

**EASA Media Anthropology Network
e-Seminar Series**

<http://www.media-anthropology.net/workingpapers.htm>

**E-Seminar on Urban Larssen's working paper
"Imagining a World of Free Expression in the Making:
Romania and Global Media Development"**

(23 – 30 January 2007)

John Postill (Sheffield Hallam University)

jpostill@usa.net

Message subject: *Larssen e-seminar opens now*

Dear All

I'd like to welcome you to our 15th EASA media anthropology e-seminar. The seminar will run on this mailing list for a week from now until Tuesday 30 January. The working paper, by Urban Larssen (Stockholm University) is entitled "Imagining a World of Free Expression in the Making: Romania and Global Media Development" and you've still got time to read the PDF version available at <http://www.media-anthropology.net/workingpapers.htm>

Urban Larssen is a former reporter with a Swedish local daily and presently a PhD candidate at the Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University. He is about to complete his thesis on Romanian postsocialist journalism and the media development NGO-sphere, a study based on fieldwork in Bucharest and supervised by Ulf Hannerz. He has taught ethnographic methods and a course called "Media and the World", on Swedish reporting about other countries on issues such as migration, ethnicity, honour killings, etc.

The discussant will be S. Elizabeth (Liz) Bird, who is professor and chair of anthropology, University of South Florida (Tampa, USA). She has published three books, including *The Audience in Everyday Life: Living in a Media World* (Routledge, 2003), which won the 2004 Outstanding Book Award from the International Communication Association. She has also published more than 50 articles and chapters in the field of media and cultural studies. She is currently working on an edited collection of essays on the Anthropology of News and Journalism.

Later today, Liz will be posting her comments directly to this list, after which Urban will respond. The discussion will then be open to all. Please bear in mind that these sessions can only work if we have wide and sustained participation, so all contributions are very welcome. To post, please write directly to medianthro@easaonline.org, i.e. not to me.

Thanking our presenter and discussant for their efforts, it's over to Liz now!

John

Elizabeth Bird (University of South Florida)

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Message subject: *E-seminar: Urban Larssen's paper*

Below is my response to Urban Larssen's paper; I guess this now opens the seminar discussion.

Liz Bird

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**Response to Urban Larssen's "Imagining a World of Free Expression
in the Making: Romania and Global Media Development"**

**for the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA)
Media Anthropology Network e-seminar 23-30 January 2007**

By Liz Bird (Department of Anthropology, University of South Florida, USA)

Larssen prefaces his paper by telling us that this is very much a work-in-progress rather than a finished paper, and that is quite clear. Rather than presenting one central argument, he raises several interesting and useful ideas, and essentially invites comment. I liked that approach, and I will try to respond in the same spirit.

In the developing field of media anthropology, as I've argued in the paper cited by Larssen, journalism and news have not had a central place. In the two main collections that seek to define the field (Askew and Wilks and Larkin, Abu-Lughod, Ginsberg), the importance of news is acknowledged but not addressed. The focus of both collections is on entertainment media, as it also has been in cultural studies, with "journalism studies" often comprising an almost separate discourse. Certainly there is a growing number of anthropologists who study journalism, but there is not yet a unified field here. Yet as Larssen points out, in today's mediated world, the role of news (and other media that make claims on reality) is crucial for understanding almost any social and cultural phenomenon. In almost any society now, anthropologists must take into account the question of how issues are presented in the news media – how can we talk about cultural attitudes to the war in Iraq, or abortion, or same-sex marriage, without looking carefully at how these issues are framed through media? For instance, an anthropologist who studied the discourse of euthanasia in the Netherlands (through traditional ethnography as well as analysis of media) concluded that in that country the debate does not center around issues of religion and faith, whereas in the United States, in common with many issues, the religious arguments are inescapable. So as Larssen suggests, the study of journalism and journalistic discourse should be central to media anthropology, and to anthropology generally. (In saying this, I do not want to suggest that "news" and "entertainment" are two entirely distinct discourses; of course they are not. But as Larssen argues,

the discourse about news, whether popular discourse or that of media critics/academics, suggests a special role for media that make explicit claims on reality).

So I liked Larssen's approach to understanding the rapidly-changing identity of news media in Romania, which he will elaborate in the dissertation. While he could have focused entirely on an ethnography of newsmaking, he saw how important it would be to understand the global discourse on what "real" journalism is, and how that affected the way the news was developing in that country. This interface between the global and the local clearly is a central concern for contemporary anthropology, as articulated in the work of Appadurai and the many who have followed him. Larssen asks the question: Are the values of democratic journalism universal, as indeed they tend to be presented in the professional discourse? Or are local cultural conditions so unique and specific that each context will develop its own understanding of what journalism is?

And of course this debate is not something that began in anthropology only after the contested discourse of globalization began to take hold. It is at the heart of anthropology's long-standing wrestling match between notions of cultural relativism and universal human rights. Most of us, I think, now accept the basic premise that there are universal rights – and that perhaps a free press, aimed at somehow uncovering the truth about the world, is one of those rights. That certainly would seem to be the basis for the global media development movement discussed by Larssen. At the same time, as anthropologists we value the uniqueness of the local. We celebrate, for example, evidence that suggests resistance to Western popular culture – people who take Western texts and turn them into something else through a variety of media-related practices. So should journalism also have its own culturally-unique set of practices that may bear very little relationships to traditional (and largely U.S.-based) notions of fairness, balance, and objectivity? For instance, as researchers into the phenomenon of "tabloidisation" have suggested, a movement towards greater personalization, subjectivity, and sensationalism, largely decried in the West as lowering of standards, may actually be liberating in post-Soviet contexts.

Furthermore, even while NGO's and the other bearers of the professional, reforming discourse of journalism continue to present such basic, objective ideals as natural, the critique within media studies has essentially deconstructed these very notions. We know, for example, that the ideology of objectivity often hobbles journalists, forcing them to report "both sides" of a story, even when common sense tells them that only one side is actually "true;" or dutifully reporting the official words of the Bush administration without comment, because such comments would become "analysis," and thus outside the boundaries of real journalism.

In all, I found Larssen's paper thought-provoking and useful. While Romania is his subject, in this paper his goal is not so much to speak of that country but rather to raise issues about how anthropologists might contribute to the larger understanding of the role of news in creating reality both locally and globally. There were many things he was not able to mention; for instance, he touches on, but does not elaborate how the rise of new media, citizen journalism, blogs and so on, are already beginning to transform the professional authority of journalism. Will the discourse of universal democratic media, fairness, and objectivity survive this transformation? And if it does

not, have we lost something very important? For all my argument (which Larssen cites) that we need to understand the local context of journalism, I also believe as he does, that journalists, like anthropologists have a duty to seek the truth, however contested that has become. He offers us some useful ideas to move the anthropology of news and journalism forward, and I look forward to reading the comments to follow.

John Postill (Sheffield Hallam University)

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Message subject: *Over to Urban*

Thanks a lot for those comments, Liz. It's over to Urban now for a brief response, after which the discussion will be open to all on the list.

Best wishes

John

Urban Larssen (Stockholm University)

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Message subject: *response on response*

List members,

Elizabeth Bird's response to my text seem generally supportive of it and her summarizing comments correlates basically with my intentions. As she does not ask any specific questions, I will at this point refrain from adding more to what the text already contains and await further comments.

/Urban

Jens Kjaerulff (Aarhus University)

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Message subject: *Globalisms*

Hi Urban, I found this an interesting read, and I liked the open-ended "draft" format.

One thing that sprang to mind is that while your focus is journalism, you also describe aspects which might bring perspectives to journalism apart from the 'Media

Anthropology’, to which you look at the end (reasonably, given the context of this forum).

You state (p.2) that your focus is the Romanian scenario as a case of “global media development discourse”. In one reading, the emphasis here is MEDIA development discourse, of global proportions (and so tying in with media anthropology). But in an alternative reading, imagining and creating “globality” (universals of various kinds) are clearly also at issue. Your material and discussion of (e.g.) “development” suggests as much, and you could perhaps consider developing this more as a take also on media and journalism (i.e. “GLOBAL [...] discourse”).

What I am suggesting is to look to anthropology of globalization for analytical inspiration, and I am thinking in particular of Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, who approaches “globalization”, not as one but many “globalist discourses” one might say (“globalisms” as she has it, Tsing 2000). This is quite different from Appadurai’s approach to media (see Tsing’s extended critique of Appadurai, Tsing 2000), and from accepting various “universals” as basic premises (both mentioned in your discussant’s comment). In Tsing’s recently published monograph (Tsing 2005), the point of departure is the “frontier” (as she has it) of the rainforest in Borneo. The scenario in Romania that you are describing seems to me to share some of that “frontier” character, which brings out the variety of globalist/universalist constructions that Tsing examines (e.g. of science, economy, development, and indeed various “freedoms”). Given the material you have presented in this paper, I imagine Tsing’s work could provide a novel source of inspiration in your contribution to media anthropology. Just a “draft” suggestion.

Cheers // Jens

Cited Literature:

Tsing, A 2000: The Global Situation (Cultural Anthropology 15: 327-360)

Tsing, A 2005: Friction. An Ethnography of Global Connection (Princeton University Press)

Daniel Taghioff (SOAS)

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Message subject: *Imagining Participation, Publics and Journalists*

Hi Urban and list

Elizabeth’s response is interesting: She points out that you have a set of issues that you seem to want to explore, and I agree with her view.

Firstly your work feels very close to the sort of work I am embarking on doing, looking at the relationship between NGOs and the Media and other publics in India.

(This is via a Swedish organization called Svalorna, so perhaps you have comments on the differences between Swedish NGOs and other “civil society” actors you have encountered.)

This makes me very interested in some of the issues you raise. I agree with Elizabeth again about the relationship between universality and diverse practice, this tension is particularly strong when considering NGO and Media relations.

I subscribe to a loose sense of there being some universals, but what is really interesting is how these are expressed in practice. The media NGO situation seems interesting because two or more sets of universals stand in tension with each other, whilst often being articulated as part of some seamless whole.

“Civil Society” and more ambitiously “Global Civil society” is a fairly nebulous idea, but implies some sense of participation beyond the state and business. As such it is one form of democratic ideal.

“The public sphere” can be seen as another such participative ideal, but more often than not it is expressed more in terms of “transparency” more as a space of objectivity or information flow than of participation.

This is what I have observed of the kinds of international development governance discourses I have encountered so far.

Now participation and information do not sit easily together, at least as cold theoretical constructs: One implies human agency and all its unpredictability, the other implies clarity and predictability, and thus has a tendency to involve downplaying human agency.

Anyway, as Elizabeth points out, what is more interesting is what happens in practice. In my mind Urban is looking at the connections in terms of discursive practice between discussions on transition and development, and discussions of journalistic professionalism.

My question is, within this set of associations, or articulations, are their tensions, or doublings of discourse and role images, which suggest that my current armchair-theoretical concerns about information and agency, or “civil society” and “the public” are being played out in practice, and if so could he give us some thickish description of this?

If not, could he give some thickish description of why not?

Daniel

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John Postill (Sheffield Hallam University)

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Message subject: *1. Social scripts, 2. Migration*

Many thanks for a highly readable and dialogical paper, Urban. Having lived in Bucharest for three years during the same period, I look forward to reading other chapters!

I wanted to ask you about the uneven spread and appropriation of various parts of the journalistic ‘package’ from Western urban centres to Bucharest. I imagine that one thing is the fairly unproblematic adoption of universal ideals such as freedom of speech or impartial reporting (at least into everyday discourse, or e.g. when applying for Soros funding) and quite another that of social scripts (or schemas) requiring a certain kind of imported knowledge and skilled performance, for instance when interviewing a politician. What happened to the scripts learned or half-learned at workshops with Western ‘experts’? Did Romanian journalists go back to business as usual after the ‘capacity-building’ session was over? Were such sessions more of an opportunity to network and beef up their CVs than to learn from supposed experts who knew little about Romania or its field of journalism?

I was also curious about the question of migration. Unlike, say, computer programmers or academics, presumably most Romanian journalists face an insurmountable language barrier when applying for jobs in Western countries. Is this a source of frustration for young journalists wanting to emigrate? Do those who want to go West have to switch careers? Perhaps what I’m trying to get at is the strange nexus in which young Romanian journalists seem to find themselves when compared to other Romanian professionals. They are at the centre of Western cultural engineering, and yet very few can transfer their professional skills to Western metropolises to earn a living.

John

Mihai Coman (University of Bucharest)

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Message subject: *all in one*

Dear All

Urban announcement on the topic of his paper made me curious and eager to read it on an intellectual and personal level. Firstly because I witnessed Urban's first inquiries for his research when he worked with my students and share with me some of his areas of interest; and secondly as someone working (meaning writing) from almost 15 years on Romanian journalists, the topic was more than attractive.

As Urban said it is still an "unfinished" text – and unfortunately we can not read the already finished parts of his thesis (as far as I understood it includes ethnographic accounts on Romanian journalists work and on NGO workers activity, plus analysis on discourses – media or non-media – on Romania and on journalism and western media and their role in social development). This project implies a huge amount of raw material and offers fertile opportunities for anthropological interpretation.

So, in some sense what we have to discuss is the visible part of an iceberg, and this visible part speaks more about Urban's personal interrogations and doubts – which can not be put in a perspective due to the absence of the "under-water" body.

In some sense, I'm puzzled because I do not know the aims and status of his text. Is it a captatio benevolentia introduction to the thesis? Is it a synthesis of the directions of his research? Is it a presentation of the theoretical paradigms and choices? Is it an overview of the historical, geographical, political and media frames that help the reader to understand the context of the research? One can find bits of all of these, but none is clarified and transformed into an analytical or epistemological reflection. In other words the text follows more the logic of an essay (and is fluent, attractive and charming) and opens themes of debate and thought - as Elisabeth has pointed out – but it seems to me that it sacrifices for persuasive aims the scientific dimension. It is not as far an anthropological text, but a text that addresses, among other things, some anthropological concerns.

Few remarks:

Page 9. What happens in Romanian TV studios in December 1989 can hardly be considered as a "genuine and somewhat spectacular public sphere in Jurgen Habermans' sense", at least after reading Michel Schudson studies. It was an arena for militant, passionate and subjective expression; people there never constitute themselves in a public, they were less concerned by the public interest (remember the lies, rumors, manipulative stances and media bias in the end) and it never happens that "the medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason"

Page 10. The first to come to implement westernized ways of teaching journalism were the French, asked in January 1990 by the prime minister Petre Roman (who studied in France) to help Romania to create a school of journalism. Americans and BBC came later, starting 1991

The role of international organizations promoting journalistic western standards by training programs have to be presented not by a list of organizations but by the number of activities; some were more substantial, some were phantomatic; the fascinating anthropological side is the interplay of idealistic (meaning ideological)

discourses and personal interest, the fight for control over the resources and over the legitimating discourse and the ambiguous role of journalistic practice and discourse in this game (Steve Sampson wrote an wonderful anthropological study on the interplay of local personal interest, NGO actors agenda and international bureaucrats). How are these aspects developed in your study?

The concept of “transition” and the role of mass media and journalist in building democracy should be addressed on much more complex theoretical basis or should be abandoned

On the “politics of expertise” and the supportive or adversary discourse (form of imperialism and control or moral duty and form of help in the process modernization and emancipation) applied to journalistic field, one have to distinguish between culture and professional culture. At the first level the main characteristic is diversity; on the second is uniformity. Professions are social institutions mainly because they share the same values and norms. In a surgery room, doctors from US, Uganda or Uzbekistan share the same capital of knowledge and apply the same procedures. Nobody will advocate against training doctors, engineers, economists etc to become good professionals – and it will be hard to say that this is a form of cultural imperialism we have to criticize (even if the process of transfer of knowledge and institutions is the same as in the case of the global distribution of soap-operas, music, movies and news). Now the main question becomes – is journalism a profession? Should it be? There is an important bibliography on these issues in the journalistic bibliography and Urban has to clarify his position in the frames of this debate before “focus on the thin principles that stand in the center of a more abstract development discourse”. Without such a clarification, his move beyond the “local” to the transnational will have no theoretical legitimacy;

Global media development is not the same as transnational journalism. And a transnational journalism is not automatically a source of a transnational public sphere (studies on the European public sphere in UE point the lack of consistency of such a claim). How do you handle these theoretical aspects?

Best

Mihai Coman

Sarah Pink (Loughborough University)

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Message subject: *comment on Urban's paper*

Many thanks to Urban for offering this interesting paper, and for being brave enough to post it as work in progress, as such work is perhaps open to greater criticism that ‘finished’ writing. The paper seemed to me to provide a fascinating overview of the issues and questions raised by Urban’s research and was for me very thought provoking. I’ll just mention here a couple of things that occurred to me when reading it.

1. DISCOURSE: Urban himself recognizes that ‘All is not discourse’, and in an overview paper like this I think there is a good opportunity to think about this question theoretically as well as in terms of what might be going on in Romania. It makes me ask

questions like: what then is the relationship between discourse and practice; how can we look at the relationships between different discourses, how do they compete, how do they reference each other, and of course what do people do with these different (media) discourses – how might they refer to them, appropriate them, switch between them depending on what circumstances they are in? I think that a firm theoretical position regarding how discourses work in relation to each other and in terms of what people do with them would help to frame the reasons why the study of media discourse is helpful here.

2. PRACTICE: the idea of media practice is nothing new on this list, but I was intrigued by the question of how the practice of media production, or journalistic practice is produced, and creatively reproduced in the contexts of learning how to be a journalist in what appears to be a context constituted through transnational connections. It might be useful to see journalism as a form of skilled practice and to ask what sorts of ‘communities of practice’ are being created?, but also can these journalistic practices been seen as resisting the norms established by different discourses – or not. Or are these practices producing changes of some kind? This also links to the idea of transferring models from outside to Romania – how is the model appropriated and what practices does this entail or produce?

3. ETHNOGRAPHY: Urban does say that he has written this paper between writing up ethnographic papers, so I am not about to criticize him for not writing the ethnography here. Having said that though I found that this paper was unsatisfying in that what I really wanted was not just more theory but also more ethnography: it made me really interested in more detail of what happened, for example when Swedish journalists went on humanitarian aid trips to Romania, I wanted some of the finegrained detail of what went into producing the media representations (discourses) that then turned up in the Swedish press later.

I hope this is helpful and look forward to the rest of the discussion
Sarah

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Adam Drazin (Trinity College Dublin)

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Message subject: *Why Romania?*

Hi Urban,

Thanks for the paper. As with the rest of the list, I find myself wanting to know more about the rest of the thesis, and am at risk of duplicating ground you intend to write

about elsewhere. My own interest comes from ongoing visits to Romania since 1991, and my PhD fieldwork in Suceava in 1997-8. I suppose liking a place enough to keep going back is not always a recommendation of expertise, but it helps.

You raise some interesting issues, as Elisabeth pointed out, including the way that the constitution of a 'global' vision of media elides with such ideas as objectivity and truth.

My main question, following on from Mihai and John, is what you think the Romanian situation specifically can contribute to these questions? The thrust of this introduction was towards the constitution of the global, I felt, but the political intricacies on the ground I presume are yet to be introduced in the thesis. I felt there were four areas I wanted to know more about in this respect:

1. Your description of the 'global script' of media hits all the right notes, but I wonder if you might clarify your opinion on the ingredients. For example, your outline of the global 'script' moves fairly easily from notions of Free-expression to notions of Truth or Objectivity, as Elisabeth touched on. In the early 1990s, Romania had hundreds or even thousands of publications by all sorts of groups with printing presses. It was an explosion of what Boym (1994) calls 'graphomania', but the marvellous celebration of freedom of expression at that time did not necessarily link to objectivity, as a grass-roots, rather than a global-institutional, conception. Your discussion of 1989 is relatively unspecific about this issue

2. Your brief mention on page 22 of blackmail I think raises a difficult set of issues, tricky to present in-the-round but central. In the late 1990s, according to my own understandings and inferences, local investigative journalism involved making heavy compromises. If you wanted to publish one 'objective' expose about local issues, you might have to shelve another. Or, you might publish an expose of one local group with business interests, helping to drive them out of business so that other influential parties can buy them up. Promotions in local institutions were frequently achieved following stories about rivals in the local media; and this is often identified as 'corrupt' in Romania when it would be 'negative campaigning' in some other countries (a-la Sampson). Readers of local papers in this situation read them with additional knowledge which is not in the texts. The self-representation by journalists at a local level, therefore, was ironically that the aspiration of Objectivity requires political Compromise.

3. You do not mention here the movement towards centralized ownership of Romanian media during the period you were there, by people with political interests and by international business interests. This again, before I read the paper, I was expecting to be a keynote theme demonstrating why Romania was a good field site for the issue.

4. I was lastly wondering whether you should have started your narrative of the Romanian media prior to 1989. Many of the Romanian narratives (including some I have written myself) take 1989 as a 'ground zero', but of course to write in this fashion is to buy into the script you've outlined, in which Journalism 'proper' started in 1989.

Thanks again, and looking forward to some discussion.

Adam

Delia Dumitrica (University of Bucharest)

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Message subject: *A few comments for Urban*

Hi Urban,

Thank you for an interesting paper. I am myself a ‘failed’ journalist – a former student at the Faculty of Journalism and Communication at the University of Bucharest, with some attempts to work in the written press, then in the marketing department of a media trust, and finally on the side of ‘teaching’ (or maybe ‘preaching’) ethnocultural diversity and journalism. As I was reading your paper, I had several thoughts for you:

1. Power as articulation and resistance.

In my own experience with the Western journalism standards, I have discovered that I have an ambivalent position on it: on one hand, I felt the need to criticize the adoption or imposition of different and allegedly universal standards to local situations; on the other hand, I found that the invocation of such standards may constitute acts of resistance. When teaching about ethnocultural diversity, I found a strong ally in the Western standards against intolerance. However, this didn’t mean that these Western standards are not themselves further challenged in the teaching act, as well as in the editorial room. I guess my comment here is that, following Foucault, power is best understood as both articulation and resistance.

2. Research question

I have to confess that I felt a bit unsure as to what you are after: how international actors imagine Romanian journalism? How the field of Romanian journalism imagines itself? How the global media development discourse is appropriated/ resisted in Romania? Is it a critique of the global media development discourse? I do realize these are related questions – yet, as a reader, I felt a bit unclear as to what is the main argument you try to put forward.

3. Questioning the dichotomy “Imperial order or doing good”

If I understood correctly, you are saying that when it comes to journalism, the process of importing Western standards remain central (against what anthropologies of post-socialism seem to argue). I would like to challenge this argument, going back to the understanding of power as both resistance/ articulation. I was wondering if it might be possible that Western standards are invoked according to the agendas of the various actors. Furthermore, when invoking these standards, one re-constructs what these standards are and how they should be interpreted. It would be interesting to explore how the Western standards are actually used in the process of drawing the boundary of the profession, by whom and in what circumstances and for what audiences

(particularly in the context of the post-1989 attempts of redefining the profession for non-professionals as to restore credibility and authority).

4. National boundaries and the process of imagination

The idea of transnational journalism opens and ends the paper. On pp. 22-23, you talk about how, in the Romanian case, the marriage between NGOs, global media development discourse and Romanian journalism might result in a “kind of journalism where NGOs and journalists across the East-West divide are working together towards a trans-public sphere”. As a researcher focusing on nationalism, I was wondering if you could say a bit more about how you see this process, where you see it and what do you have in mind by ‘trans-public sphere’.

Thank you and good luck with your work!

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Anna Horolets (Polish Academy of Science)

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Message subject: *discourse and representations of Self and the Other*

Dear Urban, dear List,

First of all thank you for your text which, for me – as for Michai – is interesting at personal and “professional” level.

As a person who studied the representations (images) of Europe in Polish press discourse in 1998-2002 the ideas of colonization by such ideas as “professionalism” or “normality” are very familiar. I also found useful to study the instances of “shaming” in discourse as the means of re-shaping the axiological system in favour of European (western) values. Objectivity in the journalistic field seems to be another key term. Therefore for me the interplay of power is interesting theme to develop.

Elaborating on what John wrote, it would be quite interesting to know who and in which circumstances “succeeded” and who “failed” to adopt the scripts. Which resources facilitated the acquisition of the scripts (e.g. family histories; oppositional experience if this is applicable or alternatively institutional connections with the former media system of Romania).

Discourse: Sarah Pink already pointed at the need to make a more clear concept of discourse. In pp. 2-4 you write quite a bit on discourse, mentioning Foucault’s notion, however, I perceive the usage of this word as “unterminological”, i.e. you seem to partly use it to designate simply texts (oral and written), or even “debate”. If you would be

interested in developing this framework of mixing ethnography with discourse analysis, I think it might be useful to check several basic approaches to discourse, especially Critical Discourse Analysis (the writing of van Dijk, Fairclough, Wodak).

Discourse as treated as “structure and process”, i.e. it is assumed that 1) through discourse structure is involved in principles of ordering (as you mention after Swidler on p. 4); 2) but on the other hand, the discourse itself is capable of shaping and changing structure. For more structure centered approaches one should look at e.g. Foucault; while for more change centered – e.g. conversational analysis.

If you have such material and would be interested in this line of argument you could try to analyze pieces of conversations between Romanian and western journalists and experts in terms of negotiating meaning of e.g. “objectivity” or “professional journalism”. These might contain the attempts to force some concepts (to apply them) as well as the attempts of resistance. The rationalizations of both would be of interest.

The last point I wanted to make is that on sources and the audience. The representations (images) of the audience might be another fascinating area for an anthropologist of the media. (See “The cruel masses...” by Katarina Graffmann, the first working paper discussed at medianthro e-seminars). The representations and images of the sources (i.e. politicians, officials) seem important too. As someone already noted that would allow to reflect on the cultural specifics of Romanian situation, at the same time it will probably bring some universal images to the fore proving the idea of globalized practices.

Once again, many thanks for the good read.

Best,
Anna

Wodak R., Meyer M. 2001. *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Sage.

van Dijk, T.A. (ed.) 1997. *Discourse as Structure and Process*. (2 volumes).

Fairclough, N. 1989. *Language and Power*. Harlow: Longman.

Horolets, A. 2006. “Pulling Europe Closer: strategy of shae in Polish press discourse on Europe”, in: Kutter, A. and V. Trappmann (eds.) *Das Erbe des Beitritts*. Berlin: Nomos Verlag.

There is also a link to Fairclough site where his unpublished paper on transition on Romania can be downloaded <http://www.ling.lancs.ac.uk/staff/norman/norman.htm>

Urban Larssen (Stockholm University)

ularssen@yahoo.com

Message subject: *response to comments*

Thanks everybody for your comments so far, which took a bit of time to digest. The fact that I delivered an un-finished text appears to have landed fairly well, at least from my point of view since most of the comments have been very interesting and helpful

reading that inspires me in moving ahead. I will attempt at responding to them in some detail below.

Jens:

I also find Tsing's (2000) writing helpful, and I understand her talk about locating globalist projects and dreams (rather than focusing on totalizing frameworks) as having bearing on the development field. Projects and dreams could perhaps be seen as manifested for example in narratives of some foreign NGO-activists working for international organizations that see their task as involved in a larger project of "solving the problem" of Romanian journalism and having it align with global values, traveling a lot, being part of an exciting international social setting, and who thus tend to think of themselves as "international" more than in terms of any national belonging. I also think that her critique of the concept of "flow" in theories about globalization as potentially hiding aspects that can also be understood as involving "carving", is relevant: "this movement [flows of people, ideas etc] depends on defining tracks and grounds or scales and units of agency" (337). With Tsing I have also thought about Romania (seen through the eyes of developers) as a kind of stopping point of global circulation: "the place where global flows are consumed, incorporated, and resisted" /.../ "the place where global flows fragment and are transformed into something place bound and particular" (338) And this is a very indicative quote of what I am after (although I have to specify more exactly how...): "My comments are not meant as a criticism of the kind of analysis that shows how cosmopolitan ideas and institutions are translated and specified as they come to mean something in particular communities. To the contrary, I would like to see the extension of this kind of work to show the cultural specification of the cosmopolitan" (338).

Daniel (and Sarah, although I will get back to you):

The issue you (Daniel) raise of the media NGO situation as involving two or more sets of universals that stand in tension with each other (civil society/participation and the public sphere/transparency) is important and difficult. You write "In my mind Urban is looking at the connections in terms of discursive practice between discussions on transition and development, and discussions of journalistic professionalism. My question is, within this set of associations, or articulations, are their tensions, or doublings of discourse and role images, which suggest that my current armchair-theoretical concerns about information and agency, or "civil society" and "the public" are being played out in practice, and if so could he give us some thickish description of this?"

I think you catch well what I attempt at looking at, and, furthermore, as Sarah rightly points out, there is need for discussing the relationship between discourse and practice. I also think that the issue of participation and transparency is a fine-grained conceptualization of the matters at stake. I will bear this in mind, but let me attempt at answering your question here, with some hints at thick description: The important role played by mass media and journalists in the civil society sector has been emphasized by many, not least Habermas himself. I understand journalists in this body of thoughts as professionals that by way of their practice of information keeps the public sphere open and running, and mainly on the side of civil society: keeping track of the whereabouts of state and market actors and how their activities have

consequences for civic life. They thus secure participation of other groups than themselves by writing about issues that concern them (journalists in this view often taking sides with weaker parts in society). This would be an ideal situation but journalists often turn out to have interests. I therefore find it interesting that one of the NGO-leaders I have been following, while carrying out projects in line with this ideal also uses his network within the Romanian public television to organize and produce programs that are critical of the journalists' work; showing how linked they are with business and politics for example.

(I will get back on this when commenting on another question that just dropped in about "trans-public spheres")

John: I frequently encountered frustration among Romanian journalists in the sense your question addresses; "What happened to the scripts learned or half-learned at workshops with Western 'experts'? Did Romanian journalists go back to business as usual after the 'capacity-building' session was over? Were such sessions more of an opportunity to network and beef up their CVs than to learn from supposed experts who knew little about Romania or its field of journalism?"

This was especially so among some of the young journalists I interviewed and who attempted to work according to Western ideals (or the ideals learned in university classes). They sometimes found their articles changed in line with the political colour of the newspaper they were working for and with their name still in the byline. There was especially one case, a newly graduated female journalist who had been in conflict with her editor/middle boss. She was upset and somewhat frightened because her sources had been misquoted or put in a bad light by material that had been added to the text, without her knowing it (thus basically destroying her relation with the sources) and she was told that if she didn't accept the rules of the paper, she could leave. She didn't know where to turn with her anxieties. Frustration and sometimes risks of losing one's job can thus be a potential outcome when journalists are trying to incorporate Western ideals of objectivity etc into daily work. It can thus be viewed as building ground for resistance, but it takes guts to pursue this kind of resistance against superior colleagues. Among frustrated young journalists, this was often talked about in terms of generation: it was the middle bosses, the senior editors, those trained engineers that came to journalism right after the revolution, with their political agendas etc... As soon as they are gone, things will change radically, they believed.

As for the issue of migration, you are probably right, although I haven't studied that closer. One of the journalists I interviewed extensively, however, later moved to Canada where he got a job with a Romanian weekly (the Romanian community is big enough). Others frequently wrote and write for web-based english-language journals and getting payed in Euros, which suggest that their job has sort of migrated, although they remain in Romania. But on the whole, there is of course limited room.

Mihai:

The image of an ice-berg is good. The way I see it today, to continue metaphorically, is that I am more of a sailor than a diver; cruising around the iceberg, observing traffic (of persons, ideas, media messages) from Romanian journalism and other icebergs

(studying flow and the carving of flows), rather than stepping down into the water and investigating one in particular and in-depth. That is to say, I will go into some detail about Romanian journalism in the final text, but only in order to indicate that it offers more complexity and cultural specificity than what the development discourse allows for, and in that one can perhaps see it as a missed opportunity for Westerners of pursuing cultural critique as to the status of actually existing journalism(s) in Western countries. I will present ethnography on international and local organizations and the (possible) kind of cosmopolitan culture (and globalist thinking) that they may represent, and the way their activity links with for example international media, but refrain from going into substantial details about each specific activity. This build ground for enquiring into issues of Romanian journalism and transnational connections, cosmopolitan culture, globalist thinking and imagination etc. This, I understand from your comments and others, needs to be specified more clearly.

Furthermore, I think some of your reservations and comments are indicative of an approach to Romanian journalism that does not correspond with mine, centered around the concept of “scientific dimension” which you suggest has been sacrificed in my text. This is interestingly discussed by George Marcus in his *Ethnography through thick and thin*. (1998, Princeton University Press), in which he brings up what he categorizes as first and second projects within contemporary anthropology. To dwell on it a bit, while first projects falls in line with a traditional view of anthropological research and the conditions of it, second projects are characterized by a more personal and more experimenting research accomplishment, one that moves more towards interdisciplinary arenas. This kind of anthropology does not start from a given repertoire of established research, but is rather generated by personal connection tied to the researcher. Such a concept leads to testing anthropological method to fit personal motives and academic discussion at the same time. It thus questions the idea of traditional fieldwork and works along the lines of multi-local perspective of the topic in focus. It means that it will be characterized by a certain discontinuous movement between different areas which in turn leads to a questioning of the coherence of the topic of study. The elaboration and expansion of other non-traditional sub- (or parallel) fields becomes part of a process of understanding cultural processes that cannot be understood in any other way. The anthropologist is thus put in a situation in which he or she has to understand, describe and interpret the functioning and operation of institutions (such as media) as well as the more day-to-day activity of concrete individuals. The focus is often put on the connections between those, how the different “realities” tie in to each other. Although my project should not be seen straightforwardly as a second project, I am inspired by this reasoning of Marcus. I do not wish to become overly self-reflexive, but I do think that my own personal background can be used in a study which moves away from Romanian journalism per se and brings up issues that put focus on how the culture of Swedish journalistic activity comes to play a role in setting the frames for thinking about Romania (and Romanian journalism).

Adam:

I think your reading is right, that the thrust of the introduction is towards the constitution of the global. I am not sure I understand your question of “Why Romania?”, however. Given my own background and the way I use it, the way I have

characterized the global media development discourse (focus on harassment of journalists, the construction of hierarchies of civilized and corrupt journalisms, Othering tendencies etc), and the talks about the fall of the Soviet sphere as challenging the spread of democracy – why not? To stretch the study further back than 1989 has been considered, but to my mind it means a different study. I realize that I will have to be more specific about why it is reasonable to close that door (for an account that does go beyond the ground zero, see Thomas C Wolfe (2005): *Governing Soviet Journalism*). On centralized ownership: I was often told that Romanian media was “special” in that it remained to a large extent in the hands of Romanians, as compared for example to Czech Republic or Bulgaria where German companies are dominant. Concerning the boom of media outlets and the celebration of freedom of expression in the early 1990s: you are right, it did not link to objectivity in a “Western” sense, and I think there is an opening for discussing the issue of informed citizen a la Schudson here. Perhaps you can tell me more about how you view these issues as important for my study.

Thanks again!
/Urban

John Postill (Sheffield Hallam University)

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Message subject: *next round*

Well, thanks a lot for that response to the first round of posts, Urban. I think the discussion can now start in earnest! As old-timers on the list will know, the only restriction we place on participants is a max. of 3 posts per seminar, but otherwise please feel free to post follow-up questions or comments, preferably with a subject line that sums up your post.

Many thanks

John

Mihai Coman (University of Bucharest)

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Message subject: *on a beau dire*

Dear Urban

Thank you for the extensive answers to all participants and remarks. I would like to comment Marcus project and its methodological consequences stating from a French expression “on a beau dire” which I incompletely translate by “It’s easy to say”

It's easy to say, on a theoretical ground, as Marcus theoretise, that you can develop a research path that "does not start from a given repertoire of established research, but is rather generated by personal connection tied to the researcher", in order to "fit personal motives and academic discussion at the same time". This is not new because even classical fieldwork depends on personal connection; this is not perfectly true, because it is impossible to start as a pure empty mind, with no repertoire of a given research! That you want to play on two register, the observed and the subjective feelings, doubts, experiences and revelations is by now almost classic as classical fieldwork!

I don't think that only by thin and thick approach "the anthropologist is thus put in a situation in which he or she has to understand, describe and interpret the functioning and operation of institutions (such as media) as well as the more day-to-day activity of concrete individuals" – I believe this has been done by a lot of "classical" ethnographers.

As you, I do not think that you run the risk of becoming "overly self-reflexive", and strongly believe that your "personal background can be used in a study which moves away from Romanian journalism per se and brings up issues that put focus on how the culture of Swedish journalistic activity comes to play a role in setting the frames for thinking about Romania (and Romanian journalism)".

I haven't question none of these assumptions; What I have question was the level of the interpretation, more precise the theoretical assumption and paradigm you can not chase just by invoking the thin and thick perspective; like in a movie with a castle haunted by ghosts they are there, you want to see them or not, you like it or not! Because your perspective on globalism and westernized models or ideals is based on a certain concept of culture and because you use a specific creators and providers of a specific culture – journalists and media culture – you have to position yourself somewhere in this debate. In other words, I'm not concerned with the fact that your work will fit or not a "scientific" approach on Romanian journalists (meaning if you will enlarge or not our knowledge on journalists in countries in transition or our knowledge on the specificity of transition and new public spheres and so on ...), I was concerned about how thick will be your reflection on journalistic culture, journalistic discourses creating or contesting identities, journalist self victimizing or hero-ising myths etc, and in the end of the interplay of their culturally bounded discourse and your culturally bounded discourse.

Best
Mihai

John Postill (Sheffield Hallam University)
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Message subject: *pre-1989*

In his response to Adam Drazin, Urban wrote:

- > To stretch the study further back than 1989 has
- > been considered, but to my mind it means a different
- > study. I realize that I will have to be more specific
- > about why it is reasonable to close that door.

Urban, I was wondering in what ways going further back in time would make it a different study. By starting in 1989, aren't you bolstering the very notion of 'transition' you seek to undermine? (a notion, by the way, with which I for one have no quarrels).

John

Daniel Taghioff (SOAS)

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Message subject: *The Illusions of the "Global"*

Dear Urban

There seem to be two discussions going in here. One is about Romania, and Romanian Journalists, the other is about "global" agendas. I must admit to knowing very little about Romania.

However, the gap in itself is telling. One perspective on this is that the "global" is not, and was never meant to "global."

Theories of globalization are strongly criticized in development, because it is clear that the "global" is not merely a juggernaut (i.e a quasi-natural process with its own dynamics), but is also a series of institutions that were more or less designed with dominance in mind – the structure of the international financial institutions, their uneasy relationship with the UN with its clipped wings, and the decidedly imbalanced "flow" of information.

Now this is separate somewhat from a debate of Romanian Journalism, and the ideals brought into it. What I mean by this is that the issue of transparency and professionalism is interesting in the Romanian context: It may provide a counter weight to abuses of power within Romania, and this may well be part of the intention of the agencies spreading these ideas internationally.

But this may have almost nothing to do with any attempt to create a transnational sphere. One thing that is striking about international relations is how powerful-state actors are getting excited about democracy at a state level, whilst being firmly opposed to a meaningful public sphere internationally (think US and UK walkout of Unesco over idea of free and balanced flow), or to any real attempts at direct democratic representation at an international level (America is not calling for a Global Parliament, and is working pretty hard to undermine the UN until very recently.)

In this context (which you may not share, OK) it would seem that the idea that standards of journalistic professionalism might have any necessary link to a transnational public seems risky.

That might be part of the ideal, but is unlikely to be part of the practice, if the issues I outline have any bearing on the situation.

This perspectives raises questions about whether the public sphere is used as a distracting spectacle: We appear to have democratic control and “freedom” but all the really important decisions get made in relation to institutions we have no direct democratic control over.

The complaint from the UK, from journalists that I know (I am related to three) is that “investigative” journalism is dead, because people don't have time or it any more. But I also think it is because it is risky: Transparency is almost always about who is held accountable (think panopticon.)

Andrew Gilligan in the UK was a good example: He was, by accounts of people who worked with him, very unprofessional and disliked for it by other journalists. But he did dear to say the unsayable, and to say things now that seem so obvious in the aftermath of the Iraq war.

The BBC was roundly punished for his lack of professionalism, to the point where the staff were collectively humiliated by being sent on courses about being “good” journalists.

But of course the real story is that none of this made any difference: The decision to go into Iraq was not part of any democratic process. So the “transparency” in this case was very uneven, even if, or perhaps because, it hinged on journalistic professionalism.

So in Romania, how does such a cynical view play? What agency are journalists, the public and politicians allowed to exercise in practice?

A final note is that there is a strong discursive link, often found in World Bank publications, between transparency and “perfect information” which is an assumption in economic theory. So is there a relationship between “economism” and discourses on transparency amongst and around journalists in Romania?

I know that this runs against the grain somewhat of an interpretive approach, it seems almost like a structuralist account, but I am really stressing the need to try look at the broader social moment (not universals or aprioris) and issues of power as one context to draw on for examining discursive practices.

Daniel

Link to Ref for "Disciplining Democracy" Abrahamsen:
<http://www.csudh.edu/dearhabermas/demoelect01bk.htm>

Monbiot's activist book about Global Democratization

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Age-Consent-George-Monbiot/dp/0007150431>

Teivainen, Teivo (2002a): Enter Economism, Exit Politics. Experts, Economic Policy and the Damage to Democracy, Zed Books: London & New York.

This last book is from the NIGD website:

<http://www.nigd.org/nigd-publications/articles-and-books>

Ursula Rao (Martin-Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg)

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Message subject: *global/local in Urban's paper*

Dear Urban, dear All

Urban begins his paper telling us about his aim to characterize “transnational or global Aspects” of Romanian journalism. I was happy to read this announcement since I am myself struggling with the question of how to characterize what for me is an internationalization /globalization of news / news format in post-liberalized India. Like most commentators in this discussion I feel that we need to look at journalistic practices from two perspectives its local embedding as well as its relation to globally circulated formats, ideas, ideologies. However, like many others, I have become extremely impatient with this dichotomy that pretends as if we could think the global without the local and visa versa. This is obviously impossible, especially in a field like journalism, which always follows a global format, idea, without of course constituting a unified practice (not even in one country).

Searching for answers in Urban's paper I came across a lot of interesting themes that made me curious. I will take up only one of here.

There is his discussion of a “Western model” being introduced through “Western agencies” into Romanian journalism. I am curious to hear what this “script” is that is handed down. Are these Western journalists teaching Romanians on the basis of their experience of practicing journalism at home? Or do they read from text books with ideal formulations? Or are these readings of laws defining freedom of press? etc. How do all these different things end up constituting “A Script” and why would we claim that THIS script is the global in the global-local debate here? My questions do not aim at denying that there is something “global” about these inputs. I rather feel that we need a very careful characterization of the practices (also practices of discourse) we are talking about, in order to break this dichotomy of global-local and see the mutual, multi-dimensional process of constructing, creating a space that is both global and local, and / or something in between.

ursula

Urban Larssen (Stockholm University)

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Message subject: *second response*

Dear all,

Thanks again for your comments. Here comes a second response.

Delia

Concerning global media development as doing good or being part of an imperial order: rather than trying to come up with an answer as to which it is, I see these aspects as opposite poles of a repertoire of what it does and what it stands for and I hope to be able to present ethnography showing that both can be the case, depending on the context, institutional and individual motives and background etc. I thus find the experience you mention in your first thought as an example of this, of the double side of Western standards. You are ambivalent, you say. So am I, but this corresponds to the complex and multilayered character of the field/topic of study. My comment to John (in the first response I sent) indicated the resistance side of things that you exemplify, that Western standards may function as a support in specific situations, when for example a journalist is arguing with his or her middleboss on rules in the editorial process. Your second thought concerns what it is that I am after, and reflecting on the rest of the comments so far, I realize I have to be more specific. Basically all your suggestions are right to some extent, “how international actors imagine Romanian journalism? How the field of Romanian journalism imagines itself? How the global media development discourse is appropriated/ resisted in Romania?” and yes, it is partly a critique of the global media development discourse. I am not sure I understand your question in your 3rd thought. As for your 4th thought, on trans-public spheres, see below in my response to Daniel.

Anna

Thanks for the reference to Fairclough on Romania. I didn't know he had been there... Furthermore, you refer to your own studies and write: “I also found useful to study the instances of “shaming” in discourse as the means of re-shaping the axiological system in favour of European (western) values. Objectivity in the journalistic field seems to be another key term. Therefore for me the interplay of power is interesting theme to develop.”

I agree. One possible interpretation of for example Reporters Without Borders' annual index list of free press around the world goes along those lines: the further down the list, the more shame you acquire (as nation). By the tremendous access to international media this NGO has, they are thus able to put pressure on states. I also thought of Elisabeth Dunn's writing here (in Ong and Collier 2005), on EU-standardization of the food industry in Poland. A quote from her text is illustrative: “The rhetoric of standards – including the ways standards depict the world, highlight particular problems as deserving of regulation and scientific solutions, and make assumptions about practices and institutional infrastructures – is one place to look at how specific places come to be known and made” /.../ “The hierarchy of value that standards lay out quickly transmutes difference into impurity. Standards thus act as more than

technologies for organizing and regulating markets [in her case, practice of information in my, centered on the concept of objectivity], and express fundamental social relations between groups”.

Ursula

Ursula writes: “There is his discussion of a “Western model” being introduced through “Western agencies” into Romanian journalism. I am curious to hear what this “script” is that is handed down. Are these Western journalists teaching Romanians on the basis of their experience of practicing journalism at home? Or do they read from text books with ideal formulations? Or are these readings of laws defining freedom of press? etc. How do all these different things end up constituting “A Script” and why would we claim that THIS script is the global in the global-local debate here? My questions do not aim at denying that there is something “global” about these inputs. I rather feel that we need a very careful characterization of the practices (also practices of discourse) we are talking about, in order to break this dichotomy of global-local and see the mutual, multi-dimensional process of constructing, creating a space that is both global and local, and / or something in between.”

I agree here too, and this is a central task concerning the issue of “Western model” as a “script”. In the introduction I describe/summarize it on the basis of what I have been able to tease out from the collected material. And, yes it is Western journalists as teachers, text books, “manuals” (one from Associated Press was for example circulating among journalists during the first years), laws, conferences etc. The Romanian Press Club formulated a code of conduct, basically copied from documents stemming from the West. There are variations and specificities and I will discuss that. On the other hand, however, while I use “script” and level out the contents, I also subscribe to Buroway’s (2000) critique of Meyer, suggesting that the problem with script is that it stops short at a point which is more interesting for anthropology: “Meyer and his colleagues have little to say about the power that lies behind this diffusion, nor what is more important for us, about the link between models or norms on the one side and concrete practices on the other” (p. 3). In the case of the Romanian Press Club (consisting of media owners, executives and just a few journalists), it was quite clear that the code of conduct-document was a rather loose subscription to Western norms which helped the club in raising funds and establish collaborations with foreign organizations. Because, on the practical side, the treatment of journalists by some of the club members in their respective work place occasionally went contrary to these ideals (for example black-listing specific individuals for not obeying rules). While investigating what the script might involve/suggest, the process of sending a script should thus be understood through the point of view of the cluster of institutions and persons who transmits it, and then further investigated (through ethnography for example).

John, Adam

I have perhaps been too categoric on the issue of going beyond 1989, since I will include some pre-1989 aspects. As Adam pointed out, the booming media in the early 1990s was not a manifestation of free expression in terms of an objectively orientated journalism. The media during the first years (speaking mainly of press) can rather be perceived as instruments of political control; most of them were connected to

political parties or some other interests and the frequent usage of the label “independent” was mainly to indicate free from state control. To a large extent this remains the case, perhaps even more so due to an overpopulated market and a scarcity of financial means that does not involve certain loyalties. As John Downey has formulated it generally on media in postsocialist Eastern Europe, “The master may have changed, but the function, for the most part, has not.” (1998:53). There is an aspect of continuity here and the expression “communist” was often used to designate a certain way of thinking about the journalistic task, for example how to conceptualize events; always placing them within a political context, never being content with “just” describing them. This stretches further: Some journalists suggested to me that the press of the day was indeed a democratic one (in any case in terms of pluralism), reawakened from the inter-war period, but also this was a time of highly politicized press. As for the socialist era, one issue concerns the generation of journalists (30-35) that came to journalism right after the revolution, basically without training, often with degrees from politechnic university. Many of them were talking about their engagement with student papers as the journalistic school of the late communist era (along with cultural and literary journals), and partly an exclusive one too considering the context in which they collected and published information and the intellectually stimulating environment it offered. Narratives by persons from this category normally included a rather romantic view of these engagements, along with lengthy descriptions of his or her revolution, where they were, what they did etc.

Since my concern during fieldwork has been mainly with fairly newly graduated journalists, who were around 15 years of age at the time of the revolution, looking back has, however, not been among the central themes in the majority of narratives I have collected. For the most part my focus has been on how they came across, what they think about, how they negotiate etc Western influence, and on this topic the talk has often been fluent. Pre-1989 was history. One may consider a choice of not going beyond 1989 as emically based in the case of this group of informants. Another aspect is methodological, the limited possibilities of collecting material that can somehow be a check on the stories told. As I aim at moving the focus to transnational connections, to the aid industry, to a deterritorialised economy of information, furthermore, I feel I am moving further and further away from pre-1989 times.

Daniel

In his second comment (I hope I was the only one not to receive it through the list, but directly), Daniel writes that “there seem to be two discussions going on here. One is about Romania, and Romanian Journalists, the other is about “global” agendas”. He finds it striking “how powerful-state actors are getting excited about democracy at a state level, whilst being firmly opposed to a meaningful public sphere internationally”. He suggests that “in this context it would seem that the idea that standards of journalistic professionalism might have any necessary link to a transnational public seems risky.” He ends by stressing “the need to try look at the broader social moment (not universals or aprioris) and issues of power as one context to draw on for examining discursive practices.”

I agree that it might be risky and I think Daniels reasoning is good. As a response, let me dwell on the transpublic or transpublicity: I was inspired to think in terms

of trans-public spheres by a talk at AAA 2003 by Nancy Fraser (a panel called "The Public Sphere, Cosmopolitans and Locals"). She has famously criticized Habermas on his notion of the public sphere, and has earlier used the term subaltern counter-publics in connection to social movements. That is to say, how social movements have created their own spaces and sites for communication that has expanded our sense for what should be on the political agenda. What Fraser first saw in these counter-publics was an expanded formation of public, but now she was wondering about whether these kinds of public spheres haven't experienced a kind of decay into more like an enclave, rather than a public. Fraser suggested that we go back to the normative category of the public sphere, as discussed by for example Habermas, and use it as a theory that has the potentials to reveal the democratic deficits or shortcomings of actually existing democracies. So what is the normative content? 1) First is the idea of unrestricted communication as to who can participate, the idea that the boundaries are never sharply drawn, it is always in principle extendable. 2) There is also an ideal of unrestrictedness with respect to what can be discussed. 3) The idea that there are relations of reciprocity between participants, that everyone has the right to speak and be heard, free to agree or disagree, free to reply in ongoing debates. 4) Lastly, what Fraser thinks follows from all this, is the idea of reflexivity, that there should be a level of meta-discussion of the ways in which the public sphere might be said to restrict what is supposed to be unrestricted. Fraser argued that theories of public sphere has mainly been developed with the sovereign nation-state situation in mind, where relations of power foremost between state, private corporations and citizens made the idea of a public sphere more graspable. With recent transnational and globalizing processes, multiple citizenship, topics that extends the national setting etc, the situation becomes more difficult. Fraser suggests two things for anthropology here: 1) the first is a comparative ethnography of publicity, that is to say, to look at differences between the ways public spaces are institutionalized and unfolds in different places or settings. 2) to look not comparatively, but at the process of public expansion, contraction and border-crossing. She calls this an anthropology of trans-publicity.

A lot of work remains, but I see this, tentatively, as one theoretical background for pushing the study of global media development further than to account just for Romania. I see an expanding border-crossing kind of publicity in the example that ends my text, and I picture journalists and their close links to NGOs as potentially important players, or perhaps brokers, here.

Best regards
/Urban

John Postill (Sheffield Hallam University)
jpostill@usa.net
Message subject: *concluding remarks*

Dear List

A reminder that our current e-seminar on Urban Larssen's working paper ends tomorrow, Tuesday, at 9 pm GMT. If you have any brief concluding remarks or questions to Urban, please send them directly to medianthro@easaonline.org

Best

John

Kerstin Andersson (University of Gothenburg)

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Message subject: *Re: Urban's paper*

Hej Urban and all the others!

First I want make my excuses for this long "non-activity" on my part. I always tend to take on too many things to do. I also want to point out that I agree with earlier comments on the list, I think that John, Jens, Philip, Daniel, Anna, Tom and others are doing a tremendous job keeping this list up. Without you, we all would miss a lot if interesting discussions and important information

Urban, I'm sorry for this late entrance into the discussion, but maybe my comments might be to some use anyway. I have read the paper and the comments with great interest. As I'm not at all well oriented in the ethnographic field of Eastern Europe, my comments and reflections will mainly be placed on a more general, theoretical and methodological level. In general I agree with earlier comments regarding the loose and open-ended character of this paper, putting forward some ideas and points regarding journalism and presented in a quite loose form.

1. You state that "... a general aspect involved in media anthropology is, first of all, the insight that cultures and societies of today is so intricately bound up with mass media that it becomes more or less impossible for an anthropologist not to take media in to account...." (P19). This is nothing new. This argument was put forward at the e-seminar "Why is interest in media anthropology growing" November 8, 2005 and I assume that we have copyright on material and ideas put forward in this forum...
.....

2. I find your use of concepts and definitions very vague and unclear. You have already got comments on your use Habermas and the concept of discourse and I only will add on a bit to them. You give a lot of priority to the concept of discourse. You give some vague statements regarding open- ended analytical approaches, talk, text and some practices, other meaning making social phenomenon. Then you turn to Foucault, systems of meaning and normalization. My point of view is that when using this kind of concepts, you should start by defining them clearly. Second you need to carefully demonstrate the relevance of the concept through empirical material. Third, the concept of discourse is according to my point of a very complex and intricate concept, which

should be used with clarity. The definitions and conceptions that I'm familiar with usually integrate "talk, text and some practices" as part of the discursive meaning making activities. They emphasise the symbiosis between the constitutive aspect of the discourse on social institutions, relations, conventions and norms and the way that social institutions, relations, conventions and norms constitute and construct the discourse. And a lot of other things.....

You have got some good references from Anna, and I can add one more; Mills 1997.

3. There has been discussion whether or not you should include the situation before 1989 in your account. My point is firmly that If you want to illustrate a transition, which you claim that you want, (the transition to a free press in Romania) you need to establish the base and point of departure for the transition of the discourse, the situation before 1989, then turn to an examination of the factors involved in this transformation, and close it by the situation after the transition, the new order. (This John has rightly pointed out)

4. You take a lot of interest in establishing the notion of a "global media discourse"/ a script/ that was imposed on Romanian journalism after 1989 in an orientalist way and that according to your point of view entailed the connotations of modernity and modernization. This based on a statement by Hartley (1996) telling how Journalism grew out of, developed alongside and promoted the emergence of modernity and modern life in the 18th and 19th centuries and onwards....

My own field, the Kolkata intellectuals, contradicts this assumption. Among the Bengali intellectuals, journalism appeared as a distinct category in the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, in relation to the introduction of the printing press among the Bengali population and the formalization of the language into a written and spoken form of Bengali. It developed very fast and proliferated into its distinct forms. The first Bengali magazine, "Bengal Gazette", started in 1816, In 1857 there existed 22 publications and in 1885; 96 publications, covering i.e. Religious issues, Social reforms, colonial professions, scientific journals, business journals, political newspapers, literary publications etc. it got an important position among the Bengali population as media for i.e. debates, discussions and reflections on the society. Later on during the nationalist movement it functioned as a weapon of resistance towards the colonial forces. It is still a big form of media among the Kolkata intellectuals, illustrated by for example the 4000 "little magazines" that exists. (I also will point out that I don't agree with Ståhlberg's statements regarding Lucknow journalists, wondering if this might not be an expression of lack of field experience)

5. You make a list of components included in this script/ discourse/ (again in a rather vague way) including for example objectivity, neutrality, positivistic and empiricist epistemologies, value free knowledge, free press, values as human rights, freedom of speech etc. I feel a bit uneasy with this categorization of western and universal things that are supposed to be included in the discourse. It implies a level of generalization that I think is a bit dangerous. In doing this, we tend to commit the same mistakes as we often accuse others for doing, including our prejudices in our analysis. I will give an illustration of this point. Last autumn some pictures in a Danish daily,

“the Mohammad cartoons” turned all those things up side down. One side of the argument was illustrated by the western notion of “freedom of speech”, the other by the human right to practice religion. Restrictions towards the publication of the cartoons were criticized in the name of the freedom of speech. But in this case, the freedom of speech had questionable consequences, offending the big part of the world’s Muslim population and questioning their rights to their religion. UN, EU and OIC tried to solve the contradiction by stating that freedom of speech also includes “responsibility”. In my eyes, this epitomises the tension between universal values and cultural relativism, local and global. As Elisabeth stated, this is an old discussion, dating back to the evolutionary period in the end of the 19th century, which has taken a lot of turns and lines through the history of anthropological method up to the present post modern agenda.

6. My lasting feeling after having read this paper was that I think that the interesting things start where you end. According to my point of view, the assumptions regarding the imposition of the script gets its legitimacy through its local expressions found through careful ethnographic research. The paper takes great interest in explaining that the transnational / global/ universal/ media discourse/ script/ exist. Urban also states that it influences both his perceptions (as anthropologist) and the practioners in Romania. The real point of interest in this lies in how media practitioners in Romania handle this discourse, how it influences and is integrated or not into their conception /discourse/ of journalism and information distribution. This is something that anthropologists should be highly skilled to enter into through fieldwork and ethnography.

Some thoughts.....

Kerstin

Mills, Sara
1997 Discourse, London; Routledge

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Urban Larssen (Stockholm University)
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Message subject: *third response*

Tack Kerstin,

I think there are some misunderstandings in your comments (the unfinished text of mine partly to be blamed...). In my two first replies, I have tried to answer earlier remarks

similar to yours. Let me attempt further explanation, specifically addressing your questions:

1. No, of course, it is not new to point out media anthropology's insight of the intricate boundedness of mass media in today's societies. I brought this up in a general sense mainly to indicate that the boundedness involves different levels of scale, and that I am more interested in the deterritorialized (or global) one rather than the culturally specific, while at the same time saying that they are both important, valid and interesting in orientating research.

2. Discourse is a debated concept. I don't think it is necessarily a good idea to start with defining it clearly, but rather to introduce it and then let the understanding of it evolve along presentation of ethnography. That is to say, some clarifying discussion of it is needed, but one shouldn't let the definition of discourse become too much a matter of concern in the thesis. You suggest "talk, text and some practices". Ok, but isn't "some practices" the most tricky part?

3. As I have been trying to explain, I am not foremost interested in "illustrating a transition" (which implies a comparison with pre-1989 journalism), but to explore transnational or global aspects of the changed conditions and practice of Romanian journalism after 1989. Going back to Sarah's comment, I think one of her formulations catches this: "how the practice of media production, or journalistic practice is produced, and creatively reproduced in the contexts of learning how to be a journalist in what appears to be a context constituted through transnational connections."

4. I am saying that one way of viewing Romanian postsocialist journalism is that a Western model has been transferred (or the attempt thereof). This is a view that I have found to be common in development circles, but it is not a view I see as representative of what "actually" happened. It is part real, part discourse; part doing good, part imperialistic. From this point, a number of questions can be asked. How is it that a Western model of journalism has become near common sense? What does it contain more specifically? What does it do, in terms for example of national and individual identities? What other discourses build ground for this naturalization? In reality, Mihai Coman pointed out that one of the first expressions the journalism development took was through an initiative by Petre Roman (former PM) to start teaching journalism at Bucharest university along the lines of Western standards. Since Roman had been living in France for some time before the revolution, there is already here an opening for discussing whether "export" is an appropriate term to characterize this process. Perhaps in some cases "import" is better. Although I think "imposing" is correct in some cases, "importing" allows for agency on the receiving part: choosing from a repertoire of different models, or different aspects of the model.

Furthermore, it is unclear to me how your description of Bengali journalism is contradicting Hartley (whom I used briefly to indicate the link between journalism and modernity), since to me it sounds like the growth of Bengali journalism (in the sense that you describe it) indeed can be seen as developing alongside and promoting modern life in Bengali (as one form of modernity among others, NB). "[T]he introduction of the printing press among the Bengali population

and the formalization of the language into a written and spoken form of Bengali”/...” In 1857 there existed 22 publications and in 1885; 96 publications, covering i.e. Religious issues, Social reforms, colonial professions, scientific journals, business journals, political newspapers, literary publications etc. it got an important position among the Bengali population as media for i.e. debates, discussions and reflections on the society.” – how does this contradict with Hartley?

5. Ursula’s point is an important one, that we need a careful characterization of the practices we describe. This goes for the various development initiatives and projects I have studied and the talk about script. The first section of your question I understood as following along those lines, but through the illustration you then deliver, I interpret your point as different from hers. Your use of the Mohammed caricatures epitomizes, you suggest, the tension between freedom and responsibility involved in universal values. My own mention about how news production by Western owned international news agencies tend to dominate and marginalize certain areas of the world is another example. It seems like we agree here, then.

6. You write that you find the last section of my paper the most interesting. Ok. But again, I think your interpretation somewhat misses the point. What I wanted to indicate here is the potentials of some Romanian journalistic activity, paired with the NGO-sector, focusing on transnational topics and moving away from the Romanian scene (in terms of public/public sphere), to break the barriers of Romanian journalism per se in a way that makes focus on cultural-specific forms of journalism too narrow.

/Urban

p.s. The seminar period is coming to an end. If there should be no further comments, I want to take the opportunity to thank not only those of you who send me comments, but especially John for initiating this seminar which from my view has been tremendously helpful. Thanks John and good luck with your book projects!

John Postill (Sheffield Hallam University)

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Message subject: *Larssen e-seminar closed*

Dear All

We’ve reached the end of our seminar on Urban Larsen’s paper. Many thanks to Urban for responding to so many comments, to Liz Bird for opening the session with her discussant’s comments, and to all those of you who’ve participated in this eventful session! As always, we’ll be uploading a PDF transcript of the seminar on the website shortly.

Our next presenter will be Matthew Durlington (Towson) with a working paper on moral panics in suburban Texas that we'll be discussing from 27 Feb to 6 March 2007. An abstract of this paper will follow after this message.

Best wishes

John

Kerstin Andersson (University of Gothenburg)

tinni.andersson@telia.com

Message subject: *Re: third response*

Dear John and the list,

Sorry, I received Urban's reply so late that I will have to step over the time limit...

Urban, some brief counter remarks;

1. I'm only trying to say that this point was taken up at the e-seminar November 8, 2005, and I think that you should give a reference....

2. The concept of discourse – I think we say the same thing. You should define the concept clearly, and verify it by empirical facts. If you want to start with the empirical facts and then turn to the definition, that is your choice, BUT, then you should declare that you are using a tentative approach to the concept and that you have the intention to define it, which you don't do. I still think that there is a lot to find in the references that you have been suggested, and that it might be of use for you. Regarding practice, there exist quite a lot of anthropological approaches including this aspect. See for example Bourdieu, Kapferer, some of the American anthropology in the 90-ties....

3. I don't think that you are foremost interested in "illustrating a transition". But it is a vital point in your discussions. To be able to understand the implications of the imposition of the "script" after 1989, I think that it is necessary to establish the conditions before 1989. You state that you want to "explore transnational or global aspects of the changed conditions and practice of Romanian journalism after 1989." But to determine that the conditions and practices have changed after 1989, one need to know how it was before 1989.

4. My field; Your discussion concerns a western based discourse/ script/ including a lot of components that you find characteristic of western journalism, and you also include the notion of modernity into it. (supported by Hartley's statement). What I want to illustrate with the reference to my field is simply that the same thing happened in Kolkata in the 19th century and the connection between journalism and western modernity can be questioned. You suggest that "Bengali journalism can be seen as developing alongside and promoting modern life in Bengali": This is a point that

I don't agree to, and I doubt that any of my informants would do it. The concept of modernity has been a debated issue among the intellectuals since the 19th century, a concept that they have reflected upon, contested, negotiated and turned and twisted, but not fully accepted. And it still is a debated issue (see for example scholars as Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, Jershudra Bagchi and others)

5. I didn't say that I find the last section of your paper most interesting, I said that I think that the interesting things start where you end. OK, you state that you want to explore "transnational or global aspects of the changed conditions and practice of Romanian journalism after 1989". Still your starting point is the Romanian journalists and the impact of the imposition of the Western script among them. What I'm trying to point out is that I think that the initial move should lie in determining the impact/ or not/ of the imposition of the script among the practioners through ethnographic research. This does not exclude transnational and global aspects. As I stated earlier, the assumptions regarding the imposition of the script gets its legitimacy through its local expressions found through careful ethnographic research...

Kerstin