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The worlding of St. Petersburg and Shanghai: comparing cultures of communication before and after revolutions

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Abstract

In this article we propose an alternative model for comparative communication research. We first make the case for comparing cities, especially worlding cities outside what is traditionally called the "West." We then explicate what we mean by comparing cultures of communication and why this offers an opportunity to reevaluate methodological nationalism and the cultural dynamics of worlding. We go on to use Shanghai and St. Petersburg as two historical examples to demonstrate how worlding cities (1) compel us to see cultural hybridization as a historical process; (2) offer good opportunities to observe contested elements of cultures; (3) make it possible to analyze cities as texts that are always connected with, but not necessarily contained by the nation.

Keywords: cities as texts, worlding, cultures of communication, comparative historical communication research, methodological nationalism and cosmopolitanism, Shanghai, St. Petersburg

The Worlding of St. Petersburg and Shanghai: Comparing Cultures of Communication

Before and After Revolutions

For years, social scientists have critiqued methodological nationalism, arguing that the concept of a nation-state should not be the default starting point for any research project and that more efforts are needed to conceive of alternative approaches (see, for example, Beck, 2005; Curtin, 2007; Sassen, 2005; Tomlinson, 1991; Wimmer & Schiller, 2002). For scholars interested in studying the cultural dynamics of globalization, such a critique is particularly relevant to rethinking the geo-cultural boundaries, as well as the analytical unit, that we tend to take for granted in our research. How have we been imagining the communication spaces demarcated by different boundaries? Is it time to recast our spatial imaginary in the age of, political, and cultural cross-border exchanges? In this article we engage with global communication studies in general, and in particular with the recent debate about de-Westernizing the field, proposing an alternative model for comparative research. We suggest that it is time for comparative communication research to take not only a spatial turn, by changing the unit of comparison, but also a cultural turn, by situating communicative activities in broader historical and cultural contexts.

Studies that examine media and communication activities in non-Western societies were traditionally labeled international communication research. Concern about the imbalanced information flow between countries at 'the center' and those at "the periphery," triggered the debate in the 1970s and 1980s on a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) and scholars in this group conceptualized both the dominant and the dominated, the

Westernizing and the Westernized, in terms of nation-states (e.g., Curran & Park, 2000; Schiller, 1969, 1976; Thussu, 2006). Later, the term "international" was dropped by many in favor of "global," in order to indicate the decline of the nation-state in the face of global media industries and to highlight the hybridization of culture as a result of the globalized circulation of media products (Rantanen, 2008). The dichotomy of imperialist vs. national was then replaced by that of global vs. local, with the latter category being perceived as passive and vulnerable (Willems, 2014). Kraidy (2011) criticizes the prevalent conceptualization of "the local" in global communication research as "something which exists in suspended opposition to the 'global,' where the local acts as the global's presumptive victim, its cultural nemesis, or its coerced subordinate" (p. 51).

Another strand of research that tends to use the nation-state as the default analytical unit is comparative media studies, which, given its focus on the relationship between media systems and political systems (e.g., Esser & Pfetsch, 2004; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1956), has been strongly influenced by comparative politics. From *Four Theories of the Press* to *Comparing Media Systems*, the comparison of different media systems and journalistic practices has often presupposed a normative goal of liberal democracy. That is to say, institutional and professional norms in Western liberal-democratic countries are usually the yardstick against which media arrangements in other countries are measured (Nerone, 2004; Meng & Rantanen, 2015).

As an attempt to challenge the deeply rooted methodological nationalism, as well as the Western-centrism, often embedded in such dichotomies as global vs. local, Western vs. non-Western, democratic vs. non-democratic, we propose to conduct comparative research on cultures of communication in two worlding cities, St. Petersburg and Shanghai. The term

"worlding cities" is borrowed from Roy and Ong's (2011) edited book of that name, in which the contributors discuss urban projects and practices across Asian cities that "instantiate some vision of the world in formation" (p. 11). In the following we first make the case for comparing cities, especially worlding cities located in countries conventionally labeled as non-Western. We then explicate what we mean by comparing cultures of communication and why this highlights some of the blind spots and opens up new possibilities for comparative research. Lastly, we use Shanghai and St. Petersburg as historical examples to demonstrate how comparing cultures of communication in worlding cities could make not only empirical, but also theoretical, contributions to the field.

Methodological Cosmopolitanism and Worlding Cities

Beck (2006) calls for social science research to overcome "the naive universalism of early Western sociology" (p. 13) by adopting methodological cosmopolitanism. The theoretical premise of the "cosmopolitan turn" is the plurality of modernities and their entanglement with one another. That is to say, not only are there various modernization processes, but individual societies in their varied paths toward modernity are also "tied into complex relations of dependence" (Beck & Grande, 2010, p. 414). In order to study these entangled processes that are taking place beyond the national level, Beck suggests two ways for social scientists to break away from the "container" of the nation-state. One is to replace the national as a unit of analysis by other *foci*, while the other is to integrate the national into "new forms of political organization and societal order" (Beck & Grande, 2010, p. 427).

For media and communication scholars, methodological cosmopolitanism offers a good opportunity to examine the spatiality of communication in relation to globalization. As Adams

and Jansson (2012) point out, space and spatial processes are "both produced by and productive of communication" (p. 3). On the one hand, spatial factors such as location, connection and scale play an important role in shaping media institutions as well as communication activities (see Curtin, 2003, 2010). On the other hand, the meanings of spatial terms such as local, national, "West" and "East" are constantly reconfigured through mediated practices. The mutual constitution of space and communication means that changing the analytical unit (for example, from a nation to a city) is not a simple matter of examining the same activities on a different scale. Rather, it means foregrounding issues and dynamics of communication that were previously neglected.

Methodological cosmopolitanism *re-orients* our research toward spaces outside the traditional "center" and toward a less Western-centric understanding of the relationship between communication and globalization. Sassen (2005) reminds us that, insofar as "the national as container of social process and power is cracked," it is cities that open up possibilities for linking sub-national spaces across borders (p. 39). Researchers in the field of media and communication have started to pay attention to the importance of cities. In 2008, the *International Communication Gazette* published a special issue on the theme of the "communicative city," which conceptualized the city as a communication system (Burd, 2008; Jeffres, 2008). If there is limited research by communication scholars that takes the city as the analytical unit, there is even less research that focuses on non-Western cities. Curtin is one of the few media scholars who have made an explicit comparison between non-Western cities such as Hong Kong and Mumbai (2010). More recently, using London as the empirical focus, Georgiou (2013) produced a book-length treatment of "the ways in which the city is shared, communicated and symbolically constructed" through examining the relationship between media and the city (p. 3).

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Indeed, not only have cities been important nodes in various global networks; they have also been sites open to new forms of cultural encounter and negotiation of meanings. Robins (2001) suggests that the cultural consequences of globalization can be better studied through the city than through the nation: "The nation, we may say, is a space of identification and identity, whilst the city is an existential and experimental space" (Robins, 2001, p. 87). This is not an argument for the declining power of the nation-state in the face of globalization, but rather points to a space for observing the multi-faceted changes taking place beyond the national level. Global cities around the world are the terrain where a multiplicity of globalization processes assume concrete, localized forms (Sassen, 2005, p. 40). In other words, as Blockmans (2003, p. 9) puts it, "states are abstract," but cities are places where "society becomes a tangible reality."

Rather than using the terms "world" or "global" or "cosmopolitan" city, we adopt the concept of a "worlding city" from Roy and Ong's (2011) edited volume on urban experiments in Asia. Ong explains that "worlding" is linked to the idea of emergence, to "the claims that global situations are always in formation" (Ong, 2011, p. 12). Her worlding project remaps the relationships of power on different scales and in different localities (Ong, 2011, p. 12). In our view, worlding precedes globalization and is a concept that helps us to understand the conflicts within the process. Worlding is not a linear process and the outcome is not necessarily globalization. Worlding takes place in pockets, of which cities are particularly important examples. By calling Shanghai and St. Petersburg worlding cities we want to highlight the historical continuity in the relationship between urban space and the dynamics of media and communication. What is happening now to the cultures of worlding cities is a result of historical processes rather than a break with their historical trajectories. At the same time, it is important to remember that, even if worlding can never be completely undone, there are times when nation-

states tighten their grip over worlding cities, as happened in the early Soviet Union or in China. Worlding cities in non-Western countries are sites where different cultures mix and clash, and which thus challenge the essentialist view of "West" or "East".

Cultures of Communication from a Historical Perspective

What goes hand in hand with methodological nationalism in communication research is a systemic view of the media. Media systems are equated with nation-states in terms of their histories, territories, languages and cultures, even though most nation-states consist of people with differing cultural backgrounds and dialects or languages (Meng & Rantanen, 2015). Secondly, to conceptualize the media as a national system is to adopt a container model that presumes an equal distribution of resources inside a national boundary. In reality, "the combination of spatial dispersal and global integration has only exacerbated the socioeconomic and power inequalities both between and within major cities" (Sassen, 2001, pp. 3-4). Thirdly, a systemic view of the media, given its orientation toward stability and the status quo, is mainly interested in how things should be rather than in how they are (Rantanen, 2013). In this sense, it is ill equipped to capture historical changes and emerging processes (Roudakova, 2012). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, media systems only acknowledge the institutional structure of the media, without taking into account the wider range of communicative practices that constitute the culture of a place.

So how should we compare cities if we want to move beyond a systemic view of media and communications? Couldry and Hepp (2012) observe that theories of media systems draw cultural conclusions from the comparison between such systems, claiming that the type of media system in a country shows us something not only about how its media cover its political system, but also about its wider society and culture (Couldry & Hepp, 2012, p. 95). To a greater extent

than a national media system model that sees the nation as a fixed space with definite boundaries, considering a combination of the worlding city and its cultures allows us to see things that are in fluctuation and contestation. As Ong (2011) writes:

> Instead of seeing the city as a fixed space or node, we approach the metropolis as a milieu of experimentation where diverse actors and institutions invent and aspire to new ways of being global, and in doing so, recuperate the global not as the endpoint to an already given urban developmental process, but as a terrain of problematization. (p. 23)

Couldry and Hepp (2012), when arguing against container theory, propose a concept of media culture that they define as "any culture whose primary resources of meaning are provided by technologies of media and communications for the members of that culture who need not be territorially defined" (p. 97). They (2012, p. 93) follow Giddens's (1984) idea that "societies should be thought of not as 'wholes' but only as levels of relative "systemness" which stand out … from a background of …other systemic relationships within which they are embedded" (p. 164). Under these complex conditions, where societies cannot be thought of only as "wholes," we need, as Couldry and Hepp remind us, a new multilevel, transcultural research perspective such as that provided by comparing two cities in two different countries.

While agreeing with Couldry and Hepp on the importance of a cultural approach, we would like to move beyond media-centrism by proposing the concept of cultures of communication, which would not only include the diverse forms of communication co-existing in any given historical period but also acknowledge the different dimensions of culture that are in constant contestation and fluctuation. We identify three key dimensions of cultures of communication and organize our empirical materials concerning Shanghai and St. Petersburg accordingly. First is the infrastructure of urban culture, which includes not only the institutional

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arrangement of the media but also the physical arrangement of urban space where diverse forms of communication take place. The urban encounter between cultural differences takes place in streets, neighborhoods, communities, public spaces, etc., which delineate important parameters for the communicative practices of residents (Georgiou, 2008). This is also the realm where the state has the strongest presence in terms of setting the agenda for the urban planning and communication sectors.

The second dimension is the media consumption and communication practices of urban residents. For all that media institutions and communication infrastructure set the parameters for the cultural life of cities, they do not determine the production of meaning. Here we see residents taking initiatives in creating and consuming cultural products in their own distinctive ways. For residents of worlding cities, in particular, their communication practices involve a constant negotiation of local, national, and global elements. Urban spaces are performed into being in the sense that it is human activities and imagination that give meaning not only to the current state of the city, but also to the future direction in which the city will be moving (Lagerkvist, 2013).

The third dimension is the cultural myths of the city as represented through various texts, including those of the media, literature and popular culture. Cities are not only physical spaces where communication activities take place, but also themselves function as a message that is sent to the outside world (Burd, 2008). Since worlding cities are all points of departure of trade, political and cultural routes, the messages carried via these routes constitute the imaginary of both the global and the local. That is to say, worlding cities are not just on the receiving end of modernizing forces, but also shape the very project of modernization itself.

These three dimensions -- the institutional, the social and the textual -- embody three layers of the "way of life" of urban residents. We want particularly to emphasize their historicity

and their contested nature. We have previously criticized comparative research that tackles only the present, the chosen frozen moment (Meng & Rantanen, 2015). Here we propose to draw comparisons by referring not only to different spaces, but also to different times, so as to better capture processes of contestation and change.

We have chosen St Petersburg and Shanghai to illustrate our approach, while being fully aware that a single article, far from providing a comprehensive analysis, can at most be a starting point for comparing cultures of communication in these two cities. Both Shanghai and St Petersburg, despite being "Eastern" cities, have a long history of "Western" influence that makes them ideal for our purpose of examining the various forms of cultural difference that develop inside a nation. Berman (1983) calls St. Petersburg the archetypical "unreal city," "whose very existence was a symbol of Russia's dynamism and its determination to be modern" (p. 192). Similarly, Shanghai is widely regarded as "China's gateway to modernity" (Bergère, 2009). Well-connected worlding cities like Shanghai and St Petersburg are "reproducing, hybridizing and domesticating simplified imaginations of the developed West, which less developed cities and territories in the same regions also consume" (Ma, 2012, p. 291).

The Infrastructure of Urban Culture

When academics write about material culture they usually refer to its physical presence in the form of objects and architecture (see, for example, Wells, 2007). For the purposes of this article, we include in the infrastructure of urban culture both material elements (such as buildings, streets, squares, monuments) of the city's physical infrastructure and intangible arrangements of the communication infrastructure. Toporov (1995) argues that "every city has its own language and speaks with its *topoi* - streets, canals, parks, squares and buildings" (in

Kononen, 2003, p. 17). In this section we give examples of what could be called urban topography, what Toporov (1995) calls "the *realia* of the city" (in Kononen, 2003, p. 17), but also include the media interconnected with the architectural structures of the cities (McQuire, 2008).

From the very beginning, the ascendance of St. Petersburg and Shanghai to the status of worlding cities was intertwined with Russia's and China's quest for modernization. A clash of cultures took place both in Shanghai and in St. Petersburg long before globalization became a fashionable term in the social sciences, although the two cities became linked with the *outside* world in different ways and at different historical conjunctures. The modernization of St Petersburg was a conscious project originated, from above, by the Russian Empire, with forceful internal resistance from the old elites in the former capital of Moscow. What happened was more than the founding of a new capital; it was about modernizing the whole country by using a new, purposely-created space with all the political, economic and cultural symbols that would mark its new status. The Russian Tsar Peter the Great founded St Petersburg in 1703, "intending [it] to be an ideal (utopia) of civilisation and culture, a vanguard for Russia and even for Europe." (George & George, 2004, p. xviii) The city was often described as Russia's window on the "West," combining the best of the "West" and of the "East," but it served equally as the window of the "West" on Russia. As Brodsky (1975) famously wrote, "Peter did not want to imitate Europe: he wanted Russia *to be* Europe, in much the same way as he was, at least partly, a European himself" (p.72).

Over a century and a half later, Shanghai, on the other hand, was "Westernized" by force from outside, by Western powers, to serve their own political, military and financial interests. Such coerced "opening-up" was met with strong internal resistance from China. Following the

country's defeat in the Opium Wars, China had to sign the Treaty of Nanking, which forced the opening of Shanghai and other port cities to Western countries. As a result, Shanghai became a city divided into foreign concessions (British, French, American, Russian, Japanese), embodying what Abbas (2000) calls "a cosmopolitanism of extraterritoriality" (p. 774).

Evidence of worlding could easily be detected in both cities during these earlier periods. In St Petersburg, even if buildings were Russian, they had usually been designed by Italian architects. Architecturally, both cities have their "Western" facades, behind which worked those in power. In this sense, "Western" was equated with 'modern' and this architecture could be recognized universally as symbolizing not only power but modernization, in the same way as Haussmann's boulevards in Paris (Berman, 1983), giving residents an opportunity to be "flâneurs" and to show off their presence in their newly founded urban space (Benjamin, 1932/1999, p. 417). Similarly, in Shanghai, all major "Western" companies had a presence on the Bund, the river embankment, with buildings that shout their importance through their grandiose "Western" architecture. Those living in the foreign concessions enjoyed the Western modernization, as they sought to implant their entire lifestyle on a Chinese city (Bergère, 1981).

Nonetheless, to equate the modernization processes that unfolded either in St. Petersburg or in Shanghai with Westernization would be a mistake. As postcolonial scholars have reminded us, for all that it is difficult to separate modernity from the European Enlightenment, it is time to move away, when studying the histories of non-Western countries, from the temporal structure represented in the statement: "first in the West, and then elsewhere" (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 7). "Western" modernity was already contested in both cities in the 19th and early 20th centuries, when both Shanghai and St Petersburg (its name was changed in 1916 to Petrograd) were hotbeds of political radicalism. Smith (2008) calls Shanghai a "'polyvalent symbol' that

represents simultaneously consumer affluence and class exploitation, foreign imperialism and patriotic resistance, individualism and mass society" (p. 18). Instead of following the path of European modernity, Shanghai and St. Petersburg became the birthplaces of the Communist Parties of Russia and China, both of which tried to achieve a new, anti-"Western" form of modernity that would be economically, politically and ethically superior to "Western" modernity (Smith, 2008, p. 205).

St Petersburg is known as the city of many uprisings, strikes, and of the three revolutions/coups of 1905 and of February and October 1917. Compared with St Petersburg, more of the protests in Shanghai had a clear anti-"Western" element. The May Thirtieth Movement in 1925, for example, originated in a dispute between a foreign factory supervisor and Chinese workers. As news of the incident spread, anti-Japanese strikes and boycotts were organized (Cochran, 1980, p. 177). But the movements in Shanghai were against not only the physical presence of foreigners, but also their symbolic presence. Campaigns were organized to boycott foreign products and to buy Chinese products instead. Red posters with messages written in big, black characters urging patriotic Chinese not to buy American goods appeared in Shanghai around 1905 (Cochran, 1980, pp. 46-47). This was also a campaign against the presentation of Chinese people in the tobacco company's movie-theatre advertisements as drunkards, prostitutes, gamblers, criminals, beggars, and "slaves of Westerners," an inferior race "unfit to look at" (Cochran, 1980, pp. 179).

During the socialist era, which for Shanghai started in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) treated the city with suspicion and considered it the major ground of ideological conflict between capitalism and socialism. Just like Leftist writers during the 1930s who had seen Shanghai as a "bastion of evil, of wanton debauchery and rampant imperialism marked by

foreign extraterritoriality" (Lee, 1999, p. 75), the CCP was wary of the corrupting influence of

"the big dyeing vat." An important move in the project of building a socialist Shanghai involved

changing the symbolic connotations of landmark buildings and streets in the city. For example,

on National Day, October 1, in 1952 the grounds of Shanghai's Horse Race Club, a symbol of

the city's colonial past, were converted into People's Park, People's Avenue and People's

Square. The following year, Nanjing Road, the bustling commercial street next to People's

Square, underwent a similar transformation, with a new paved sidewalk and a new name.

Braester (2010) points out that these changes were part of the wider plan to transform Shanghai

from a commercial center into an industrial hub: "these material and nominal changes signaled

the erasure of Shanghai's grandeur as 'Paris of the East' and its new identity as a socialist city"

(p. 57).

The same kind of dualism can also be seen in St Petersburg. The city was "perceived

simultaneously as a paradise and a hell, as a utopia of the ideal city and the nefarious masquerade

of the Russian antichrist, an embodiment of 'satanic Russia' in opposition to 'Holy Russia'"

(Boym, 2001, pp. 12, 160). Petrograd had already started to deteriorate before 1917 and lost its

status after 1918, when the Bolshevik government moved to Moscow during the siege.

According to Blockmans (2003, p. 19), new state regimes always try to transform urban

infrastructure to reflect their own ideology. The Bolshevik government indeed constructed,

transformed, or demolished buildings, particularly churches, in the new capital of Moscow.

Petrograd was renamed Leningrad in 1924, five days after Lenin's death. Many of the street

names were altered and new revolutionary monuments were erected. For example, Palace Square

was renamed Uritsky Square after a murdered Bolshevik politician and Nevsky Prospekt became

25 October Prospekt (see, for example, Boym, 2005, pp. 134-135). New monuments to

revolutionary heroes were erected, such as the Freedom Obelisk and the monument on the Field of Mars in Petrograd to those who perished in the revolution (Brumfield, 1993, p. 468). Leningrad, however, rapidly became "frozen in time" (Boym, 2001, p. 303) and less important than Moscow. As a result many of its buildings were saved, even if transformed.

Communication Practices of Urban Residents

Communication plays a major role in forming the identities of a city's residents. Language and class have both separated and united people. As Smith (2006, p. 19) writes, at the Imperial court of St Petersburg the German influence was superseded in the 1740s by French influence. As the culture of the court became French, in schools an emphasis was laid on members of the upper class learning French as their second language. Both St. Petersburg and Shanghai had large minority populations. Some 200,000 foreigners lived in St Petersburg at the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Census figures from 1910 show 47,000 German speakers in St Petersburg. Other significant minorities counted by the census included Poles (61,300), Jews (35,000), Estonians (20,800), Finns (14,700), Latvians (14,000), Lithuanians (10,600), and Tatars (7,300) (Henrikson, 1993, p. 341). As Boym (2001, p. 161) writes, "if Petersburg did not exist, it had to be invented or rather Peter did not just invent but actualised the potential of the multiethnic Baltic region."

Census statistics from 1865 to 1935 show that nationals of 46 countries lived in Shanghai (Wei, 1987, p. 104). By 1933 Shanghai had become the world's fifth largest city, with 70,000 foreigners. By that time also, Russians had become the city's third largest minority after the British and the Japanese (Denison & Ren, 2006, p. 251). In addition to foreign travellers and refugees, during those decades the "floating" subjects also included Chinese migrants, whose regional identities and dialects filled the city streets, together with foreign nationalities and

languages (Zhang, 2005, p. 45). As a result, a peculiar Shanghai vernacular form of expression, *yangjingbang* (or pidgin), emerged from the dock areas, where the city's lower classes had intensive interaction with foreigners on a daily basis. As a type of speech that mixed English, Chinese (including local dialects), and elements of other languages that permeated the city, *yangjingbang* was emblematic of "grassroots metropolitan consciousness and ambivalent semicolonial experience" (Zhang, 2005, p. 47).

Mixing different languages became a norm rather than an exception, an essential part of emerging city cultures in both St Petersburg and Shanghai. A newspaper article from 1907 reveals the relaxed attitude towards mixing languages in St Petersburg: "An [English-speaking] governess tells her mistress that when she stepped off the *pod'ezd* [porch] she found an *izvoshchik* [cab] to take her to the *konka* [trolley], on which she journeyed to the *naberezhnaia* [riverfront] to hop a *perevoz* [ferry]. [...] This specifically St. Petersburg dialect soon becomes the everyday language of children" (Henrikson, 1993, p. 343).

People developed an identity as citizens of their city. For example, St Petersburg locals called their city "Piter" (see, for example Kelly, 2014) or, instead of defining themselves, for example, as German-speaking Russians, counted themselves as "Petersburgers" (Henrikson, 1993, p. 345). City dwellers also made use of sub-identities based on their status, location or language inside the city, such as being "Shanghainese" or a "Shanghailander." Both cities also became known for their ethnic tolerance.

Both these two cities also had several foreign-language newspapers, and were locations for foreign correspondents and agents covering incoming and outgoing political and financial news. In St Petersburg, there were several newspapers published in different languages, for example the *St. Peterburger Zeitung* in German and the *Journal de St. Petersbourg* in French. A 1877

statistical study showed that 45 percent of the books published in Russia originated from Petersburg, rather than from Moscow and the provinces combined (Buckler, 2005, p. 13). The first printed newspaper was produced there (*Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti* in 1728), as well as the first evening paper (*Vechernyaya gazeta,* 1866) and the first tabloid newspapers (*Peterburgskii listok*, 1864, and *Gazeta-Kopeika,* 1907) (McReynolds, 1991, p. 225; McReynolds, 1992, p. 125). By 1915 there were 78 daily newspapers published in St Petersburg (McReynolds, 1991, Appendix). After the Bolsheviks took power, all non-Bolshevik papers were gradually closed (see, for example, Rantanen, 1994, p. 8).

Shanghai was the centre of the foreign press (26 newspapers and magazines in 1921) and of the Chinese press (over 80 publications). The modern publishing industry had organized itself from the beginning of the century into companies, and used advanced technical processes such as rotary printing, engraving their own copper etc. (Bergère, 1981). The *North China Herald* was founded by the English community in 1850. The *North China Daily New*s, founded in 1858, became the principal English-language newspaper of the foreign community in Shanghai and also, from 1868, published a Chinese edition (Wasserstrom, 2009, pp. 23-24; Wei, 1987, p. 169). *Shen-Pao,* published from 1872 to 1949 and first published by a British resident of Shanghai to keep the Chinese reading public informed of events at home and abroad, became the most popular newspaper in Shanghai (Wei, 1987). By the end of the 19th century foreigners had established more than 300 newspapers, most of them printed in Chinese and most published in Shanghai (Chang, 1989, pp. 7-8). The rapid growth of the Shanghai publishing industry from the 1880s onwards meant that by 1937 an overwhelming 86 per cent of all books published in China appeared under a Shanghai imprint (Des Forges, 2007, p. 17).

The constant juxtaposition, clash and mixing of local and worlding cultural elements in the

everyday life of Shanghai and St. Petersburg would be easily overwritten if one only paid attention to the rise and fall of the Russian and Chinese Empires. Even after the Communist Parties took power in the two countries and started to nationalize media and communication in Shanghai and in St. Petersburg, elements of Western culture died slowly in both cities. In Leningrad, as the magazine *Life of Art* reported in 1925, of 183 new films shown in the preceding nine-month period 103 were from the United States and only 25 from the Soviet Union (Clark, 1998, p. 135). Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton became household names, and Petrograders became more familiar with the faces of Hollywood stars than with those of stars of Russian culture and politics. Jazz, the foxtrot and contemporary Western literature such as the books of Jack London and Arthur Conan Doyle also became popular (George & George, 2004, p. 467). In 1951, Shanghai had more than fifty movie theatres and about one hundred theatres and entertainment halls, with an audience much broader than those of other media. Shanghai was reported to have a monthly movie audience of two million and a theatre audience of three million. The movie audience continued for some time to prefer American films. In early 1949, 75 per cent of the audience preferred American movies, and throughout that summer more than two-thirds of the films shown in Shanghai were produced in the US. Films were imported from the Soviet Union to make up for the shortage of Chinese films, but the audience response to these was lukewarm. In October 1950 only 12.5 per cent of the audience attended Soviet films and only 10.2 per cent attended those produced by China's state studios (Gaulton, 1981, pp. 48-50).

The continuing popularity of Western films and music shows how difficult is it for any system to take over the cultures of communication in worlding cities. These consist of many sub-cultures and invisible networks that are very hard to break down. We do not wish to argue that the consequences of Westernization were all positive or all negative. What we wish to point out

is that, as sites of cultural hybridity, non-Western worlding cities allow us to see domination, segregation and inequality, but also new cultures of communication and new identities emerging when groups with different backgrounds try to negotiate how to live next to one another in their daily lives.

City Texts as Myths of Construction and Deconstruction

It was the Tartu School of Semiotics that introduced the concept of the *St Petersburg text*, conceptualizing, on the one hand, the city as a text (what we call infrastructure in this article), and, on the other hand, the city as a mechanism for generating texts (Tammi, 2008). The concept of a text could also be understood as constructing "a positive or negative myth of a creation and a destruction of the city" (Toporov, 1995, p. 348 in Bratova, 2013, pp. 27-28). Cities as texts are an important aspect of cultures of communication, since a semiotic approach allows us to analyze not only the continuity and discontinuity of different historical periods, but also the connections and disconnections between different aspects of culture at any given time. In this sense, cities as texts provide another important angle for understanding worlding as a process of generating images, imagination and the imaginary (Appadurai, 1990, p. 31), which are not only shared by residents of the city, but also communicated to the outside world.

Instead of literary texts, we shall give two films as examples: Sergei Eisenstein's *October* (1928) and Wang Ping's *Sentinels Under the Neon Lights* (1964). Both films became so famous that they were increasingly accepted as historical documentaries of what happened when communist parties took over. They represent major attempts to reclaim urban space and redefine the image of the two cities in line with the new political agendas of nation-building. As McQuire (2008, p. 66), paraphrasing Benjamin (1932/1999), observes, "no other medium can reproduce

better than film to blow apart the prison-world of the bourgeois city and convert the indifference of the masses into the 'collective in motion'."

October was shot almost entirely in Leningrad in 1927 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution (Eisenstein, 1943, p. 173). The city infrastructure as a text, including the Winter Palace, the Smolny, the Admiralty Building, the statues, the main commercial street of Nevsky Prospekt, the bridges and gates, among other landmarks, are shown as fields of battle between the bourgeoisie and the masses symbolizing the end of an old and beginning of a new city. There are also several references to the worlding of St. Petersburg, the most explicit of these to the dis-continuity and re-continuity of world time. When Eisenstein was filming *October* in the Winter Palace, which he described as a "dead palace" with "damp cellars and rats" (Eisenstein, 1968, p. 31), he came across "a curious specimen of clock," with a number of dials, showing the time in Paris, London, New York or Shanghai alongside that in Petrograd. In the film, this clock was stopped to show the time of the fall of the Provisional Government, thus "making a plastic fusion of all the different and separate indices of time in the sensation of one historic hour" (Eisenstein, 1943, p. 27). One could not find a better example of Harvey's (1990) time-space compression in the name of world revolution. As Boym (2005, p. 59) writes, the October Revolution was "radically anti-nostalgic" and "presented as the culmination of world history to be completed with the final victory of communism and 'end of history'."

Sentinels Under the Neon Lights was among a group of films made during the 1950s and 1960s with the clear intention of representing the ideological struggle taking place in urban areas under a nascent socialist regime. As Abbas aptly puts it, given the colonial history that contributed to the city's commercial prosperity, "Shanghai's strength as a cosmopolitan city was always based on China's weakness as a nation" (Abbas, 2000, p. 775). Films like *Sentinels*

Under the Neon Lights were part of a broader campaign to strengthen national unity at the ideological front by vilifying an unruly city. The Party's attempt at "painting the city red" (Braester, 2010) included not only a Maoist urban policy of reshaping the topography of the city, as discussed in an earlier section, but also a series of cinematic representations that reclaimed Shanghai's streets and landmarks from bourgeois counter-revolutionaries to return them to the people (Braester, 2005, pp 56-94).

The film focuses on the activities of the Good Eighth Company (GEC), a unit of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) entrusted with guarding Nanjing Road immediately after Shanghai's liberation in 1949. Before the film was produced in the early 1960s, the GEC had already been endorsed by top CCP leaders and heavily promoted by the party media for their exemplary behavior in maintaining a revolutionary spirit and fighting capitalist thought. The storyline of the movie foregrounds Shanghai as a "big dyeing vat" and follows the soldiers' struggles with various counter-revolutionary activists as well as with the corrupting force of capitalism, which was symbolized by places like cafés, dance halls and high-end hotels.

Both movies, when analyzed as texts, show how important it was for new governments to try to erase the symbolic power of the elements of worlding in cultures of communication. In *October* this was done primarily by taking over city sites, while in *Sentinels Under the Neon Lights* it was done by purging capitalist sins through a socialist revolutionary spirit. Both films, through their destruction of the old cities and re-construction of new ones, emphasize how powerful city myths are not only for residents, but also for those elsewhere. Both cities had already become larger-than-life myths that threatened the unity of nation-building attempts by communist parties, including attempts to nationalize time and space. However, as we have seen especially in communication practices, worlding seldom dies out completely with a new order,

but goes on living in ever-smaller pockets to reappear again unexpectedly and often in different forms at another time.

Conclusion

In this article we have argued the case for historical comparative research into cultures of communication in worlding cities, choosing the empirical cases of Shanghai in China and St Petersburg in Russia to illustrate this approach. We have argued that by taking a spatial, temporal and cultural turn in comparative research we will be able to develop a more nuanced understanding of the shifting cultural boundaries between spaces. We have shown that juxtaposing these two cities enables us to see processes of hybridization and contestation which are not so easily seen when our starting point is a national media system and when we are constrained by the dichotomy of "East" vs. "West." Conceptually, this helps us to look critically at the theorization of national media systems and at de-"Westernization."

First, comparing worlding cities liberates us from the restraints of national media systems and is an important step toward methodological cosmopolitanism. While the nation-state is primarily a political term that highlights external borders and internal unity, a city is a site for encountering differences and incongruence. As we zoom in from the nation to the city, we have the opportunity to see the world inside a city and a city in the world, as the concept of worlding implies (Ong, 2011). Worlding cities are at the conjuncture of national, foreign and local forces, the negotiation of which constantly disrupts and reconfigures the boundaries between these three categories.

Second, by introducing the concept of cultures of communication inside worlding cities we focus on processes rather than outcomes. In systemic comparative media research, the time is always the present and historical processes are often neglected or mentioned briefly as the

background. By focusing on culture rather than on a political system, we highlight the ongoing

processes of hybridization and contestation rather than one type of regime replacing another.

Instead of a camera we use a video recorder, with the hope of capturing moving objects rather

than a frozen snapshot. We have identified three arenas where the cultures of communication

manifest are embodied, including the infrastructure of urban culture, the communication

practices of urban residents, as well as media texts that narrate and define the city for those living

inside and outside it alike. All of these are fraught with residual, dominant and emergent

elements in fluctuation (Williams, 1977).

Third, being located outside what is conventionally considered as the "West," Shanghai

and St. Petersburg have been sites of contested modernities rather than examples of Western

domination. Even when we see clear forms of military and/or cultural imperialism, such as the

Opium Wars in China, we also see successful resistance to cultural imperialism, as happened in

Shanghai in the early 19th century. We see that the adoption of "Western" values does not

necessarily happen as a result of foreign invasion, but may be at the instigation of an autocratic

political system, as in Imperial Russia. This is why it is so important to understand the worlding

of cities like Shanghai and St. Petersburg, especially in relation to the "West" and "Western"

modernity. The historical journeys of these two cities not only offer important lessons for future

worlding cities, but also unravel the myth that the "West" is the "universal norm of humankind"

(Morley, 2011, p. 127).

Lastly, we have demonstrated through a historical comparative analysis that essentialist

terms such as "West" or "East" prevent us from seeing a cultural hybridity that is constantly

pregnant with contestations and struggles. Cultures of communication help us to understand how

worlding takes place in cities like St Petersburg and Shanghai that are "both and" rather than

"either or," and thus to cosmopolitanize our research.

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