



Communication in Post- and Neo-Authoritarian Societies Working Group

Abstracts of papers accepted for presentation in the Online Conference Papers of the **International Association for Media and Communication Research**¹

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How historical feature films reproduce the hegemonic GDR discourse

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Abstract

Historical memory is a battlefield, where different stakeholders fight for the power, in order to define how the past should be remembered. In these “memory wars” media plays a crucial role. Covering the past, history books and religious texts, TV documentaries and movies, newspapers and museums become memory agents. They generate images and construct narratives, provide interpretations and perspectives on historical actors and events and, thus, shape the collective memory.

Using the example of the GDR, the present study, first, investigates how historical feature films represent the past and what power structures lie behind them. Second, we question how hegemonic GDR narratives delivered by movies and other mass media affect the professional biography and the memories of those media professionals, who lived, studied and worked under socialism and, therefore, witnessed the past.

There are two main reasons in case of the GDR to be taken into account. First, the former GDR citizens had to (re-)build their national identity in the united Germany. With the collapse of the system, people woke up to a whole new reality as the political, ideological and economic landscape had changed almost overnight. Since the unification of East and West, people have contradictory memories of their controversial past and look at the life under communism in different ways. Second, choosing the GDR as an example, is the key role of the media in the “memory battle.” The leading German media outlets remember the GDR almost exclusively as a dictatorship, a state of lawlessness, Stasi, economic mismanagement and missing freedoms.

Historical films can be analyzed for their special role in the memory-shaping process. The German cultural scientist Astrid Erll defines film as the leading medium of collective memory. Our study focuses on film narratives, political and social contexts, in which films are produced and received, and stakeholders participating in “memory wars”, such as film funders and distributors.

The present study is based on the Assmann’s theory of Collective Memory and on the (Critical) Discourse Analysis, as practiced by Foucault, Fairclough and Jäger. The empirical work includes, firstly, the qualitative analysis of 20 core films dealing with the GDR past and produced between 1990 and 2020. Secondly, we have interviewed 16 leading East-German journalists, who were trained to become communist party propagandists back then about their memories, role perceptions and career path.

The study shows, first, how the filmic discourse has changed over time transforming from melancholic movies of the last generation of DEFA filmmakers through the GDR “ostalgia” to “creepy tales” about the GDR secret police and escape attempts. Second, one key outcome of the study is that the success of media professionals depends on how one constructs his/her very own GDR biography. To be more concrete, to climb the career ladder, East-German journalists should see themselves as part of the former opposition. Third, the hegemonic discourse silences alternative voices. Journalists who could tell a different GDR story stay in shadow, since they are afraid to be confronted with their communist past.

Submission ID

492

Panel description - Digital Movements and (Cyber)Surveillance in Neo-Authoritarian States

Authors

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Abstract

Focusing on issues relating to both The People’s Republic of China and Russia, this panel will address the increasingly unstable and ambiguous relationship between the neo-authoritarian state, digital movements, cyber surveillance and technology itself, in the 21st century.

The rise of technology in the industrial era was initially accompanied with the hope that it would inevitably lead to the democratisation of society and greater freedom and transparency, as information became more freely accessible by all. In the 21st century, however, as neo-authoritarian regimes in places such as China and Russia actively suppress dissent and surveil its populations with the use of the most sophisticated surveillance technology, the sentiment that the rise of the Internet and social media would connect people together and thus democratise societies seems to have dissipated.

Ever more present cyber surveillance in neo-authoritarian states also reveals an ambiguous relationship between the state and digital movements. The example of female cyber-nationalist fandom groups from China launching a state-backed digital campaign against the Hong Kong 2019 protesters in the run-up to the 70th Anniversary of the People’s Republic of China demonstrates how ‘activist’ potential is being extracted and re-appropriated by the state apparatus. Meanwhile, online feminist activists in Russia have carved out a digital platform for expounding their views by navigating the shifting and unstable state surveillance in the digital sphere throughout the 2010s, through the means of grassroots ‘cluster’-like organising of activists.

The potential for the ‘weaponisation’ of cyber surveillance technology leads to state-driven campaigns to control the digital sphere, one example being the Internet Clean-Up Campaign (*jingwang xingdong* 净网行动). This, in turn, leads to the emergence of a kind of ‘cryptopticon,’ a

techno-authoritarian upgrade of the Foucauldian ‘panopticon,’ where surveillance is carried out through users denouncing other users in the online sphere. As the potential for resistance diminishes and surveillance technology becomes a weapon and an extension of policing practices of the state, what does that mean in the age of ‘deepfake’ technology? As a techno-authoritarian capitalist model of governance emerges as the seemingly sole victor on the global stage, what is the role of ‘deepfake’ (and indeed, surveillance) technology in the mediation of the game between capital and politics?

Chair: Maria Romanova, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Paper 1: From Contestation to Consensus: Relocating ‘Female-led Fandom Cyber-nationalism’ in the 2019 Online Expedition, Tan Xuanxuan (Co-author: Wang Zhishuang), The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Paper 2: The ‘Cluster’ Effect of Cyberfeminist Activism in 2010s Russia: A Case Study of ‘Nixelpixel’, Maria Romanova, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Paper 3: Campaign Against Boy’s Love: An Observation of China’s Growing Cyber Surveillance and Internet Campaigns Over the Past Two Decades, Wang Weihang, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Paper 4: Deepfakes and Hauntology: AI-Synthesized Fake Faces in Chinese Popular Culture, Zhu Mengmeng, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Submission ID

854

Conceptualizing the comparative model for post-soviet media systems: case of Armenia, Belarus and Russia

Authors

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Abstract

When doing research on the post-communist countries, there is a tendency, especially among the Western researchers, to define modern states by their common communist past. We believe that overestimating this variable might be fatal for understanding the current state of affairs in the former Soviet republics.

A significant amount of literature covers Russian media system, its evolution after the collapse of the USSR with cobwebs of media ownership and state censorship well described and analysed. However, only little research has been done on other post-Soviet republics. Usually the situation there is generalized and regarded through the Russian prism. In reality, the post-Soviet space is heterogeneous, with each country having cultural, economic and political differences. Thus, the attempts to generalise the developments and specifics of Russian media system to other former Soviet countries might be misleading. The unified post-Soviet media model is increasingly seen as a normativistic ideal vision rather than the real universal conceptual framework. The comparative dimension in the existing body of literature is rather limited. In the current paper we propose the analytical tool to compare media systems on post-soviet space and test it on the example of Belarus and Armenia which then will be compared with probably the most well described — the Russian case.

To achieve this goal, we will use the well-known framework for media systematic analysis developed by Hallin and Mancini (2004), which will be revised and adopted for the analysis of post-Soviet space. This concept has been often criticized for only being operational for Western democracies, as it proved to be less or not at all effective for describing media systems beyond the Western world (Albuquerque, 2013; Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012; Peruško, Vozab & Čuvalo; 2013; Jakubowicz & Sükösd, 2008). But the revised version of their framework (Hallin and Mancini, 2012) was also not efficient in showing how exactly the proposed variables fail to work when analyzing non-Western societies. In particular it failed to help classify post-communist media systems. We will try to demonstrate why some of the parameters proposed by Hallin and Mancini are not applicable for studying post-Soviet media systems for a number of reasons. One of the most indicative examples of such a criteria would be political parallelism, as many previously socialist states still struggle with developing a system of political parties, which would be a functioning mechanism for political representation and not a pillar of "facade democracies" (Ágh, 2017). What is more, Hallin and Mancini (2004, 2012) devote only little attention to the role and the attitude of the audience, which we believe to be a very important variable for understanding how media works.

Consequently, we will propose a new framework for comparative analysis of post-communist media systems, which will take into account the peculiarities of their development and current operation in the non-free political environment. This set of criteria could be further implemented for researching other post-Soviet countries.

Submission ID

984

Towards a conceptual approach of Arab media systems comparison

Authors

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Abstract

With the term “Arab Media” we refer to mass media in the so called MENA region – the Middle East and North Africa – a region that comprises more than 300 million people in more than 20 states stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the borders of Iran. People living in these states are of different ethnic origins and adhere to different religions. States are shaped by different forms of ruling, reaching from hereditary monarchies to federal republics. Some of them are considered the richest countries on earth, whereas others belong to the poorest in the world. Thus, the “Arab world” is by no means a homogenous entity – nor is its media. With this paper, we aim to provide a conceptual approach that allows for a systematic comparative analysis of these media systems.

For a long time the only and probably the most widely read attempt to classify Arab media systems has been the one by William Rugh, the first version published as early as 1979. According to his latest version (2004), there are four main models to classify Arab media systems: the mobilization, the loyalist, the diverse and the transitional model. Few other authors have made interesting contributions to further differentiate the types of media system and the dimensions of analysis such as Ayish (2002). What does exist is a number of single case studies of one Arab country or comparisons of two states. Often, these studies refer to Rugh’s classification or Siebert, Peterson and Schramm’s early typology (1956) or Hallin and Mancini’s work (2004) and speak about an “authoritarian” or – to a lesser degree – about a “polarized-pluralist” character of the respective media system. Yet, these classifications do not take the heterogeneity of the region into account.

A comparative analysis relies on common dimensions that are used to carve out the main characteristics of a specific system and that can be put in relation to yet another system. Therefore, we reflected about the dimensions and criteria typically used to analyze media systems, in general, and Arab media systems, in particular. We carefully weighed up the different approaches outlined above to see whether the respective dimensions help us to grasp both the heterogeneity and commonalities of the media in the MENA region. Our investigation led us to analyze the media in each country according to the following dimensions:

- Historical (transnational) developments
- Social composition, languages and geography
- Political system and legal framework
- Economy and ownership patterns

- Technology and infrastructure

Through an in-depths analysis of 18 countries we will highlight in our presentation main patterns characterizing Arab media systems, which reflect not only a variety of authoritarian governing structures but also a digital divide and a strong transnational connectivity. By doing so, the contribution aims also to critically review the dimensions been used and will thus contribute to methodological reflections of media system comparison.

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1789

The power of public memory: The Third Reich in all-German communicative memory

Authors

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Abstract

This study asks about the “sustainability” of memory regimes, using the example of Third Reich commemoration in reunified Germany. Are there differences in remembrance between East and West Germany – and if so, how do these differences relate to the GDR? What traces have the bearers of public memory – such as mass media or education – left behind in the memory of former GDR citizens? Did GDR remembrance have any effect on historical consciousness at all?

These questions become increasingly relevant against the background of the growing importance of the right-wing party “Alternative for Germany” and increasing incidents of right-wing extremism in East Germany. To this day, there is a persistent belief that East Germans, unlike West Germans, have never really come to terms with the National Socialist past, reinforcing right-wing tendencies. In the GDR, anti-fascism was part of the founding myth of the republic, which proclaimed real socialism, whereas National Socialism was considered an outgrowth of capitalism and imperialism.

To answer the research questions, in-depth interviews with more than 50 interviewees and focus group discussions with nearly 200 participants from East and West Germany were conducted between December 2018 and November 2019. The theoretical tool is provided on the one hand by Jan and Aleida Assmann by referring to their concepts of communicative and cultural memory as part of collective memory. The present study focuses on the question of which elements of cultural memory – such as mass media, museums, art – are reflected in the communicative memory of the East and West German population. On the other hand, we argue with Michel Foucault that memory is a discursive construction that follows certain rules. The question here is whether East Germans construct memory in their communicative memory according to rules other than West Germans.

The results show that Germans, despite socialization in different political regimes of memory, end up with the same frame of assessment, which is reflected not least in the desire to forget the crimes of National Socialism and to regain national pride. Here, East and West are in no way inferior to each other. Although this indicates that the respective public memory regime (East/West) has had little effect, this is refuted by the second result: People are aware of the prevailing West German public discourse of memory (We must not forget!) and adjust arguments accordingly. Although the majority of West Germans are no longer interested in Nazi remembrance, they use their hegemonic memory discourse as a continuous “Cold War weapon” against Easterners, whom they accuse of not having dealt with the Nazi past properly. East Germans with GDR socialization, to some extent, evaluate the GDR discourse of remembrance as the better one, but at the same time they reinterpret it in such a way that it again fits into the current hegemonic discourse of memory. The study provides foundations for the development of a theory on the influence of hegemonic memory practices (cultural memory) on the discursive construction of memory in the population (communicative memory).

Submission ID

2506

Antagonism, Disregard or Integration: Three Faces of the Relationship Between Professionals and Journalism Academics in Egypt

Authors

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Abstract

Different aspects of the relationships between academics and practitioners have been tremendously discussed in various studies (Blinder, 1997; Fitzgerald, 2003; Baldrige, Floyd, and Markóczy, 2004; Nicolai, Schulz, & Göbel, 2011)

Researchers have pointed out that the lack of congruity in those relationships is impeding potential desirable progress of the profession. Reviewing the literature In the Egyptian journalistic context has shown low interest of the issue. Egyptian laws in both academic institutions and media organization don't promote high degree of mutuality of consideration. According to the the Organization Law of Egyptian Universities and Egyptian Journalists' Syndicate law, professors in journalism officially are not allowed to work as journalists or being members of journalists' syndicate. In the other hand, despite the favorability of having practitioners as part time faculty in universities (Beer,1995; Reese,1999; Henderson, Bradey, 2008; Chan, 2010), journalists don't, or aren't, frequently invited to contribute in teaching or training journalism students in Egypt.

This qualitative study adopts a new model proposed to investigate and interpret the different aspects of the relationship between academics and practitioners in the field of journalism, considering the Egyptian context.

Data collected through semi-structured interviews conducted during the period from December 8th, 2018 to January 10th, 2019 with participants affiliated in public and private universities and media organizations in Cairo. The sample consisted of 28 interviewees represent four subgroups: journalism educators with expertise as journalists, journalism educators without expertise in the industry, journalists who have coached, supervised or judged graduation projects of journalism students, and journalists who haven't. The sample considered variety of expertise years for each side. The total time of recorded discussions was 19 hours. Each interview averaged between 35-45 minutes.

The findings support that the broader cultural and legal context affects the relationships between the two sides more than the internal and personal factors. Educators suggested precautions regarding the ethical considerations more than the technical part of the practice. Journalists are concerned about the applicability, relevance of the research, continued improvement of the curriculum and the originality of the pedagogy. Both sides agreed about the negative assessment of the relationships between them as it varies between hostility and underestimation. Few of the educators (30%) assumed that the cooperation between the two sides is improving.

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2721

Domesticating Foreign News in Romanian News Outlets: Global Issues in Local Frames

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Abstract

This paper investigates the domestication practices of three of the largest Romanian online news outlets when reporting on foreign news. We employ the concept of domestication to study the discursive features of news items that render global news meaningful for local audiences. Our research is situated at the intersection of two large research traditions in journalism studies. On the one hand, previous studies of international news flows have pointed to the tendencies of homogenization and cultural hegemony defined by the large international news agencies which serve as the main source of foreign reporting, and these tendencies can be expected to be strengthened by the economic pressures brought about by the rise of online news consumption. On

the other hand, studies in news values have emphasized that as structures used by journalists to make sense of the world, these are deeply rooted in local political, social, economic contexts, and that any taxonomy of news values should take into account the value-laden, indeed ideological nature of these. Our research investigates the ways in which generic news values like proximity or conflict are endowed with local relevance, and intersect with local sociopolitical languages or issue-specific frames. In doing so, apart from offering a descriptive analysis of the thematic sensitivities and symbolic geography of a national news culture, we also aim to contribute to the more general discussion of the relationship between news values and news frames. The analysis is structured around three main research questions: 1) as the language of journalism is highly formulaic, which are the recurrent discursive patterns that are used to construct newsworthiness? 2) which are the main domestication practices by which local relevance is constructed? 3) which are the local political languages that intersect with and frame global issues? Methodologically, we employ corpus-assisted discourse analysis (for RQ1) and qualitative content analysis (RQ 2 and RQ3) on a subcorpus generated from a large (41,000n) corpus of foreign news spanning three years, by filtering these for articles that index their relevance for the country by its name and demonyms. Results indicate that the prevalence of topics in the proximity corpus (i.e. the subsample in which local relevance is indexed) follow global patterns: terrorist attacks, natural catastrophes, dramatic political developments etc., domesticated either by turning to official local voices, eg. the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or shifting the focus from the informational value towards the emotional focus and human interest by offering eye witness stories and constructing profiles of Romanian participants of events. Turning to diaspora voices as a journalistic practice also reflects the importance of the emigration of workforce in postcommunist Romania and domestic political discussions, and functions as one of the main discursive anchors connecting local political languages and international affairs, eg. by offering a specific outlook on the globally relevant issue of migration. Further such anchors identified are geographical distance, tradition of economic relations and emotional proximity.

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3682