UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

MEDIA AND CONFLICT:

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

JOINT WORKSHOP FOR EARLY-CAREER RESEARCHERS

School of Media and Communication
University of Leeds
United Kingdom

September 6
2016

About the Workshop

The workshop focuses on the link between media and civil and violent conflicts in developing and democratising countries. The workshop is jointly supported by two EU-funded projects, MeCoDEM and INFOCORE. Some of the papers presented at the workshop have emerged from these projects, while others are independent studies with related thematic concerns.

The workshop is jointly organised at the host institution by Charlotte Elliott and Lone Sorensen. Both are PhD Candidates at the School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds. Charlotte and Lone are also both Research Assistants on WP2 for the MeCoDEM project, and co-coordinators of the MeCoDEM Early Career Researcher Network.

Programme

09:15 to 09:30   Check-in
09:30 to 10:00   Welcome
10:00 to 11:30   Panel 1: *The mobilisation of identity*
11:30 to 12:00   Coffee break
12:00 to 13:00   Panel 2: *Media representations of conflict*
13:00 to 14:00   Lunch
14:00 to 15:30   Roundtable on the theme 'polarisation'
15:30 to 16:00   Coffee break
16:00 to 17:30   Panel 3: *New approaches to studying the media's role in conflict*
17:30 to 18:00   Wrap-up

Panels

Panel 1: The mobilisation of identity
Chair: Dr Jason Vincent Cabañes

▪ Nino Abzianidze
 Nationalist discourse as a network: Analysing the structure and dynamics of nationalist appeals in Georgian print media

▪ Ieva Zakareviciute
 Visual representations of religion and its role in Middle Eastern conflicts

▪ Yosra El Gendi
 Networking marginalized voices: Spreading solidarity for the Maspero Protest on Twitter

Panel 2: Media representations of conflict
Chair: Dr Giorgia Aiello

▪ Ines Gundlach
 More than Nameless Victims: Afghan Women in US and German Media during the War on Terror

▪ Aleksandra Krstic
 Transitional justice process in Serbia: the issue of media bias

Panel 3: New approaches to studying the media's role in conflict
Chair: Dr Katy Parry

▪ José Antonio Brambila Ramírez
 Scaling down: The menu of manipulation in subnational hybrid regimes

▪ Heather Ford and Walid Al–Saqaf
 Framesnatching: How Twitter conversations are shaping political conflict in emerging democracies

▪ Katya Stalpouskaya
 Automatic extraction of agendas for action from news coverage

Roundtable: *On polarisation*

Political debate is becoming increasingly polarised in transitional as well as in established democracies, which raises some interesting questions: *Are changes in the media system a contributing cause to this development, with increased levels of commercialisation encouraging conflict frames, and online personalisation developing so-called 'filter bubbles' that serve as echo chambers for extreme positions? Or do new media technologies rather serve to encourage deliberation? Are political developments, such as the rise of populist politics and nationalism, playing an active role in promoting polarising narratives, or are they merely symptoms of underlying social ills?* We aim to debate as a group both the institutional, technological and social dimensions of the causes of polarisation and its consequences for democratic development. A roundtable discussion will follow four panellists' thoughts, ideas, ruminations on these themes in the first half hour, followed by an hour of group discussion.

Presenters and Roundtable Participants

Nino Abzianidze, PhD Candidate,
NCCR Democracy,
University of Zurich

Dr Walid Al–Saqaf, Postdoctoral
Researcher, Department of Media Studies,
Stockholm University

Dr Chris Birchall, Lecturer in Digital
Media, School of Media and
Communication,
University of Leeds

Yosra El Gendi, Research Officer,
Department of Political Science,
American University in Cairo

Dr Heather Ford, University Academic
Fellow in Digital Methods, School of
Media and Communication,
University of Leeds

Ines Gundlach, PhD Candidate,
Department of War Studies,
King´s College London

Dr Aleksandra Krstic, Postdoctoral
Researcher, Faculty of Political Sciences,
University of Belgrade

José Antonio Brambila Ramírez, PhD
Candidate, School of Media and
Communication,
University of Leeds

Lone Sorensen, PhD Candidate,
School of Media and Communication,
University of Leeds

Katya Stalpouskaya, PhD Candidate,
Department of Communication Studies
and Media Research,
Ludwig–Maximilian University

Ieva Zakareviciute, PhD Candidate,
Department of Communication Studies
and Media Research,
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Chairs

Dr Giorgia Aiello, Associate Professor in
Media and Communication*

Dr Jason Vincent Cabañes, Lecturer in
International Communication*

Dr Katy Parry, Lecturer in
Media and Communication*

Professor Katrin Voltmer, Professor of
Communication and Democracy*

* School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds

Abstracts

Nino Abzianidze, PhD Candidate
NCCR Democracy
University of Zurich

Nationalist discourse as a network: Analysing the structure and dynamics of nationalist appeals in Georgian print media

The literature on civil conflict has been nearly in consent about the argument that the process of transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic system can bear risks of violent conflict. While most of the authors in this strand of the literature have agreed that exclusionary nationalist rhetoric in media is one of the most important links in the causal chain driving this process, analysis of the "marketplace of ideas" is mainly concerned with the structural factors such as media ownership and journalistic practices, or with qualitative studies of discourse in media leaving out the systematic analysis of media content itself. In addition, while the crucial role of elites has been acknowledged in forging nationalist conflicts, little is known if there is any systematic variance, either in degree or in kind, in the rhetoric of the different types of actors. This dissertation aims at filling in this gap by analysing the structure and dynamics of the exclusionary nationalist discourse in the Georgian print media over the democratization period (1991–2012).

Broadly speaking, the study looks at (1) whether certain instances of the democratization process, such as increased political participation, lead to intensified exclusionary and hostile nationalism in the media content and (2) how does the extent of exclusionary and hostile nationalism in the media vary depending on the variation in actor types? For this purpose, a quantitative content analysis of the Georgian print media is conducted. The case of Georgia is selected as the most–likely case of democratization and civil conflict. The extent of exclusionary nationalist discourse across actors (elites) is measured with the original codebook created specifically for the analysis of the nationalist appeals.

During the presentation I will focus on the chapter of my dissertation which looks at the role of individual actors in the spread of the nationalist discourse. The main argument is that the civil conflict literature suffers from the misconception of the role of the media in general, and particularly that of journalists in the causal process by labelling them as "transmitters", "channels" or the "middlemen". The chapter bridges the propositions and findings of this literature with the premises of communication science, especially with the strand focusing on the media systems in transitional/democratizing countries and argues that journalistic agency should be taken seriously in the process of spreading nationalist discourse. Using the method of Social Network Analysis, the chapter shows that the journalist is the most dominant actor pursuing nationalist discourse independently of who is in the power, whether it is an electoral period or not and whether it is in the early stage of democratization process or the late. The picture remains the same when controlled for the different media outlets. The only instance when a journalist is not the first most central actor sending nationalist appeals is when the press is still state–owned. This dominance of a journalist in the nationalist discourse is explained by the hybridity of the transitional media systems manifested in the combination of the relative freedom of the media as compared to the authoritarian regimes and the lack of journalistic professionalism.

Walid Al–Saqaf, Postdoctoral Researcher
Department of Media Studies, Stockholm University
Heather Ford, Academic Fellow
School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds

Framesnatching: How Twitter conversations are shaping political conflict in emerging democracies

The state of the nation address in South Africa is an annual event where the president outlines his/her plans for the coming year in terms of governmental priorities, etc. In 2015, the event was disrupted when the opposition party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) called for President Jacob Zuma to answer questions about a controversial R208–million security upgrade to his private home. The EFF members were removed from the National Assembly chamber by security personnel. South Africa's opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, walked out in solidarity with the EFF, protesting the police presence in the National Assembly. While journalists were prevented from reporting the news as it happened – both because of the use of cell phone blocking devices and a disorder clause to protect the 'dignity' of the house – discussion about the event was significant on Twitter, where about 100,000+ tweets were published using the #SONA hashtag.

We investigate the ways in which SONA was framed by various stakeholders in the run up to, and during the event, as different frame–makers struggled for prominence. We ask: How did the South African government and opposition try to frame the event on social media? What were the responses to these competing frames by citizens, opposition groups and institutional actors? How did the conflict parties try to manage those responses? And, how did the Twitter conversation shape the resulting conflict? We ask these questions in order to reflect on how the medium of Twitter and its growing prominence in emerging democracies is being used to shape political conflict with a particular focus on the relationship between political elites and citizens.

We present the initial results from our empirical study of #SONA tweets in 2015, highlighting the resulting themes and theoretical links and demonstrating the particular mixed methods that we have used in the project so far. Such methods include the development and use of a tailored social media software analysis tool for the MeCoDEM project called MeCodify that aids researchers in the visualization and analysis of Twitter data.

Yosra El Gendi, Research Officer
Department of Political Science
American University in Cairo

Networking marginalized voices: Spreading solidarity for the Maspero Protest on Twitter

Much research has been produced on the role of social media in assisting various groups in the mobilization for offline protest activity. Their ability to diffuse information speedily, through information cascades, decreases the cost for coordination and mobilization for collective action. Similarly, lots of research has been produced on the impact of networks and connections between activists in facilitating mobilization. However, very little has been produced on how marginalized groups, with little online connectedness, are capable of gaining the attention of social media spaces.

This paper holds that some social networks operate according to power laws that hold that some actors in the network assume greater influence and importance than others by virtue of their connectedness (Faris, 2013). In the case of minority's movements that are embedded in fundamentally different networks than those influential actors, how does social media play a connecting role? Understanding the patterns of online mobilization for marginalized groups' issues is thus a gap in the literature that needs to be addressed. This paper wishes to question how Coptic Christian demands and protests are propagated on Twitter – a domain which is highly dominated by secular revolutionary activists and on which Coptic groups are virtually absent. It focuses on the events of the Maspero protest in Egypt which was a Coptic Christian led protest in October 2011 that ended in bloody clashes. The attacks, going viral on Twitter, led to the mobilization of the revolutionary secular groups, and brought the matter national (and international) attention.

By analysing Twitter data obtained through the MeCodify platform, collecting data from Twitter for two weeks before and after the incident, this paper seeks to answer two questions. First, how are Coptic minority issues framed, spread and gain popularity on Twitter? Second, what are the effects of being based in different networks? Did that lead the protest organizers to miss information and thus make miscalculations? Our initial findings show that mobilization for the Maspero protest on Twitter took place through interlinking activists: individual activists that were connected to Coptic groups and to the secular revolutionaries and who used a secular human rights discourse to which other Twitter activists could relate. The fundamentally distinct networks that these movements were embedded in may be useful in explaining the reasons for the miscalculation of the Coptic protests groups who led rapid escalations and which eventually ended in bloody clashes.

Ines Gundlach, PhD Candidate
Department of War Studies
King´s College London

More than Nameless Victims: Afghan Women in US and German Media during the War on Terror

Since the attacks on September 11th, 2001, much has been written regarding the oppression and the liberation of Afghan women. However, the academic debate shows shortcomings insofar as a comparative approach to the constructions and utilizations of Afghan women in the media according to national contexts has been neglected. Instead, a view that tends to overly homogenize "Western" discourse and emphasizes the construction of Afghan women as victims has been prevalent. Following a constructivist, comparative mixed methods approach, this project strives to add to the academic debate through the analysis of US and German elite newspapers. It posits that constructions other than that of the Afghan woman as a victim, such as the Afghan woman as an agent for democratic change, are not only an integral and vital part of the media discourse, but may also be highly reflective of their national contexts. Due to stark variances in approaching the Afghanistan intervention, the US and Germany in particular allow for a critical comparison that may reveal both the commonalities in the representation of Afghan women in the media, as well as the differences that underline the heterogeneity of these constructions even within "Western" news discourses.

Aleksandra Krstic, Postdoctoral Researcher
Faculty of Political Sciences
University of Belgrade

Transitional justice process in Serbia: the issue of media bias

The aim of this paper is to explore how the Serbian media covered political and societal polarisation triggered by the arrest of the former Yugoslav president Slobodan Milošević and his extradition to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague in June 2001. Therefore, we draw on results of a content analysis of four national Serbian print and broadcast media and in–depth interviews with journalists, civil society actors and public authorities, conducted within the EU–FP7 funded project "Media, Conflict and Democratisation" (www.mecodem.eu). This paper particularly focuses on the issue of media bias and diversity of opinions in the coverage of transitional justice process. The results of content analysis show that inclination towards one of the sides in the conflict very often occurred, particularly in the portrayal of Milošević and his supporters, the issue of personal and collective guilt in the Balkans context, the actions of the government and cooperation with the ICTY. According to results of the interviews with journalists, the opposing viewpoints and alternative interpretations were offered to audience, but the coverage was mainly determined by editorial alignment with new democratic elites, which were expected to reform the country after a decade long authoritarian rule. On the other side, perceptions of civil society actors and public authorities engaged in the events of Milošević's arrest and extradition explain more in–depth how the Serbian media favoured particular topics and opinions, as well as whether their relationships with journalists, established during the authoritarian rule, affected the coverage of transitional justice during the first year of the country's democratisation.

José Antonio Brambila Ramírez, PhD Candidate
School of Media and Communication
University of Leeds

Scaling down: The menu of manipulation in subnational hybrid regimes

Scholars (Behrend and Whitehead, 2016) notice that there are cases where national–level democratic regimes coexist with less–democratic or undemocratic regimes, especially in Federal democracies (Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, India and Russia). To categorize this phenomenon, they speak about the emergence of subnational hybrid regimes within one country, which are mixed in nature and contain both democratic and authoritarian elements (Karl 1995). Drawing upon this assumptions, this paper asks: How does the recognition of subnational "hybrid" regimes affect media system theory (commonly focused in the national state as unit of analysis) (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), and how do local powers contain the local press in those regimes?

Drawing upon the literature of media systems (Hallin and Mancini, 2004 and 2012) and comparative politics (Snyder, 2001), in the first part I argue that the recognition of subnational hybrid regimes enriched media system theory by introducing comparisons of units of analysis below the national state (Esser, 2013). This recognition avoids some methodological fallacies – such as "invalid part to whole mapping" (Gibson, 2013) – and affects theory development, that is, to what extend can we conceive a sub–national media system? (Chakravartty and Roy, 2013).

Therefore, using the Mexican case, in the second part of the piece I argue that after 16 years of the transition to democracy at a national level, local political powers (local incumbent, local groups and local government) implement strategies that limited the exercise of press freedom in the Mexican subnational hybrid regimes (Gibson, 2013). Those strategies include legal, administrative, violent and technological means of censorship (Chalaby, 2000). I argue that local powers implement successfully all these strategies in their jurisdiction, with a few or without any kind of local or national check and balance. To illustrate this, I use novel data coming from a set of interviews that I recently conducted in Mexico with personnel of non–profit organisations, national authorities and local journalists.

Finally, the paper concludes that the recognition of the subnational hybrid regimes is relevant to analyse the uneven exercise of press freedom in new Federal democracies, like Mexico, where each local media arena is constrained differently by the subnational political and social system in which it is embedded.

Katya Stalpouskaya, PhD Candidate
Department of Communication Studies and Media Research
Ludwig–Maximilian University

Automatic extraction of agendas for action from news coverage

The first and second level of agenda setting studies have shown that media not only define what to think *about*, but they also set attributes and contribute to evaluations – they determine *how* to think about an issue (McCombs, 2005). This function of media becomes crucial for reports on war and violent conflicts, when most of the audience do not have direct access to the field and are informed about what is happening solely via media. But can media go beyond issues, attribute agenda setting and also serve as a "fortune teller"; that is, foresee and predict further developments and possible outcomes?

The present PhD thesis investigates on the further role of media – action agenda setting or agenda for action. Agenda for action is a piece of semantic information that expresses a request, desire, call or hope for the desirable future. The concept has been developed within the INFOCORE theoretical framework (Stalpouskaya & Baden, 2015) and can be seen as a continuation of agenda setting theory (c.f. Moon, 2014). I argue that extracting agendas for action from media coverage can predict collective action which is of particular interest and importance in war and violent conflict.

Within the scope of my thesis I employ the methods of computational linguistics to develop a tool capable of automatic extraction and classification of agendas for action, to enable the extraction of agendas from large scale corpora. Agenda for action extraction is a two–step process: in the first step I identify whether a sentence in a given corpus expresses an agenda for action or not; the classification of distilled agendas takes place in the second step. I intend to capture not only explicit agendas for action, such as "We must fight them" or "They request the prosecution of the rebels", but also hidden or implicit ones, e.g., "Peace is the only answer" or "They condemn the execution of the rebel leaders". Given an overarching thematic focus of war and conflict, the developed taxonomy of agendas for action distinguishes between agendas for cooperative, restrictive treatment, general expressions that something should be done or agendas for non–action. Currently the accuracy score for the first step has reached 0,83; for the second it approaches 0,55.

Ieva Zakareviciute, PhD Candidate
Department of Communication Studies and Media Research
Ludwig–Maximilian University

Visual representations of religion and its role in Middle Eastern conflicts

Both in the escalation of violent mass conflict and in its resolution, media plays an essential role. The particular significance of visuals in media reporting on war is widely discussed among academics as one of the key factors of the public's understanding of violent conflict. Visuals are considered essential because they are a means of intuitive understanding and stimulate emotive reactions among the audience. However, they are often semantically ambiguous and can refer to a variety of cultural ideas and identities. Therefore, as all forms of communication, they unfold their intended meaning only in relation to given cultural knowledge and/or in combination with the accompanying text. Today, when religion is quoted to be one of the main aspects within the conflicts in the Middle East, it is crucial to understand what role media directly and indirectly attributes to religion when building meta– narratives about conflicts.

Relying on visual discourse methods and moral and conflict anthropology approaches, I explore how international media visually frames Islam and its role while covering two conflicts in the Middle East (Israel-Palestine and Syria). I will examine media usage of metaphorical and symbolic pictures, invoking religious connotations and illustrating war coverage and conflict stories. I will seek to determine what are the dominating imagery thematic categories (e.g. 'rituals', 'ceremonies', 'symbols', etc.) and in which contexts they appear (e.g. protests, violence, suffering, etc.). In addition, relying on methods of visual semiotics, I aim to study what visual tools and stylistic devices are employed to depict religion and conflict-related coverage, and how they are used. I will discuss whether or not the techniques applied serve to aestheticize conflict as a way to iconize and extend critical events, and to capture the audience's gaze in quickly changing information scenes.

MeCoDEM – Media, Conflict and Democratisation

The project, 'Media, Conflict and Democratisation' (MeCoDEM) investigates the role of traditional media and ICTs in conflicts that accompany and follow transitions from authoritarian rule to more democratic forms of government. The project aims to investigate:

- The way in which traditional media portray democratisation conflicts and whether media coverage contributes to the polarisation or moderation of divisions;
- The diffusion of conflict messages through new ICTs;
- The role perceptions, ethics and working practices of journalists in conflict situations;
- The communication behaviour of conflict parties – governments, political leaders, civil society groups – during democratisation conflicts and how communications heightens or ameliorates tensions.

The empirical research is carried out in four countries: Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa, each of them representing different scenarios of democratic change. A set of case studies provides in-depth understanding of the interplay between communication and the dynamics of democratisation conflicts. The research aims to contribute to communicative practices that are conducive for democratic governance and inclusive participation in public life.

The project consortium includes eight partner institutions from six countries: University of Leeds (coordinating institution), University of Belgrade, University of Hamburg, University of Cape Town, University of Oxford, Stockholm University, Ruhr University Bochum and American University in Cairo.

More information is available at: www.mecodem.eu

INFOCORE – (In)Forming Conflict Prevention, Response and Resolution: The Role of Media in Violent Conflict

INFOCORE is an international collaborative research project that comprises leading experts from all social sciences dealing, and includes nine renowned research institutions from seven countries. Its main aim is to investigate the role(s) that media play in the emergence or prevention, the escalation or de-escalation, the management, resolution, and reconciliation of violent conflict. INFOCORE provides a systematically comparative assessment of various kinds of media, interacting with a wide range of relevant actors and producing diverse kinds of conflict coverage. It focuses on three main conflict regions – the Middle East, the West Balkans, and the African Great Lakes area. Its findings address both the socially interactive production process behind the creation of conflict coverage, and the dynamics of information and meaning disseminated via the media.

INFOCORE focuses on the conditions that bring about different media roles in the cycle of conflict and peace building. It generates knowledge on the social processes underlying the production of conflict news, and the inherent dynamics of conflict news contents, in a systematically comparative fashion. Based on this perspective, the project identifies the conditions under which media play specific constructive or destructive roles in preventing, managing, and resolving violent conflict, and building sustainable peace.

To assess the roles of media for shaping conflict perceptions and responses to ongoing conflicts, INFOCORE analyses the dynamics of conflict news content over time. It identifies recurrent patterns of information diffusion and the polarization/consolidation of specific frames and determines the main contextual factors that influence the roles media play in conflict and peace building. Specifically, the project assesses the roles of individual agendas and resources, professional norms, media organizations and systems, political systems, and characteristics of the conflict situation.

The INFOCORE project team has taken up its work on January 1, 2014. Its findings and selected data will be accessible to all public. During and beyond the project duration, we invite collaboration by interested researchers and practitioners.

More information is available at: www.infocore.eu

REVISED PROGRAMME

09:15 - 09:30 Check-in

09:30 - 09:45 Welcome

09:45 - 11:15 Panel 1: *New approaches to studying the media's role in conflict*

Chair: Dr Jason Vincent Cabañes

- José Antonio Brambila Ramírez:

  Scaling down: The menu of manipulation in subnational hybrid regimes

- Heather Ford and Walid Al–Saqaf:

  Framesnatching: How Twitter conversations are shaping political conflict in emerging democracies

- Katya Stalpouskaya:

  Automatic extraction of agendas for action from news coverage

11:15 - 11:45 Coffee

11:45 - 13:15 Roundtable: *Polarisation*

Chair: Prof: Katrin Voltmer

13:15 - 14:15 Lunch

14:15 - 16:15 Panel 2: *Mobilisation of identity* (Chair: Dr Katy Parry) and

Media representation of conflict (Chair: Dr Giorgia Aiello)

- Nino Abzianidze:

  Nationalist discourse as a network: Analysing the structure and dynamics of nationalist appeals in Georgian print media

- Ieva Zakareviciute:

  Visual representations of religion and its role in Middle Eastern conflicts

- Ines Gundlach:

  More than Nameless Victims: Afghan Women in US and German Media during the War on Terror

- Aleksandra Krstic:

  Transitional justice process in Serbia: the issue of media bias

16:15 - 17:30 *Researching media and conflict in large-scale project networks: MeCoDEM and INFOCORE* - with coffee!