Modern Comrades or Old Enemies?

A comparative study of the representation of Russia in Italian and Swedish Press

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Abstract

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Starting from a personal, contemporary outlook on society today, it might be obvious for a reader to immediately think of media as global, an entity hovering over national borders, transcending geography and geo-politics. As such viewers, we ignore thus that media - and the press in particular - have for a long time in the past been associated and tightly linked with mechanisms of nation-building, as well as with concepts such as nation, national identity and nationalism. Living in Sweden one might be acquainted with a fairly frequent representation of Russia in the media, just as well as with a fairly specific one; and the same would plausibly go for other countries. Through a narrative analysis of newspaper articles, this study focuses on the comparison of the representation of Russia in Swedish and Italian liberal online press in order to research whether the weaker degree of partisanship that characterises liberal journalism would still allow for two different storylines about Russia to be told through different narratives.

With Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini’s study of media systems, as well as Kristina Riegert’s comparison of national representation in foreign news as a background, this study researches whether societal and political agendas and partisanship shape the image (and hence narration) of Russia in the two countries’ newspapers. Using Allan Bell’s values of newsworthiness and Vladimir Propp’s analysis of the quest’s narrative structure, it concludes that although the storylines about Russia told by the two countries were in fact different and plausibly coherent with the respective country’s circumstances (with a margin of exception), their narrative did not fully represent the model that Hallin and Mancini had assigned them.
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1. Introduction

Starting from a personal, contemporary outlook on society today, it might be obvious for a reader to immediately think of media as *global*, an entity hovering over national borders, transcending geography and geo-politics. As such viewers, we ignore thus that media - and the press in particular - have for a long time in the past been associated and tightly linked with mechanisms of nation-building, as well as with concepts such as nation, national identity and nationalism. A certain peculiar attention has been paid to American modern history, as one of pioneer of globalization and global communication and policies, as well as a benchmark for comparing media systems and press models. With this study, on the other hand, we will be redirecting our focus to Swedish and Italian media, in an attempt to identify how their respective media systems affect the representation and reproduction of certain events in the press.

More specifically, living in Sweden one might be acquainted with a fairly frequent representation of Russia in the media, just as well as one might be acquainted with a fairly specific representation of Russia in Swedish media, which is generally believed to be quite negative. One could also regard it as obvious given the complex relations that have long since characterised Russo-Swedish historical and political relations, as Russian expansionistic tendencies in the 19th century were in fact primarily aimed at Northern Scandinavia, creating a feeling of paranoia in Swedish leaders and diplomats (Åselius 1994). Such adversities might as said be rooted back in history and the content of today’s news, going from the scandals of the so-called 'attacks on democracy' and 'Russiagate' in the US and various other countries, to the military attacks in Ukraine and Northern Africa, the aggressive declaration against the Baltic nations, culminating finally in the more recent Swedish suggestion to give pamphlets out to households on how to respond in case of an eventual war against Russia or a Russian invasion, might in fact not be just genuine, professional, ‘neutral’ journalism, but also the echoing of such specific societal controversies, of such *storylines* in the context of a very specific media system (Jones 2018).

Similarly, Italo-Russian relations also can be traced back to history, although quite in a different fashion. Already during their respectively communist and fascist reigns, Russia and Italy had declared the recognition of each other's power and signed a non-aggression treaty, and even when WWII finally broke out and they found themselves facing each other as enemies, tales go that Italian soldiers were known to treat Russian civilians much better than the Germans did, as
well as Russian soldiers imprisoned and later liberated during the (end of the) war, and the consequent fall of the fascist regime, are said to have stayed behind and fought alongside Italian rebels instead of travelling back to the motherland. Italy and Russia were later hosts to the two major communist parties in the western world. In more recent years, furthermore, Italo-Russian relationships have been characterised by the much-advertised good relationship between Russian PM Vladimir Putin and the media-magnate, ex Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi, and just in 2017, Vladimir Putin’s party, United Russia, signed a political cooperation treaty with Italian anti-establishment party Lega Nord. Even as of today, the two leading parties in Italy from the recent 2018 Italien elections, namely the same Lega Nord and Movimento Cinque Stelle, have been said to have supported and have been supported by the Russian government, also opposing EU sanctions against the latter (Caizzi 2016).

The idea behind this study is therefore that such deeply rooted societal relations together with the different media systems behind the two countries’ journalistic work, might influence how Sweden and Italy portray and report news about Russia today. In order to reach a result, I will go onto analysing articles from one Swedish and Italian newspaper respectively, comparing and identifying differences and similarities in their reproduction of specific storylines and use of different narrative structures, in an attempt to so compare their representation of Russia and Russian events. My approach will be that of a narration analysis of articles published by the main liberal digital journalistic platforms in Sweden and Italy respectively.

2. Literature Review

The research area of this c-essay will be national media-representation – in this case the representation of Russia in Italian and Swedish press in a comparative analysis. As a background to this representation analysis there is an interest and description of European media systems as studied and categorized by Hallin and Mancini, with a more attentive look at the two models characterizing Sweden and Italy.

Similar studies comparing two different countries’ media systems have been carried out by researchers such as the likes of Michelle Hilmes, Kristina Riegert, Sabina Mihelj and John Downey, as well as by the above-mentioned Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, and others.
2.1. Journalistic and media representation in relation to foreign events

As stated, the focus of this thesis lies on national representation in foreign news-press. An example of a similar study in this field is given by Kristina Riegert in her “Nationalising” Foreign Conflict (1998) where she compares two countries with similar public service broadcasting systems, namely Britain and Sweden, with the aim of determining whether the countries’ respective positions in regard to foreign policy might have influenced their coverage on that topic. Through both quantitative and qualitative content analysis, in this study she focuses on four case-studies and conclusively lists three factors contributing to the differences between the two countries’ coverage of international events. Such differences, Riegert concludes, are also determined by the different perception of relevance and proximity, of national audience and of the journalist’ own role in society, as well as by the different production processes.

The subject is then further developed by Ulf Hannerz in Foreign News, where he explores how international news and coverage on foreign countries are constructed and read. By extensively interviewing over 70 correspondents around the world, in fact, he goes onto analysing reporters’ construction-processes of stories on foreign cultures and countries, discussing their abuse and over-reproduction of certain storylines over others (Hannerz & Carter 2014). The representation of Russia in particular, on the other hand, is studied through Critical Discourse Analysis by Tatiana Dubrovskaya and Evgeny Kozhemyakin (2016) in their Media Constructions of Russia’s International Relations, where they state that “the mass media produce a reality autonomous from ‘the real world’” and that mass media present and then offer an interpretation of things, coding and transforming its object. In Stuart Hall’s terms, they regard representation as a result and construction of social practices, isolating reality from its representation, concluding therefore that the representation of Russian international relations in the national media “are characterised by recontextualisation” and that “the newspapers adopt approaches that are embedded in their ideologies” (id. 91; 103).

2.2. Comparing Media Systems

Another fundamental point of this thesis is the plausible connection between different national representations and different media systems. Relating to this field, for example, in their Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics and Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World, Hallin and Mancini draw on a survey of media institutions and do
a similar comparison of eighteen Western European and North American democracies and justify their approach with the attempt to deny the existence of a unitary Western media model, and, similarly to this very study, “by treating these systems not as abstract ideals but as concrete social formations that developed under particular historical conditions” (Hallin & Mancini 2011, 1-2). By analysing the different dimension affecting the different media systems, such as media markets, political parallelism, the concept of professionalism and state intervention, they conceive a differential system that categorises Sweden under the Democratic Corporatist Model and Italy under the Polarized Pluralist Model. Supporting Hallin’s and Mancini’s schematization and analysis of Italian media in particular, for example, Alessandro D’Arma (2009) confirms in his article Broadcasting policy in Italy’s ‘Second Republic’ that Italian press has in fact been seen by the leading class as means to gain political power and an instrumental notion of the media has therefore historically prevailed, especially after the emergence on the political scene in 1994 of media magnate Silvio Berlusconi, who would then be elected Prime Minister (id. 770).

With a much more powerful focus on the importance of the nation and nationalism and based on primary research in the two countries’ archives, in her Network Nations, Michelle Hilmes, on the other hand, goes onto analysing the origins of media globalization by taking on an historical outlook, and the transnational relationships between what many consider two polar-opposite media broadcasting systems, that is the British and the American, that then have gone onto influencing and shaping the rest of the world (Hilmes 2012).

Similarly, building on several international case studies and contemporary debates, Sabina Mihelj (2011) denounces in her Media Nations a blind spot in regard to the importance of nationalism and nationhood in relation to global media. This is also relatable to Riegert’s suggestion that modern concepts of global village and an international media system (and Americanization) might in fact be too optimistic or too exaggerated, although contrarily, in Mihelj’s and John Downey’s (2012) book Central and Eastern Media in Comparative Perspective, Alison Harcourt states that different European countries are in fact under a similar isomorphic pressure, which will be further explained later in this essay.

2.3. Comparison of Journalistic Models
Following the thread of Media Systems’ comparison, this thesis’ focus will however be narrowed down to press systems and journalistic representation. Frank Esser’s and Andrea
Umbricht’s study *The Evolution of Objective and Interpretative Journalism in the Western Press*, following the models set by Hallin and Mancini, is therefore of major interest here as through several case studies they analyse through content analysis different journalistic models in Europe, concluding that the journalism model practiced in northern European media systems is rather a “legacy of commentary-oriented journalism with a growing emphasis on neutral professionalism and information-oriented journalism” (Esser & Umbricht 2014, 232). On the other hand, they claim that southern European media systems such as Italy developed a Polarized Pluralist model “where newspapers’ reliance on state subsidies is traditionally high and ties to political parties close” and where a writing style that favours commentary and intellectual essays is preferred, making Italian press the furthest removed from the hard-news paradigm that they study (id. 231).

Other studies, on the other hand, such as Harcourt’s, by stating that the European countries are under a common isomorphic pressure, mean to bring to attention more modern liberalising tendencies, also taking into account recent signs showed by typical Polarized Pluralist systems - such as the Italian - of more commercial media-policies and a more commonly shared ideal of journalistic professionalism (Downey & Mihelj 2012, 138-141).

### 2.4. The influence of history and the reproduction of collective national memory

Another cornerstone of this essay, furthermore, is the importance of societal factors such as history as a background for news production and national representation in the media. Close to Hannerz and Carter’s (2014) theory of journalism’s use of *story lines* and importance of the reproduction of a certain *story or history* for the reproduction of a certain *discourse*, in fact, James Schwoch claims that although a lot has changed since the Cold War, our understanding of global television today has been shaped by Cold War television and politics. In *Global TV* (2008) he presents the analysis of the relationship between global television, politics and diplomacy, as well as media technologies in the context of the Cold War, simultaneously describing the role of America in the shaping of global communication and *globalization*. He narrates in fact that Cold War American politics and diplomacy strategies have forged a particular discourse around globalization that even today is seen as a way and an attempt to promote an American image on global scale and by so doing pursuing the US’ national interest. In this sense, globalization and Americanisation are seen as being tightly linked to one another.
Similarly, Stefan Berger (and others) (2008) isolates – in his *Narrating the Nation* – history from national memory, regarding the first as responsible for the construction of the nation and national identity, but in turn as a product and a construct of human (national) memory. Like Dubrovskaya and Kozhemyakin’s, the purpose of *Narrating the Nation* is not that of reducing history (or in the case of the former, truth) as simply a matter of personal opinion, but to challenge the notion of neutral journalism as well as the ones of an international media culture and of a global village, as read in Riegert’s work. This in fact I believe to be a concept of utmost importance for the understanding of Russian representation in foreign media, especially as a consequence of the complex historical relations between Russia and Sweden and Italy respectively, which may still be shaping the Russian representation in the others’ media.

3. Aim and Research questions

The purpose of this study is to compare the representation of Russia in Swedish and Italian press, with a particular focus on determining whether this can be understood in relation to its country’s adopted storylines and narrative structure.

   1. What storylines are covered in the two countries? Are there differences or similarities between the content chosen in the two countries?
   2. Consequently, how are these storylines influenced by the narrative structure chosen in the two countries? Are there differences or similarities?

As it will be further explained later in this essay, a storyline is a common category in which certain events get relatively naturally slotted in, in the attempt by the journalist and society to make sense of and organise news and reality. The recycling of storylines, though, often results in the re-categorisation of different events in the same discourse, naturalising therefore these interconnections. Because of the limited space available for journalists to cover this *line of stories*, they will resort to the use of specific narrative structures, similar almost, as we will see, to the ones used in fairy tales in order to more easily convey a certain agenda.

4. Theory

In this section will be illustrated and deepened the theoretical notions and concepts that will serve as a background for our understanding and consequently analysis of the empirical
material, with the aim of conclusively being able to answer this essays’ research questions. The focus of this theoretical sections revolves around the parameters of comparison of media systems and the study of representation.

4.1. Comparing Media Systems

As mentioned in the literature summary section, the two ‘opposite’ models that are the British and American one are said by Hilmes to have underpinned media genres, forms and standards for the rest of the world: the relationship with the American other has profoundly influenced and shaped British media till today, as well as how it was implemented and used for nation-building purposes both home and abroad (as well as in countries like Scandinavia – as seen with Riegert (1998), Africa and the Middle East). However, she also claims that although this fundamental transnational characteristic of broadcasting, the subject has always been overlooked by researchers, as if being developed by each nation ‘in splendid isolation’ (Hilmes 2012, 10). This, Hilmes claims, has created a blind spot in our understanding of the nation and of nationalism’s role and importance in the shaping of modern media cultures.

In relation to Hilmes’, another researcher – Sabina Mihelj – introduces and denounces in her Media Nations a theoretical lack in regard to discussing nationalism and nationhood in relation to globalisation, cosmopolitanism and the media, by focusing on how nationalism and global media are in fact mutually dependent and influenced, arguing for the need of a reorganization and reassessment of the meaning of nation and nationalism, challenging what she refers to as false dichotomies, such as that of globalization and nationalism, instead tightly linked with one another (Mihelj 2011). She attempts with this study to fill that void by focusing on how nationalism, inserted in a very Benedict-Anderson-like discourse of cultural imagination, influences and is mutually influenced by the ever- and fast-changing media scenery, and on how these are dependent on each other. Rather than arguing for a transnational perspective, though, she focuses on the power and influence that nationalism and the nation still have in shaping global communications, although these concepts as well as those of media cultures and national audiences might today (and in such a global discourse) seem vague.

In “Nationalising” Foreign Conflict, in fact, Kristina Riegert (1998) states that many mass-media researches would argue that the mass-media are more international than national, as they present similar production routines and organisational division of labour, as well as a common idea of ‘newsworthiness’. She mentions in fact an ‘international media culture’ leading to the
standardisation of international news stories across national boundaries (id. 3-5). She also repeatedly takes up T. A. Van Dijk, according to whom such similarities may be due to the sharing or imposition of such sets of production routines and values advanced by western international news agencies (id. 31).

Such normative or coercive tendencies are elsewhere given the name of *isomorphism* – a phenomenon we also have previously mentioned in the literature summary. Similarly, in fact, in *Central and Eastern European Media in Comparative Perspective*, John Downey and Alison Harcourt bring up Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell’s development of the concept of *isomorphism*, namely ‘*the tendency to become alike*’, and more specifically of its normative faculty: an homogenising force, product of an increased professionalization, responsible for reshaping the idea and image of a certain group of professionals, in this case journalists (Downey & Mihelj 2012, 138). A consequence of this isomorphic process is a move towards the liberal model and a global homogenization of media systems. Harcourt states in fact that the whole of Europe is approximately under the same pressure for liberalization from market competition and globalization of the industry, and that during the last twenty years Europe has been gradually moving away from its original *social responsibility model*, characterised by a more interventionist approach to regulation in press and broadcasting, as well as a strong support for public service, towards a market based one and a lesser role for the state, more typical of a liberal, market-led model that is for example the American (id. 139-41).

Following the stream of American journalistic influence, while reconnecting to the initial ideas presented by Michelle Hilmes and Kristina Riegert, in their case study *The Evolution of Objective and Interpretative Journalism in the Western Press*, Frank Esser and Andrea Umbricht analyse over 2000 political news stories and examine the different ways in which the hard-news paradigm had been adopted or had adapted and shaped itself in the different media systems and societies of the countries taken into account, namely the US, Great Britain, Germany, Switzerland, France and Italy, in a period of time that goes from the 60s to the early 2000s (Esser & Umbricht 2014, 229). With *paradigm* they refer to a shared mind-set, preconceptions and practices related to a matter and in this case we have focused on the concept of *hard-news paradigm*, first emerged in the United States (id. 230). It is through the study of such a paradigm that Esser and Umbricht studied and asserted the level of objectivity and interpretation in American, Northern European and Southern European journalism, isolating in
this way two opposite press systems already introduced by Hallin and Mancini, the *Corporatist* system and the *Polarized Pluralist* model.

The paradigm has in fact developed along different paths in different countries, making a peculiar example out of Italian press, that out of all was the *furthest removed from the principles of facticity and balance*, with political sources being quoted extensively, supposing a strong press-party parallelism (id. 244). Southern European media systems such as Italy, in fact, developed a Polarized Pluralist model “where newspapers’ reliance on state subsidies is traditionally high and ties to political parties close” and where a writing style that favours commentary and intellectual essays is preferred, making Italian press the furthest removed from the *hard-news paradigm* that they study and that will be used in our analysis of Italian and Swedish news (id. 231). The aim of this cross-national and cross-temporal study, based on the model advanced by Hallin and Mancini, is to link the adoption and development of the hard-news paradigm to an increase in the use of objective reporting elements, and why more so in the US than in the European countries, as well as how the paradigm has changed in Western press systems through time (for example towards a more interpretative, opinionated type of journalism, or because of certain conditions – long-time press freedom, liberal democracy etc.) (id. 239, 245). The results of the study showed in fact that there’s been an increase in stories mixing information and interpretations as well as an increase in opinion-based stories. The results show that his might be caused by a recent increase in journalistic analysis - and therefore wanting to know the reason behind some event - and in contextualization of political events. The study’s authors argue that this more interpretative side of journalism might in fact be an enrichment, a contribution to the public sphere, and not necessarily a threat (id. 2).

### 4.2 The study of news

This more interpretative side of journalism, though, might just as easily be understood in terms of *manufacture of consent*, in a very Chomsky- and Herman-like way. They in fact identify five *filters* that may affect the representation of certain news-events, influencing how those stories are read, heard and received. With the term of ‘manufactured consent’, Chomsky and Herman argue in fact that the media promote a certain outlook rather than another and therefore function as propaganda. The five filters they list are: (1) media ownership, (b) advertising income, (c) where our news stories come from, (d) how groups and individuals respond to stories, (e) communism must be avoided at all costs (Mooney & Evans 2015, 65). Through these filters, news and events are represented in a particular light and since we are only ever exposed to that
particular light, of filtered news, this becomes normalised and ‘common sense’ and, reconnecting to Hannerz’s and Berger’s work, a certain story or storyline gets produced and reproduced (id, 64-65).

Another linguist, Allan Bell, has furthermore identified and listed a set of news values that covering actors and events explains how stories are chosen and/or told on the ground of their significance or newsworthiness. Complimenting Chomsky and Herman’s filters, Bell focuses on the micro structures of news-productions and contributes to answering Hannerz’s point of why some stories and storylines get covered while others do not. He categorises these values under hard and soft-news, stating that “Hard news is their staple product: their reports of accidents, conflicts, crimes, and announcements, discoveries and other events which have occurred or come to lights since the previous issue of their paper” (quoted in Mooney & Evans 2015, 73) and draw on the values of: (1) recency (the events should be recent), (2) negativity (negative events are more likely to be newsworthy), (3) proximity (the events should be close by), (4) unexpectedness (that which is not routine is more newsworthy), (4) relevance (to the audience’s own life) and (5) facticity (figures, dates, locations and statistics) (id. 72-74);

Furthermore, on the basis of Russian narratologist Vladimir Propp’s structure, Marie Gillespie (2006) observed that even the genre of news can be and is subject to the key narrative structure of the quest. Just as in a tale in fact, a news story enacts and presents a disruption of the initial equilibrium that is our knowledge of a certain state of affairs; and just as in a tale, even in news it is possible to identify specific characters that would otherwise be found and characteristic of our folklore. He identified 6: (1) the villain; (2) the hero; (3) the donor/provider of a magical tool; (4) the helper; (5) the princess/the victim; (6) the dispatcher who sets the hero on their way and finally (6) the false hero. “News and documentaries are often based on the hero’s journey or quest structure. The narrator (as hero) sets out on a journey to uncover a mystery or find a treasure, meets with obstacles and opponents that prevent him or her discovering the ‘truth’ of a situation, but finally, with helpers, there is a transformation of knowledge, a return and a reward” (id. 99-100).

4.3. The study of representation of foreign countries and events

As mentioned before, Kristina Riegert compares in her “Nationalising” Foreign Conflict two countries with relatively similar public service broadcasting systems, namely Britain and Sweden (Swedish broadcasting was in fact built on the BBC model), with the aim of
determining whether or how each country’s national position in regard to foreign policy might have influenced the conflict’s news coverage, through the analysis of four case studies (Riegert 1998, 51). She lists three factors contributing to such individual coverage: (1) political factors, (2) media factors, and (3) media norms and journalistic culture, paying for example attention on what the individual news-reporting puts focus on, what context the conflicts are put in and whether the correspondents reported and kept the same level of neutrality in relation to either contender. The study’s results have revealed similarities in terms of factors belonging to a certain genre of news reporting, but differences in relation to the amount of attention given to the conflicts, probably depending on the political stance of the country in relation to that particular conflict, as well as in the either positive or negative tones used by the two nations in their reporting. Moreover, despite the similarities attributed to the two systems, Riegert concludes that the Swedish model was in fact closer to a more European, Continental broadcasting model than to an Anglo-Saxon one (Riegert 1998, 56).

Similarly to Riegert’s study, the subject is in fact further developed by Ulf Hannerz and Anthon T. Carter in Foreign News, where they explore how international news and coverage on foreign countries is constructed and read. Through the interviewing of correspondents, they analyse how reporters construct their stories on foreign cultures and countries and how these might be read and made sense of. By interviewing over 70 correspondents around the world, they make an extremely thorough analysis and critique of today’s international journalistic practices while focusing on the methods and approaches of the individual correspondents they interview. On this note, they introduce Lederman’s concept of story line (hence, a line of stories or an order of events) as a common category in which certain events get slotted in almost naturally, a way for the media and society to organise and make sense of reality, foreign events and cultures, reproducing a portrayal of regions in foreign news in a way we are already familiar with. “A place into which a journalist can place seemingly random events and give them coherence […] a common reference point, a set of agreed bearings from which to set out into the unknown and through which to communicate with their audiences” (Hannerz & Carter 2014, ch 4).

Close to Hannerz and Carter’s (2014) theory of journalism’s use of story lines and importance of the reproduction of a certain story or history for the reproduction of a certain discourse, James Schwoch claims that although a lot has changed since the Cold War, our understanding of global television today has been shaped by Cold War television and politics. He narrates in fact that Cold War American politics and diplomacy strategies have forged a particular
discourse around globalization that even today is seen as a way and an attempt to promote an American image on global scale and by so doing pursuing the US’ national interest. In this sense, globalization and Americanisation are seen as being tightly linked to one another. In Global TV (2008) he presents the analysis of the relationship between global television, politics and diplomacy, as well as media technologies in the context of the Cold War, simultaneously describing the role of America in the shaping of global communication and globalization all while “rising through cold war tensions, propaganda battles of the superpowers, competition in science and technology”, creating this way a peculiar American-led discourse about globalization (Schwoch 2008, 1). The goal of the book is that of mapping out a detailed history of how we got where are, and so of television as a medium – from its rise during the Cold War onto how the war and world politics shaped what it has become today.

Hence history, politics and diplomacy too are argued not only to be responsible for the shaping of the respective media systems but also for the storylines told by the same media, both revealing the nation’s stance and producing and spreading a certain stable paradigm through news reporting. If the coverage of a certain event or conflict does not reflect the more common and previously told storyline, Jim Lederman meant that that specific coverage would then almost get ignored – and that the story line told would eventually stay the same (Hannerz & Carter 2004, 102-103). From a functionalist perspective, in fact, by interpreting and reproducing certain events and storylines, the media has played an important role in shaping national memory and identity. Just like news and the media, in fact, all historical events are interpreted and re-told by historians from their own partial perspective. In relation to this, in Stefan Berger’s book Narrating the Nation we read of the concept of transgenerational traumatisation, indicating the phenomenon of the memory of a certain event in the nation’s past becoming central to the understanding of reality of a generation that has no direct experience of memory of that event, consequently meaning that we mistakenly identify history with narrative (Berger 2008, 11). A narrative in fact, just like Hannerz’s storyline, is considered to be persuasive and so normalised that it is hardly ever questioned.

Just like Berger, Tatiana Dubrovskaya and Evgeniy Kozhemyakin in their Media Construction of Russia’s International Relations discuss the representation of Russia and Russian international relations in the mass media in very similar terms. By quoting Hjarvard, they see the media as offering a presentation and interpretation of reality, contributing to the development of a common identity, like Berger’s memory. But as representation needs to be
expressed through language, signs and images – just like in a newspaper – it gets transformed and reconstructed through coding and decoding practices, reorganised and re-told – just as Chomsky and Herman and Bell claim – for the sake of a certain agenda, of a certain audience and gets re-adapted to match certain values of newsworthiness. It becomes a statement (Dubrovskaya & Kozhemyakin 2017, 91).

4.4. **Theoretical introduction to the mode of analysis**

The analysis of the narration, and hence representation, of Russia in Swedish and Italian newspapers is performed by maintaining a steady background knowledge of the study and comparison of the two different media systems proposed by Hallin and Mancini. Thereafter, through the values proposed by Chomsky and Herman and Bell, as well as the model of narrative analysis proposed by Propp, I set out to analyse the narrative structure of the articles chosen, with the aim of identifying the reproduction of the same or eventually different storylines by the two countries’ newspapers, and the relative representation of Russia.

5. **Method and Material**

*Representation* commonly means using language to say or represent the world *meaningfully*, an essential part of meaning-making- and exchanging-process among members of a *culture*, and *narrative analysis*, which is the method chosen for my thesis and this specialization, has the role and makes the contribution of providing us with “a *productive approach to what goes on when the media texts are produced as well as when they are received, used and understood by audiences*” (Hall 2013, 1; Gillespie & Toynbee 2016, 35). The role of this section, then, will be that of further describing and discussing the methodological field and the importance of the study of words and narratives in relation to representation.

5.1. **Choice of Method**

In order to answer this essay’s aim and research questions, I will make use of articles regarding the representation of Russia on the two main digital liberal newspapers in Sweden and Italy respectively, namely *Dagens Nyheter* and *Il Corriere della Sera*. This will be a qualitative analysis involving the use of narrative analyses of news articles. This method was chosen as more specific and better applied to just texts and story-telling strategies, rather than what for
example a discourse analysis would and could have been. Furthermore, these may enhance the importance of modes of narration for an analysis of representations.

Cullum-Swan and Manning, for starters, write about connections between expression and content as social and arbitrary, and as incomplete without what it’s called an *interpretant*, an observer that makes the connection. The connections made by the interpretant are coded, mental, primitive, socially created and shared, and form a certain set of ideas and practices that – to reconnect with the beginning - it’s then called *culture*. Here, these connections are mentioned to also be called *paradigms*. These paradigms, these understandings are most often tacit, that means non-verbal, and therefore usually go unrecognized by the interpretants themselves, just like the normalized *storylines* we discussed in the theoretical section. Here is culture also tightly linked to power, in the sense that it is sedimented in institutions that authorize and legitimize some invisible, unrecognized connections and paradigms over others (Cullum-Swan & Manning 1994, 466-467).

Just as Cullum-Swan and Malling, in his *A Multimodal Framework for Analysing Websites as Cultural Expressions* Luc Pauwels (2012, 260) claims that even in the same *culture*, the same sign might have different meanings according to context and to the observer. These two accounts leave us wondering about objectivity and whether something like that might actually exist. They both seem to embrace the structuralist assumption expressed by Cullum-Swan and Manning that all expressions are relative, which coincides with what has been previously stated about Chomsky and Herman’s filters as well as Allan Bell’s values. These affect in fact the way in which reality is re-produced by the media, conclusively making the press and events *newsworthy* rather than objective.

### 5.2. Material and Execution

These two countries were chosen as being both European countries, they belong to two realities not too far off from one another and present therefore differences that may not be too obvious as well as similarities that may themselves be of interest to study. This interest was then further deepened by the historical differences between the two, which I believe resonate still today. Furthermore, they are the systems and realities I personally know best, previously researched and studied in languages I can read and comprehend extensively.
These sources, on the other hand, were chosen as they both present a similarly well-constructed section about foreign news-reporting, as well as are the most distributed liberal online sources in their countries. It is in fact important for the sake of the comparison that the presentation of the articles would not look too different from each other, and that the political views expressed were not too obvious. Liberal newspapers were chosen, in fact, as to avoid all-too-obvious partisanship, hence government or party control. As there’s a lot of material available on these platforms, I will be limiting the empirical research to 3 to 5 articles regarding 3 more general categories, where specific recent or actual events regarding Russia will be slotted in. The three categories being: (1) Russian national events, (2) Coverage on foreign events involving Russia, (3) The Skripal-case. An additional cornerstone for the analysis of Russian representation will be a closer look at the representation of Russian PM Vladimir Putin.

The articles will be chosen so as not to select news that more specifically regard Russia and Sweden and Italy respectively, as it may sound obvious that the national press may support its own country in case of crisis, but it would on the other hand not be as clear if neither of the countries are directly involved. The aim is in fact to eventually demonstrate that the reporting will vary regardless. The articles were selected by searching for the same keyword on both online sources. The keywords were related to a specific event involving Russia in the last year - with the most recent being published in March. As not to incur in obvious differences, the articles whose structure were the most alike were selected. Finally, the parameters described in the theoretical section got applied to the articles throughout the analysis.

The keywords used for the selection of the events and articles on the respective digital platforms were (translated to English):

a. Russia  
b. Vladimir Putin  
c. Russian election  
d. Russiagate  
e. Putingate  
f. Skripal

5.3. Methodological discussion
A weakness of a narrative analysis in a comparative study is that the researcher has to assume that all readers and interpretant share the same values and read and therefore interpret a text in the same way. Depending on the passive expectations and perspective the reader and/or the researcher are either aware or unaware of having, the interpretation of events, words and narratives may vary. Therefore, the intersubjective character of this study may appear hard to prove. On the other hand, its reliability and validity are strengthened by the fact that similar studies have been performed before, as mentioned and given account of in the literature summary and theoretical section.

6. Analysis and Discussion

As mentioned earlier in the chapter about theory, the theoretical model of analysis that is used in this study is partly based on Hallin and Mancini’s own study and comparison of the different media systems, as well as on Kristina Riegert’s study and also comparison of the national representation in foreign news-reporting, furthermore applying modes of analysis of news and narrative structures proposed by Allan Bell and Vladimir Propp respectively. This theoretical model has structured my own analysis and its relative results will be presented and organised following two questions. Firstly, the results will be presented as to answering the question about what general storyline, as intended by Hannerz and Carter (2014), is or are told by the articles. Secondly, how the articles revealed their differences and similarities in regards to their narrative structure.

6.1. Reporting of Russian national events

6.1.1. Storyline analysis

The greatest part of recent Russia-related articles found and slotted in under this category belong to the event that was the Russian 2018 presidential election. As it might have been expected, both Il Corriere della Sera and Dagens Nyheter proved to pay a lot of attention to the persona of Vladimir Putin. Despite the common objects, the reporting also showed some striking differences.

The Swedish newspaper, to begin with, showed a much more extreme focus on the Vladimir Putin’s persona than the Italian newspaper. All articles taken in consideration, for starters, displayed the word ‘Putin’ in the title and focused mainly on his race to presidency than on the
election per se. All of the articles emphasized the obviousness of his victory and payed relatively little attention to other candidates. Furthermore, in the storyline about the Russian election, other storylines were brought up as relevant context for the argument, such as the recent events in Syria, also involving Russia and Vladimir Putin, as well as a strategic comparison with North Korea.

The Italian newspaper on the other hand, seemed to be focusing a lot more on Putin’s rivals in the race to Russian presidency. Similarly to Dagens Nyheter, the name ‘Putin’ often appeared in the title, although not in all articles, but contrarily to the Swedish paper only one article focused completely on Putin’s persona. In this case, the storyline told about Putin was rather in defence of the Russian politician – in regards to the accusation of him being a populist -, than a criticism to him and his policies. The other articles, on the other hand, focused almost fully on two of the best-known candidates running against Putin, namely Aleksej Navalnyj and Ksenia Sobachak, and on the unlikeliness of their chance against the ex PM.

Lastly, one other event that fell into this category was the plane crash happened in the Moscow-area in the beginning of February this year. Here too, the storylines told were quite strikingly different. As the Italian paper kept a fairly neutral and descriptive tone, mainly presenting details about the circumstances of the accident and the hypotheses behind it, the Swedish paper focused on the unsafety of the Russian company and on the frequency of crashes involving Russian flights. The Swedish article does not stop at describing the event of the accident but goes into telling the storyline about Russia being one of the countries with the highest number of plane crashes, as well as re-telling the ones about previous accidents, including the one involving a Swedish ice-hockey team.

6.1.2. Narrative analysis

Hence, when reporting on national events, the Swedish paper is much more openly negative than the Italian paper, which in turns relies on a more varied agency. The value of negativity is generally more present in the Swedish paper than in the Italian, but this can especially be seen in regard to the image of Vladimir Putin, even when the articles appear to and/or are expected to be relatively similar. When reporting on the Russian 2018 election, the Swedish newspaper displayed an overall feeling of hopelessness, also perceivable in the articles narrative structure, as seen in the example:
“That Vladimir Putin communicates that he would be running for the Russian 2018 presidential election was more than expected. He will win the election. Meanwhile tiredness grows for a president that has practically been in power for almost two decades” (Lauren 2017).

This article in particular is strongly commentary-led, and the narrator is not only perceived as such, but as the protagonist and hero too. The narrator-hero here does not only contribute to making the narration more relatable, but also to rendering Putin the villain of the story and to turning the witnesses into victims:

“I’m riding a cab home from a reception in Moscow and listening to his speech. There he stands surrounded by factory workers – this time Gaz car factory in Nizjnij Novgorod – and replies yes. A situation that as in a mix-up compares to many other previous ones. Putin likes to be surrounded by collectives that can be controlled”

“I think of all these talented people I have met not just in Moscow but also in the Russian provinces. Who can never trust that law is effective.”

“There are many like Islam, who avoid to take a position” (ibid.).

On the other hand, an example of differences in narrative can be seen in the comparison of the two articles “No one doubts that Vladimir Putin wins the Russian presidential election – again” (ibid.) in Dagens Nyheter, versus “Tzar Putin’s limitless race: in March he will (once again) be president” (Dragosei 2017) in Il Corriere della Sera. The articles already present similarities in regard to the fact that they both were written at the end of December 2017 and that their titles are quite similar. Another factor that may lead us to believe that the two articles may resemble each other is that they both name and discuss Putin’s main political rival, Aleksej Navalnyj.

As mentioned in the first part of this analysis, however, the two papers reveal two different approaches to the news. While the Swedish paper remains consistent with the title and begins by emphasizing Putin’s undisputed victory and power over the voting processes, thus focusing on a negative value of the news, the Italian paper starts by discussing the Navalnyj trial (thus the court-led decision that he would not be able to run for president), its unexpectedness, by ‘legitimizing’ its outcome as an application of Russian law, and by listing Navalnyj’s ‘crimes’. Where the Swedish paper talks Putin’s maneuvers to ensure its victory, the Italian paper reports on Vladimir Putin’s support rising to 80%; where the Swedish article talks policies and the Syrian conflict, the Italian reports on how Putin will try to solve the risk of low turnout.
“No one doubts that Vladimir Putin will win. The power of the current president controls the whole election process, including the vote-count.”

“A third great issue for Russia is Syria. Putin has now communicated twice that Russian troops leave Syria […], but Russia maintains both its bases in Khmeimim and Tartus, and is a key-actor for peace-processes. The most central of Putin’s objectives, that al-Assad stays, is ensured” (Lauren 2017)

“An incandescent electoral campaign, then, although the result already appears effectively obvious with Vladimir Vladimirovich that gains approval-percentages close to 80%”.

“With the people sure of the results, it is possible that many will stay at home instead of going to the polling stations. Like in the past, then, all the organizational set-ups will be mobilized in order to bring workers, soldiers and the common people to the polling stations” (Dragosei 2017).

One might then argue that the use of the term ‘tsar’ in the Italian paper might hold a negative connotation, but then again this seems to be used in the attempt to separate the persona of Vladimir Putin from his accusations of being a populist, a word loaded with negativity today more than ever before. The terms tsar and nationalist, that are today not commonly used in a positive light, are in the Italian newspaper used in order to portray Vladimir Putin as a sort of stoic, powerful, heroic figure: ex. “his nationalism has relaunched Moscow […] and Russia’s centriality” (Romano 2018). As in the previous article, it seems common in the narrative structure of Il Corriere della Sera to start with a confutation, e negation, as it was Navalnyj’s candidacy and hope for change, or Putin’s allegations to be a populist, in order for the narration to gradually escalate in more positive terms.

The narrative in Dagens Nyheter seems on the other hand to start with a negative tone, with a powerful, dramatic title for example (ex. “Putin will win again – but it will not be a real election”, or “Russia suffers many deadly plane crashes”) with the tendency to use words with negative connotations, such as ‘drabbas’ or suffer – as it will also be seen later in other categories -, to use the persona of Putin as a constant and a focus in discussions about Russia, as well as to make more use of the values of proximity and relevance (for example by connecting the news story about the plane crash to the less recent one that killed Swedish citizens, or by often retelling the tragedy of the conflict in Syria) (Lauren 2017)(Dagens Nyheter 2018).
“Russia ranks as one of the most affected countries for deadly plane-crashes. In 2011, Ice-hockey goal-keeper Stefan Liv and his whole team died when their plane crashed down in the Volga river” (ibid.).

6.2. Reporting of foreign events involving Russia

6.2.1. Storyline analysis

Under this category, it might be necessary to make a difference between articles involving Russia as an active agent in the narration itself and others involving Russia as an agent in the affair described, but not covering any agency-role in the narration.

In the articles about the Trump-scandal and the parallelisms made with the Watergate scandal, for example, and in the Swedish paper in particular, the focus seems to be much more on the history and circumstances behind Watergate itself, rather than Trump or his involvement with Putin and Russia, although the Swedish paper makes use of the word ‘Putingate’ in the title, rather than the more commonly, internationally used term ‘Russiagate’. The Italian paper, contrarily, focuses much more on the Trump-scandal of his involvement with the Kremlin than on the Watergate scandal per se and does name Russia and Putin (although indirectly as ‘president’) in the article, although not in the title, keeping a relatively neutral and informative tone.

In the articles in which Russia is displayed as an agent, on the other hand, the differences are once again quite striking. They tell both the storyline of the conflict in Syria and the Middle East and do so in quite different ways, starting with their titles. In both’s titles, in fact, Russia and Putin are displayed as active agents but the storylines are quite different. In Dagens Nyheter, in fact, Putin and Russia are described and emphasized as perpetrators, supporters of the dramatic and dramatized conflict. Only in the title, Putin is named together with the word ‘blood’ and right after, in the subtitle, Russia is said supporting a civilian-slaughtering dictatorship. Elements that set the tone for the whole article. The storyline told is in fact that of Russia supporting a massacre and of its unsuccessfulness at calming it down. Swedish articles about the Syrian conflicts are generally negative and tend to tell a story of hopelessness, with titles such as “The UN cannot solve the conflicts in the Middle East” (Björling 2018).

The articles on Il Corriere della Sera, on the other hand, grant Russia a rather positive agency, as well as portray it as a victim. In one of the articles, in fact, apart from re-telling the story of
the Syrian conflicts and of the parties involved, the story covers Putin’s aims for stability and peace in the area rather than his support for the Syrian dictator, as well as the role of Russia in saving the regime and the lives of Syrians, Israelis and the Lebanese.

“‘The Russian president […] seems to be more interested in keeping a balance between the different battling coalitions than in making Assad re-conquer every lost piece of territory’”.

“‘The Russians still have time to avoid a total conflict so protecting the investment of these past years for the survival of the regime and the lives of Syrians, Israelis and Lebanese” (Frattini 2018).

In another case, furthermore, about an accident also shortly mentioned by the Swedish paper in one of its articles, a whole other storyline is told about Russia as a victim and about Russian soldiers killed in Syria by the hand of a US raid. Russian involvement here is kept quite vague while it is stated quite clearly that the US heavily attacked the Russian battalion and its counsellors, killing dozens of Russian soldiers. Russia here is also said to have toned down the gravity of the event for the sake of diplomatic relations.

### 6.2.2. Narrative analysis

On the same line of what has just been said about the narrative of national events, the Swedish paper tends to use more negative terms and start with an outright more negative representation of Vladimir Putin if compared to the Italian: “Blood runs from al-Assad and Putin” (Wolodarski 2018) versus “Iran-Israel: the war that only Putin can end” (Frattini 2018). Once again, in contrast with the Swedish article, *Il Corriere della Sera* tends to portray Vladimir Putin’s agency in a positive light. Furthermore, the narrative structure often used in this newspaper, of short separate paragraphs, contributes to taking away the dramatic narration that is otherwise found in the Swedish article, where the paragraphs flow from one onto the other and where the initial and final equilibrium almost coincide, and the narrative is generally more constant.

Wolodarski’s (2018) article, for example, begins with a short recap in timeline form of the three most recent events related to the Syrian war and then quotes:

“A myriad of conflicts with shifting and uneven alliances has long characterized the civil war in Syria. The most recent phase, where even more foreign powers are joining, is even more complicated”

And then ends with:
“Hopefully the UN and aid agencies will find a way to alleviate the suffering in eastern Ghouta. But the civil war is hard to end, and in Syria it’s already hard enough to count all the parties involved. In seven years this hell on Earth has revealed a horrible ever-worsening capability” (ibid.).

The melodramatic factor, as seen in Gillespie and Toynbee (2006) seems in fact to be highly influencing in the Swedish paper. As mentioned before, even by repeatedly re-contextualizing the Syrian conflict and therefore a tragedy familiar and relevant to the reader, the narrative here seems to want to emphasize pathos and emotions. As partly seen in the example, in fact, the newspaper seems to rely on emotionally-loaded language familiar of humanitarian narrative, with other examples in the article being “The tragedy constantly gets new chapters” and “it’s barbarism of incomprehensible dimensions” (ibid.).

The Italian articles, on the other hand, seem to lack this humanitarian-like narrative, and seem to prefer one similar to those of reports or diaries. In the article ‘Syria, many Russians dead in US raid’ (Olimpio 2018), for example, the first paragraphs quote:

“Dozens of Russians seems to have died in the US-led attack in Syria that took place between February 7th and 8th. Unofficial sources have mentioned 4 soldiers, but other insistently-spread news also backed up by the New York Times believe that the number might be higher. Maybe 100, according to Syrian sources. Moscow, in turn, has tried to cool the temperature down by claiming they were in fact not soldiers but mercenaries” (ibid.).

No commentary is given nor particular connotations perceived. The article consequently ends with a recap of the different aspects of the battle and conclusively with:

“the Russian losses have an ‘internal’ value, the Kremlin doesn’t want it to be talked about as it is trying to promote the idea that the campaign in Syria, certainly successful, comes with a low cost. So much that in Russia there’s who is asking for clarity on what has happened and on how many conational may have lost their life” (ibid.).

Although the controversial nature of the news, once again, no commentary is given. The narration is kept relatively neutral and the narrator maintains a status of observer or witness.

A similar phenomenon, when no commentary is given in controversial circumstances, can however also be observed in Dagens Nyheter. In some cases, in fact, as in the article titled “Expert: The UN cannot solve the conflicts in the Middle East” (Björbling 2018), the narrator almost completely vanishes and blends in in the text, becomes an observer and mainly serves
the purpose of reporting and/or explaining shortly the circumstances behind a quote. Interestingly enough, though, when the quoted ‘expert’ attributes Russia and Putin important agency, and the possibility of it being positive, no commentary is given at all:

“-Russia is today the only country that has contact with all the parties. We need to let Russia see the advantages of toning down the tensions in Syria. What would that be? I don’t want to sound naïve, but maybe Putin cares about his reputation, and he wants to preserve relations with other countries” (ibid.).

Now, I have mentioned that the Swedish paper tends to make more use of the value of relevance for the audience, therefore it could be said to be re-telling the same tragic storyline about Syria where Russia plays the role of the villain or the false hero. In a similar and maybe all-too-Proppian way, just as Russia gets repeatedly portrayed as the villain and/or false hero (depending on the article) and Syria as the victim, it could be argued that the ‘expert’ in question then comes in aid of the observer-narrator, substituting himself in the quest of transforming and spreading knowledge. The expert becomes then both helper and hero.

Although not specifically related to the representation of Russia, this re-contextualizing tendency of the Swedish paper can also be seen in its article’s take on the Russiagate-Watergate comparison. Despite the title “Therefore can ’Putingate’ compare to Watergate” (Ohlsson 2017) and the singular use of the term ‘Putingate’ rather than the more commonly known ‘Russiagate’, the article does not mention Putin or Russia once, but focuses on retelling the story of Nixon’s Watergate-scandal.

In the same way and just oppositely, the Italian article covering the same subject (“Will it be like Watergate (and what does Hillary have to do with it)?”) (Corriere della Sera 2017) reveals once again its less melodramatic, less story-telling approach, favoring instead an interview format with questions and answers. Through this format the reader is expected to and made aware of not knowing everything about the story, and the narrator is therefore not just an observer re-telling a story, but more of an expert, an omniscient narrator, transforming its audience’s knowledge.

6.3. Reporting of the Skripal case

6.3.1. Storyline analysis
Finally, I believed a separate category should be made about the Skripal case as a most-recent event and the one that seemingly drew the most attention from the media. This category was not pre-planned but happened as the event was getting a lot of international and variegated coverage.

Another reason why I believe the Skripal-reporting is in need of a particular, separate category is because the reporting between the two papers is in fact more balanced than in the previous two. The storylines told by the two papers are similar and report mostly on the same events. Both *Dagens Nyheter* and *Il Corriere della Sera* tell the story and describe the circumstances of the accident, both report on Theresa May and Boris Johnson’s threats to Russia if the latter was in fact involved, and both name the parallelism with the less recent case of the Litvinenko assassination in an hotel in London.

However, the two papers still display some differences. The Swedish paper, for example, focuses on a much more diplomatically isolated image of Russia. The country gets portrayed as the identified common enemy of USA, UK, EU and Nato, almost alienated, and the event as a diplomatic crisis between the West and Russia. Both papers report on the Russian side, defence and responses, but as the Swedish paper keeps quotations quite short and vague, the Italian paper goes more in deep and quotes longer pieces of Russian responses to the attacks. That is to say, the Russian side is in fact more present in the Italian paper although less than in other articles. Furthermore, it appears that while the Swedish paper remains quite consistent with the story and version told, the Italian paper balances the two sides out by publishing one article emphasizing suspicions against Russian involvement - for example with a whole article focused on the parallelism with the Litvinenko case-, with articles emphasizing Russia as an agent and therefore its responses against the accusations.

6.3.2. Narrative analysis

As mentioned before, the analysis of the Skripal-case reporting deserves a category of its own as, as well as being the most covered event, it presents some anomalies. If the two previous categories displayed a similar pattern of different storylines-different narrative structures, this one did not. The storyline told by the two papers was pretty much the same, what differed the most in fact was the narrative structure.
First, despite the frequent use of quotations, we find an omniscient narrator in the Swedish paper. In the article “Lavrov replies to the British accusations – ‘Russia is not guilty’” (Neveus 2018), furthermore, the narrator seems to take on the role of a helper, and to support a specific side rather than the other. By writing that “USA, EU and Nato support Great Britain in the conflict with Russia” and that the events are developing “into a serious diplomatic crisis between the Western world and Russia”, Russia is no longer just a villain, but becomes the common enemy of the society the audience relates to. Great Britain becomes on the other hand the hero, opposed by the villain in its quest for truth and justice. The narrator/helper, in this case, openly intervenes in aid of the hero by claiming that “Even France’s president Emmanuel Macron, Nato’s general secretary Jens Stoltenberg and other big EU-leaders have sided with London in the quarrel” and that “At the same time it’s unlikely that London would lie about it being Novichoc, a poison only Russia should have access to” (ibid.). Here in particular we clearly recognize the narrator’s voice addressing its reader with an argument.

Meanwhile, the Italian article covers exactly the same story but emphasizes quotations rather than narration. As usual, the event is covered in a much more explanatory way, divided in different paragraphs, rather than following story-telling strategies. The article “Ex Russian spy: Lavrov asks London for samples of the nerve gas. Request rejected” (Corriere della Sera 2018) begins with a short summary of the quarrel and is consequently divided into two paragraphs: the first one quoting more of Lavrov – hence a much longer and more complete quote than in the Swedish paper – and the second further explaining the rules that Lavrov appeals to in his quotations. Examples from the first are:

“‘Russia doesn’t have anything to do with the case of the ex Russian secret agent poisoned in Great Britain together with the daughter and will not answer the United Kingdom’s ultimatum before London will have given it access to the analysis of the toxic component’, respecting this way ‘the obligations of the convention on chemical weapons’” (ibid.)

And

“‘Instead of giving ultimatums London should be respecting its international obligations’” (ibid.).

Although commentary is almost completely absent, by choosing these quotations the author seems to be tilting the article’s center a bit towards the Russian side, making Great Britain the enemy instead, hindering the hero’s quest to truth and justice by not allowing transparency and
not respecting international pacts. The logic of Lavrov’s argument is further proven and supported in the second, more explanatory paragraph and quotes:

"The rules of the Opac allow Great Britain to send a request to Russia about the suspected chemical component and expect a reply within 10 days, Lavrov explained. If the reply is not satisfactory, Great Britain can present an objection to the executive council of the organization and to the conference of the member states of the Convention" (ibid.).

This paragraphs certainly gives credit to Lavrov’s argument against London, but it is nonetheless only a paraphrase of his own statement and not a commentary or explanation given by an omniscient narrator with access to other sources and knowledge.

In comparison to the Swedish article, furthermore, here Russia is not portrayed as the isolated enemy of a coalition or a group, and although the event told is exactly the same, with the same quotes - used although to different degrees -, Russia does not seem to be portrayed as the villain, but rather as the outlook. In fact, similar quotes to the ones read in the Swedish article but portraying the event as a British-Russian quarrel only, are: “Tension rises between London and Moscow” and “Meanwhile even the general secretary of the Nato, Jens Stoltenberg, has expressed ‘great worry’ [...] ‘The United Kingdom is a highly appreciated ally and this accident is of great worry for Nato’” (ibid.). Furthermore, although the same secretary Jens Stoltenberg is quoted in both articles, the Italian doesn’t mention him taking any side.

On the other hand, another reason why the Skripal-case needed a category of its own is given by the inconsistency of the Italian paper. Despite the great number of articles published about the case, the Swedish paper kept consistently spreading the same storyline while the Italian paper’s changed depending on the author of the article. Other articles about the case in fact, focused much more on Great Britain’s agency and measures against Russia, as well as their legitimacy; or made parallelisms with previous similar cases involving Russian spies, interviewing people fleeing Russia due to the fear, typical of a more melodramatic narrative.

In these more melodramatic Italian articles, in fact, we can observe a narrator-given commentary summarizing and making parallelism between the Skripal and the Litvinenko-cases, both involving ex Russian secret agents killed on British grounds. In an article of which the title clearly states “‘Now everyone knows that Moscow is behind it’ “ (Ippolito 2018), we read:
“And one had to wait until 2016 before an official probation would establish that the execution had been by the hands of the Russian secret services, probably on direct order of Vladimir Putin. Now she, Marina [Litvinenko’s wife], witnesses with dismay her personal drama repeating itself: the poisoning of Sergej Skripal and his daughter Yulia forces her to relive those days and that grief” (ibid.).

“Will Russia be able to change, finally become a normal country? ‘I am very sad, mine is a great country, a generous people. But it first needs to change this atmosphere of propaganda that it’s covering it’. Will it be necessary to wait for a political change to have the truth? ‘Yes, and I’m sure that then we’ll have the truth on all the political murders of these years, from Anna Poltikovskaja to Boris Nemtsov and many others. And even the truth on my Sasha’” (ibid.).

Here Vladimir Putin and his ‘atmosphere of propaganda’ are openly observed as the villain of the story while the Litvinenko widow is portrayed as the hero, fighting for truth and for her dead husband. This intertextuality is also a cosmetic strategy typical of melodrama, playing on the readers’ emotions and retelling a story they already are familiar with (relevance), overlapping different time- and space-dimensions.

Also Dagens Nyheter draws upon the Litvinenko case for parallelism-sake, although in a much shorter way:

“The event in Salisbury has led politicians and the media in Great Britain to draw parallels with the polonium-poisoning of the ex Russian agent Aleksander Litvinenko in London – a case that caused diplomatic complications between Great Britain and Russia” (de la Reguera 2018).

The Swedish narrative of the Skripal-case in fact seems to be consistent with Dagens Nyheter’s overall narrative. Much of the focus is kept on Great Britain and Theresa May’s agency, as the just and strong hero protecting its country:

“-But let the police have time and space so that they can do a real investigation, May said also according to the news agency Reuters. May stressed that the British government was prepared to take measures as soon as the police could have proven who is behind the attack: -We will do that when the time is right and based on the evidence found, she said” (Svahn 2018)

Russia, on the other hand, is not given much choice but to be the villain:

“May demands that Russia now comes with a credible explanation of what has happened.
Either is the Russian federation responsible for the attack against the Skripal family, or the Russian state has lost control over the neurotoxins that are produced and stored in the country, May said” (Holmberg 2018)

7. Results and Summary

Through an analysis of storylines and narrative structure in news articles covering national, international and more specific events, and their relative differences and similarities, the aim of this study was of comparing the representation of Russia in Swedish and Italian press.

The results have shown that when it comes to Russia, Putin or Russian involvement, the storylines told by the two countries differ from one another. The personification of Russia with its leader, Vladimir Putin, was in fact much stronger in the Dagens Nyheter than in the Italian paper. News-stories about the Russian election became stories about Putin’s race to presidency; those about Russian involvement in Syria became stories about Putin’s maneuvers or failures in the area. The importance of personification in the Swedish paper might be due to the political distance between Russian and Swedish politics, as well as the negative image that the Russian president has built around him in Sweden. The paper might then play on the value of negativity and relevance to appeal and get more attention from its audience.

Hypothetically, in fact, this would explain why the same storylines would not be as successful with Il Corriere della Sera. Relations between Italian politics and economics and the Putin’s administration trace in fact back to Silvio Berlusconi’s days, and have even characterized the more recent Italian political scene. In fact, the use of terms like ‘tsar’, ‘nationalism’ and ‘populism’ in Italian articles could be said to be familiar to the current political situation in Italy where two parties, nationalist and populist respectively, were running against each other for election. Furthermore, stronger signs of political corruption are not as distant from Italian eyes and ears as they might be to Swedish, and the values of negativity and unexpectedness might therefore not be as effective to an Italian audience. It could furthermore also be argued that the relatively constantly stable political and economic system in Sweden might be at the roots of the consistent representation of Russia in Swedish media.
Similarly, to a country so much on the frontline of the war in Syria as Italy, humanitarian attitudes and narration strategies like the ones found in the Swedish paper, might be too distant, and all-too-typical of an observer’s point of view. The villain-victim dichotomy that concerns Russia and Syria found in Dagens Nyheter would not in fact work on a people struggling with political and economical instability and clandestine immigration, about to vote their national and populist parties at the polling stations. This might also explain why a melodramatic narrative structure was preferred by the Swedish writers rather than the Italian, although according to Hallin and Mancini’s model, the Polarized Pluralist model, and the Italian more in particular, were the ones placed furthest from the principles of balance and facticity. This was interestingly observed in the analysis of the Skripal-case’s coverage, where varying articles were published, covering different points of views.

It might be important to bring once again to memory that although the strong partisanship characteristic of the model Italy belongs to, Il Corriere della Sera still is said to be a liberal newspaper and is therefore supposed to emphasize more of a neutral approach and a journalism more information-oriented. On the other hand, the melodramatic style of Dagens Nyheter reminds of the commentary-oriented and intellectually prosed style not exactly typical of the Democratic Corporatist model Sweden would otherwise belong to.

Conclusively, although the articles did in fact portray Russia in different ways, coherent with the storylines told in the past and with the ones relevant for today’s political and economical circumstances, neither papers seem to exactly adhere to the characteristics of the models proposed by Hallin and Mancini. Relevance for the audience, as seen in Kristina Riegert’s study, seem in fact to finally be what is most valued by both in the process of news production. This might reconnect also to the isomorphic tendencies mentioned by Harcourt and therefore current transnational tendencies affecting contemporary Europe.

**8. Conclusion**

The representation of Russia in the press did in fact at least partly prove itself to vary from one country to the other. This was showed through the reproduction of different storylines involving Russia and through the choice of different narrative structures attributing Russia different roles and varying degrees of relevance, revealing at least partly different social agendas.
These narrative structures did however also prove to not necessarily be able to be understood in relation to Hallin and Mancini’s media model, who attributed Italy and Sweden to the Polarized Pluralist and Democratic Corporatist models respectively.

Finally, the applied analysis allowed me to answer this study’s research questions and aim.
9. REFERENCES:


10. PRIMARY SOURCES


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