies by sport stars provide “narratives of masculinity in which obstacles are overcome, victories won, and enemies vanquished” (Whannel 2007: 9). Accordingly, a “rugged individualism” is constituted as an “alternative masculinity to that of the team game ethos” (Whannel 2007: 11). This “ideology of masculine individualism is a significant part of the sub-text of the mythologised narratives of such stars” (Whannel 2007: 14). The “sport-media complex”, that is the relationship between and fusion of sports and communication industries, has regenerated “master narratives of heroic manhood” and reproduced an ideology of “hypermasculinity” (Burstyn 1999:103-04, 193). The “commercialization and commodification of men’s sport / ... / have played a large role in turning professional athletes into modern-day gladiators, exchanging alienation, injury, and pain for material and social rewards” (Burstyn 1999: 138).

In the Swedish context, this ideology also fulfils the political vision of the immigrant being assimilated and integrated into Swedishness, which leads to Zlatan becoming an exemplary individual “Made by Sweden” (2014).<sup>9</sup> Zlatan stands out as one such individual and as unique, in accordance with the slogan marketing the biography application. In an interview in *The Times* promoting the autobiography, Ibrahimović summarizes his position, partly contradicting this vision:

‘I know that I have become a symbol of [multiculturalism],’ he says. ‘But I still feel like a bit of an outsider. When I was growing up, I was not a ‘real’ Swede. I

did not have a name like Ericsson or Carlsson. I was always the snotty-nosed immigrant, having to work twice as hard to get the same respect. I think the country is changing for the better today. We are more together and I am glad I have been a part of that. But I still feel a distance; that sense of being on the outside. You can take the guy out of the ghetto, but you cannot take the ghetto out of the guy.’ (Syed 2013)

This story about the immigrant experience in Sweden is transmediated by journalists and commentators. In *The Times*, the journalist argues that Ibrahimović has been made into an icon

/ ... / capturing the reality of the immigrant experience in modern Sweden – in particular, how entire communities can live in almost complete isolation from the native culture – it has confronted many of his countrymen with an aspect of Swedish life they scarcely knew existed (Syed 2013).

According to Garry Whannel, the ”image of the sport star has become a significant point of condensation for social unease in which tensions about moral authority and manliness are addressed” (2007:11). The mediatized image of Zlatan, on the contrary, seems to ideologically reconcile tensions concerning race, class and masculinity. In the public story of Zlatan, Swedish political controversies related to immigration and assimilation are resolved: Ibrahimović is construed and received as the personification of the exemplary immigrant.

Another part of the myth-making is the game itself. Football has by tradition been regarded as a working-class sport,<sup>10</sup> inflicted with both hatred, grief and joy: all strong affects that are not only performed when watching football, but that also augment the affective aura of the story of Zlatan. One theory of marketing is concerned with how to attract consumers by creating affective branding campaigns (Burstyn 1999: 143-44, Hill & Power 2005: 106). The mobile phone application *Zlatan Unplugged* is a technique for creating ’authenticity’ as well as a seemingly immediate relationship between the user and the persona Zlatan. This relationship has identificatory potential, which is an integral part of how a contemporary mediatized myth is both vitalized and reified. It is promoted as the application that gives you Zlatan 24/7: ”With Zlatan unplugged I will get a personal channel for my views, comments and thoughts. Directly to my fans, without a filter”, Ibrahimović says.<sup>11</sup>

With reference to Driessens’ (2013) conceptual model, branding is part of what he identifies as the commodification of culture and individuals, the goal being to attract attention and to establish attachments with products and brands, including personae, in the service of marketing ends. However, the publisher’s and Ibrahimović’s own branding campaigns are so entangled with the mediatized myth of the immigrant underdog turned celebrity that it is impossible to decide whether the myth or the branding is the main factor in the construction of the persona Zlatan. Marketing converges with journalism and media content to a high degree, which is another effect of the processes of mediatization and commodification. In a similar manner, the life story converges with and is an integral part of the brand Zlatan.

The book, as another medium in this global network society, is subjected to this logic of convergence. One telling example is the commercial made by Volvo where Ibrahimović performs his Swedish national identity by hunting, fishing and playing with

his children, seconded by the national anthem. The commercial draws on the football player's life story, which is partly told in the autobiography as well (his wife, children, house in northern Sweden, where he is known for hunting, skiing and relaxing). The agency that produced the commercial promotes Ibrahimović's Swedishness together with the car's. The celebrity and the brand Zlatan converge with the product to be sold and the celebrity is reified:

Together with Zlatan Ibrahimović we have done a celebration to Sweden. It's our country's unique nature that inspires and challenges the people at Volvo when they develop their cars. It's also here, at home, in the magnificent wilderness that they find their strength. Just as Zlatan does.<sup>12</sup>

A Swedish journalist was granted an exclusive interview before the commercial was released.<sup>13</sup> The article itself (Gradvall 2014) became part of the viral marketing of Ibrahimović's Swedishness, family life as well as the car brand. This also implicitly markets the book and adds significance both to the brand Zlatan and to the mythic life story.

In Sweden, the book's literary quality is not the main issue in the media coverage. The subject and his exceptional life story are the target. This is another example of a contemporary (auto)biographical trend in publishing, and the reality cultural hype in the media in general, whose main objective is to expose and produce 'authenticity' and 'true stories'. The marketing of *I am Zlatan Ibrahimović* follows the same path as the marketing of the crime writer Liza Marklund's thrillers: Her face is exposed on the book covers and her persona is visualized in advertisements as being part of the crime story. The author thus becomes part of the story being told, which invites the readers into the story by the author herself (Sarrimo 2012: 168-169).

Ibrahimović is not exposed on the book's front cover as the professional football player, but as a 'private' person dressed in jeans and a t-shirt, seriously looking at the viewer, thus indicating that the content will expose the 'real' person 'behind' the famous player. In other contexts, the footballer's naked body parts are exposed; in the biography application his tattooed torso is shown, as it is in the car commercial. The masculine body is objectified, but still contextualized as an acceptable familiar body and not fetishized primarily as a body part intended to arouse voyeuristic desire. In the commercial, the naked torso is integrated into the context of family life, safe driving and Swedish nationalism. The often "highly sexualized images featuring the heroes of sport spectacle" (Burstyn 1999: 149) are thus played down.

This marketing and mediatization logic invites recipients to learn about a star who is fully integrated into a well-known national context, but at the same time visualizing a combination of masculine roles not commonly exposed in Swedish publics: the man as a hunter enduring the ice cold water and showing his perfectly disciplined body combined with being a loving husband and father.

The ghostwriter David Lagercrantz's own response is indicative. Ibrahimović is described by Lagercrantz in interviews as an "icon" who has "travelled through the entire country". At the same time, Ibrahimović's poor suburban immigrant background is romanticized, turned into a melodramatic contemporary Dickens' tale, in some respects similar to the car commercial's depiction: "He is a wild one", "a bad boy" and "a warrior" as well as "an injured child", says Lagercrantz ([*Author Friday*] 2012, *Metropol* 2013) from "another part of Sweden" and he "broke through" and "engaged



the Swedish people”. ”All generations like him” ([*Author Friday*] 2012). He is aware of his difference and alienation, but ”his anger grows” as well as his desire for revenge ([*Elfvig meets*] 2011). The transition from an injured warrior in a space outside Sweden to a hunter, father and husband – Made by Sweden – summarizes the mythic character of the tale told in the media.

## **The Myth’s Affective and Socially Stratifying Effects**

### *The Empty Fridge and the Blonde Swedish Woman*

A fragmented narrative from the autobiography that is often dramatized is ’the empty fridge’ in Ibrahimović’s childhood home, sometimes only filled with his father’s beer bottles ([*Author Friday*] 2012, *Metropol* 2013, [*Elfvig meets*] 2011). This detail from the book is constructed by Lagercrantz in interviews as an emotive metonym telling the entire sad story about an immigrant kid living in Sweden, but in fact in another country. This metonym becomes part of the ghostwriter’s emotive speech act, circumscribing the footballer’s deprived childhood and positioning him as a marginalized outcast ([*Elfvig meets*] 2011). In a number of interviews, Lagercrantz performs assertive and expressive speech acts (Searle 1975) confirming his truthfulness as well as emotions.

David Lagercrantz has a high-brow aristocratic background and spent 100 hours interviewing Ibrahimović, which resulted in, according to Lagercrantz’s own statements, him confronting as well as internalizing the Other. This confrontation of classes – and eventually identificatory relationship – is a significant example of a mediatized affect and celebrity production that are socially stratified. Lagercrantz voices and constructs an encounter with the ’authentic’ Other, sprung from the class difference between him and the subject of the life story he is writing: an ’authenticity’ primarily based on the construction of strong feelings. The ”Zlatan I got”, says Lagercrantz, was the ”uncensored one”. ”A feeling” Lagercrantz voices is that Ibrahimović ”let him in” when he encouraged the footballer to ”talk freely”. The goal was to ”find dramatical scenes to explore on a deeper level and it took time to find these”. ”I was a bit like a therapist” and ”[w]e talked about immensely emotional things”, Lagercrantz argues ([*Author Friday*] 2012, *Metropol* 2013, *SR International* 2012).

It is obvious that interviewers are thrilled when they meet a person who has been physically close to the subject of the myth. Lagercrantz is asked if he ”knows Zlatan”, if he became one of his friends and how Zlatan ”really is” ([*Author Friday*] 2012). The quest to find the ’true’ and authentic person ’behind’ the myth is part of its attractiveness. This structure of media attention is a decisive part of celebrity production and could be called celebrity by proxy: Lagercrantz himself achieves popularity by having spent time with a Star.

The emotive discourse and socially stratified structure of class identification is a major part of this life story’s mythological qualities and attractiveness in the public. The imagined geographical and social space constructed in the Zlatan myth triggers enthusiasm and desire and fulfils the need for ’true’ stories and feelings connected to the underdog’s journey from a non-existent space to the centre of whiteness, Sweden.

This construction of whiteness is favourably triggered by the other metonym displaced from the book: Ibrahimović’s story in the autobiography about his desire to court and be loved by a blonde Swedish girl, which he finally does when he marries Helena

Sejer (e.g., Kuper 2013a & 2014, Skillen 2014, Syed 2013, *The Sports Bookshelf* 2014). In this context, the car commercial's representation of Helena Sejer becomes a strong signifier of Zlatan finally being integrated and assimilated into 'genuine' Swedishness. Sejer also symbolizes Swedish middle-class values in the autobiography and in the news coverage. The blonde Swedish woman is construed as the 'wild' immigrant's restraining force. The immigrant is thus kept in place (in Sweden) by the blonde woman and made respectable (Skeggs 1997):

The most restraining influence on Ibrahimović has been Helena, his wife, whom he met when he was 19 and with whom he has two children. With her flowing blonde hair and impeccable middle-class credentials, she represented both the unattainability of the girls of his youth and a way of connecting with a native culture he had been always secretly in awe of. As he put it in his memoir: 'She came from a model family from Lindesberg, one of those families where they say, 'Darling, would you please pass me the milk?', whereas we at table mostly just hurled death threats at each other.' (Syed 2013)

The mediatized signifying chain is thus both condensed in a traditional Western myth of the successful and autonomous liberal male individual *and* displaced metonymically through these topoi (the fridge and the blonde Swedish woman). The effectiveness of the Zlatan tale is due to both this culturally well-grounded myth, offering the recipients affective recognition, and overdetermined realistic details easily displaced through the media.

In its affective aspect, the story of Zlatan is analogous, though in inverse relation to the story of princess Diana – another tantalizing, globally mediatized contemporary myth. They both transmit a traditional and still powerful and desirable gendered structure in Western culture: the male working-class hero, if successful, has to survive to fulfil his destiny and the heroic tale's need for the underdog's happy ending, whereas the princess/woman has to die to fulfil the romantic tale's quest for grief, melancholy and romance (Ang 1997). The tears shed over the persona Diana are tears of mourning, thus fulfilling a "mythic tragedy" comparable to the "emotional energy" and "passionate identifications" acted out in relation to sports events (Sofoulis 1997: 15, 16). The male lower-class body performs with great skill, while the female body's aristocratic grandeur and beauty is heightened by her death. The Zlatan myth contains an affective register related to male immigrant embodiment: the power to beat your opponents and overcome obstacles through the *embodied* performance of excellence. The mediated focus on the brilliant performance of the male body is socially stratified and thus marked by both race and class: The migrant underdog uses his body to perform professionalism, the middle-class male (such as Lagercrantz) uses his intellect.

This quest – readers', interviewers' as well as the ghostwriter's – for the 'authentic' Zlatan is one main part of the life story's interpollative (Althusser 1971) and socially stratifying effects.

To be successful, a contemporary myth would seem to need the recipients' affective responses. They are triggered by Ibrahimović's own performances of professional excellence and of an exciting life story combined with individual speech acts and embodiments. Notwithstanding, this myth of individual masculine success 'lives its own life', well grounded in Western modernity and in Western cultural production, where



it is constantly reproduced. It hails recipients as possible successful subjects: "This biography brought me to tears", a blogger writes

because of such similarity to my life. Unlike you I was born in Bijeljina and grew up in Germany as a refugee dreaming of becoming a Professional player someday studying Ronaldo like there is no tomorrow only one goal on my mind to presume my dream and use my talent to make it / ... /.<sup>14</sup>

The cultural editor of one of Sweden's largest newspapers writes in a column that she "shed some tears" when Ibrahimović, in the end of the car commercial, utters the last verse of the Swedish national anthem, but replaces the words "Nordic countries" with "Sweden": "I want to live and die in Sweden" (Chukri 2014). The tears shed by the editor are tears of joy over this immigrant being happily accepted and integrated into Swedishness. It also triggers statements about the game's, the life story's and the brand Zlatan's political impact:

Today, Ibrahimović is more than a sportsman in his homeland; more even than a word. He has become a cultural phenomenon. / ... / It is not just the way he has pushed the boundaries of fashion, style and, in the case of his infatuation with fast cars, motoring. It is also the way he has come to dominate political discourse. As the son of a Croat and a Bosnian Muslim, brought up in an ethnic ghetto in Malmö, Ibrahimović symbolises the ironies of Sweden's version of multiculturalism. His bicycle kick against England came in the week that the far-right Sweden Democrats polled 11 per cent, the party's highest rating. The presence of Zlatan, in hearts and minds, is regarded by many in the political mainstream as one of their most potent weapons. As Kim Källström, his team-mate, put it after the England match: 'With foreign-born parents and certain problems in society, he can hopefully unify the country in a good way. Football builds bridges. He's a modern Swede who stands for the new Sweden.' (Syed 2013)

In the above quote, the commodification of the trademark Zlatan converges with its cultural and political discursivity. The subject positioning of Zlatan hails the recipient both as consumer, fan, admirer of his embodiments, and as politically engaged. The subject positioning of the recipient is a crucial part of mediatized myth-making. Also, the "Zlatan speech" is well known in Sweden, described as provocative one-liners and therefore often transmediated and retold. Some put a twist on it, positioning the subject Zlatan as a masculine heterosexual: "You come to my house and you are going to see if I am gay", he replies to a Spanish journalist who questions his sexuality.<sup>15</sup> Another one-liner often transmediated was performed at a press conference when a journalist asked why Ibrahimović had scratches on his face: "Well... you'll have to ask your wife about that" (Syed 2013). Normative masculine heterosexuality combined with a traditional marriage, two children and a Volvo underscores Zlatan's Swedishness, which keep the revenge-seeking and furious 'ghetto character' in place. These one-liners are excitable speech acts,<sup>16</sup> positioning the subject Zlatan in the news coverage as well as attracting responses from a wider range of recipients than the usual sports or book fan.

A similar reproduction of identificatory affectivity directed towards the readers is common when branding mass market fiction. Crime writer Liza Marklund constructs an affective reader when explaining why she wrote the 'true story' *Buried Alive*, a story

about a Swedish woman, presumably battered and persecuted by her Arab husband. Marklund wanted to:

describe the entire story from within a battered woman / ... / I wanted the reader to feel what she felt, to experience the traumas she was forced to experience, to follow her through persecution and flight, fear and loneliness. Strangely enough, it was not painful to write the book, on the contrary. It was a relief to finally be able to tell everything in a really truthful attendant manner (Sarrimo 2012: 171).

'True' feelings are used to market a story and as an argument to highlight a burning political issue: violence against women. This issue, as in the case with Ibrahimović's immigrant background and former position as an outsider, is intimidated and emotionalized according to the following logic: You have to feel what the other feels to be able to connect, understand or to be politically engaged. In a manner similar to Marklund's, Lagercrantz relates to and 'connects' with the subject of the story he is writing to such an extent that he himself regresses emotionally to a 11- to 12-year-old football "lunatic" ([*Author Friday*] 2012). As such, the ghostwriter performs the position of the exemplary recipient of the book he has written, which dramatically differs from a traditional journalistic public take after a book release; as a journalist, you are not expected to be intimately attached to the object of your endeavour or to idealize its importance and effects.

## **The Mediatized Zlatan**

### *From Provincial Otherness to Swedishness and to a Western Literary 'Ghetto Experience'*

Another part of the Zlatan myth's spacial imaginary is the mediatization of the ghetto, as stated in the quote by Simon Kuper introducing this article: Zlatan's life story is said to offer "a rare insight into European ghetto life" (Kuper 2013a). In the English edition of the autobiography a suggestive part from Kuper's book review in the *Financial Times* is used as a promotional slogan: "/ ... / it's probably the best selling immigrant's tale since Sadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000)." In the review, the autobiography is classified as belonging to a high quality literary circuit, which is emphasized when compared to Philip Roth's "classic novel about growing up Jewish in 1930s and 1940s Newark, New Jersey. Each man's story illuminates the other. Moreover, each illuminates the increasingly typical yet rarely heard immigrant experience" (Kuper 2013b).

As has been shown in the present article, the myth and trademark Zlatan have thus travelled through the media, the book being one of them, as a displaced story in a mediatized signifying chain – and have become a condensed commonplace in a Western literary tradition. Not only have "the wild one" and "the warrior" been integrated into the heart of Swedishness and rendered respectable by a blonde Swedish wife, but the myth has also been incorporated into a common ghetto experience mediated through contemporary literature.

The 'ghetto' or suburb Rosengård outside Malmö where Ibrahimović grew up holds a different imaginary and symbolic meaning in Sweden. It is mainly provincialized as a socially and culturally stigmatized space 'outside', which Lagercrantz showed in particular in the interviews discussed above. In Sweden, it was also suggested to be part of a specific national tradition when a reviewer argued that the autobiography was "one of

the best working-class narratives he had ever read”: a bold statement considering that Swedish working-class fiction has a strong position in the country’s literary tradition. This reviewer, when assessing the book, reuses Lagercrantz’s own statements about the quest to find the ‘authentic’ Zlatan:

David Lagercrantz has succeeded in maintaining Zlatan Ibrahimović’s language; I hear his voice when I read and I hope that pupils not used to reading, and even youth who hate to read, who have similar experiences as Zlatan, will find this book and that they will feel strengthened by reading it. (Bolin 2011)

The book’s values are beyond literary quality as defined as aesthetic value: instead the book’s identificatory and remedying effects are assessed. This identificatory and affective response is, as has been argued in the present article, a major part of the construction of a myth and celebrity such as Zlatan. Another factor is the mediatization of the myth. It contributes to globalizing the Other, the province Malmö and its suburb Rosengård to an immigrant’s tale well suited to both a national and an international public.

In conclusion, the province and ‘genuine’ Swedishness, which was a major part of the Swedish response to the persona Zlatan and his life story, are thus inscribed by Simon Kuper as an imaginary Western mutual space and common experience. This shows that literary content, when mediated through a global media system, e.g. as fragmented narratives such as the empty fridge in the footballer’s childhood home, creates new geographic imaginaries and imagined communities. It also shows that this life story transcends both media, geographic, vernacular and social contexts. In the case of Zlatan, his northern province, and its suburb, is condensed into a common ghetto experience. As such, it has transcended and left the materiality of the book to be integrated into another signifying imaginary circuit: Western literary canon formation. In several respects, the tale of Zlatan lives up to a Western liberal ideal of autonomous masculine excellence: The unique individual is always presumed to transcend social and cultural restraints to fight his way to freedom and professional success, be it in the field of sports or of culture.

## Notes

1. “Affect” is used synonymously with “emotion”, that is, as social, historical and cultural practices and constructions that are ‘felt’ and perceived by someone. Ahmed (2004: 103).
2. Hjarvard (2013: 19) makes a distinction between mediation and mediatization: “Mediation describes the concrete act of communication by means of a type of media in a specific social context. By contrast, mediatization refers to a more long-term process, whereby social and cultural institutions and modes of interaction are changed as a consequence of the growth of the media’s influence. / ... / In continental European media studies, in particular Scandinavian and German research traditions, there is a longer and more elaborate tradition for using the concept of ‘mediatization’ as distinct from ‘mediation’, whereas Anglo-American scholars have preferred the term ‘mediation’ / ... / in several senses”.
3. The definition of media follows Hjarvard (2013: 19): “By media we understand technologies that expand communication in time, space, and modality. The media are not only technologies, but also acquire social and aesthetic forms that structure how the media come to be used in various contexts”. The book is understood as one medium among others, transcending its materiality and thus transforming into other forms of communication.
4. According to Searle (1975), the assertive speech act confirms that the speaker is telling the truth.
5. *Zlatan Unplugged*. The app is free to downloaded on *Mikz*. It is advertised as “Zlatan Ibrahimović’s own official channel direct to the fans.”
6. According to Cornel Sandvoss (2011: 66), the Internet works primarily as an archive (and not as a ‘space’ or ‘place’), because the Internet gives us access to texts produced by both professionals and amateurs. Therefore, the text as a concept must be problematized. What is a ‘text’ and its ‘paratext’ on the Internet?

7. Sara Lloyd (2008) argues that, due to digital technology, the materiality of the book can be transformed into pure content in the form of electronic texts in the middle of a network (instead of remaining a material product at the end of a distribution chain). This would, very briefly, be the publishing aspect of the impact of digital technology.
8. John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* (1859) and *The Subjection of Women* (1869) are classic works outlining the liberal view on the sovereign individual in charge of and owner of his own self, body and soul. This ownership is also expanded to the individual's property rights. The individual should thus not be chained to birth rights, but be free to create his own future and fortune based on his own merits and wishes.
9. "Made by Sweden" is the slogan in the commercial made for Volvo where Ibrahimović is promoting the car brand. Volvo XC70 Made by Sweden [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) 21 February 2014.
10. According to Whannel (2007: 11-12), football used to be a sport mainly for the working-class male, with values such as modesty and team ethos in contrast with the star players today whose individuality and uniqueness are promoted.
11. The Application guide <http://www.appguiden.se/article/4700002> 20 February 2014.
12. Homepage of the agency Forsman & Bodenfors <http://www.fb.se/about> 21 February 2014.
13. Within approximately 36 hrs., the commercial was shown more than 1 million times on *Youtube*.
14. Suad Arnavutovic Suad789 <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/i-am-zlatan/id499373930?ls=1&mt> 21 February 2014.
15. "You come to my house and see if I am gay" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NrzVR1D0VXw> 21 February 2014.
16. Subjectivation, subjection and naming are crucial to Butler's understanding of the performative, here condensed in the term "subject positioning" (Butler, 1997a & b).

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