Envisioning Unity: The Media Discourse in South Korea and Germany on National Unity. A Longitudinal Study on Emerging Transnational Public Spheres

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Abstract: Using the example of the discourse on national unity in Germany and South Korea, this article examines the formation of transnational public spheres along long-wave political issues. It explores to what extent a similar political challenge of two states is conducive to the formation of a transnational public sphere. The findings of a qualitative analysis of frames in the reporting of South Korean and West German leading media on the process of German unification from 1989 to 1991 as well as the initiatives of South Korean President Moon Jae-In for peace and unification on the Korean peninsula in 2018 and 2019 are discussed. The study reveals indications for the emergence of a transnational public sphere with regard to all important indicators. However, this appears to be fragile and strongly driven by the fall of the Berlin Wall as a key event with global impact.

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Introduction

Some political issues occupy societies for decades and shape political discourses for just as long. However, they are not consistently perceived as pressing by the population (Gehrau, 2014). The media play a central role in shaping the dynamics of these discourses. This article traces this role using the example of the discourse on national unity in Germany and Korea.

The topos of national unity has shaped both countries in a significant way since the end of the Second World War (Wiesen, 2018). Germany looks back on a 40-year-long history as a divided state, whereas North and South Korea are still extremely isolated from each other (Grzelczyk, 2019). This shared experience of division makes the two countries an interesting case study to explore whether and how a transnational public sphere can shape itself along a long-term political trajectory and how issues and perspectives are perceived and discussed as mutually relevant.

Therefore, we examined the political coverage of state unification in German and South Korean media along the German unification process in the years 1989 to 1991 as well as South Korean President Moon Jae-In's efforts for peace and unification on the Korean peninsula in 2018 and 2019. We identified frames in South Korean and West German reporting that shaped the media discourse on the respective matter, and then compared the national discourses to find out if and to what extent these patterns intertwine.

Current Research

Theoretical framework

In our project, we understand transnational public spheres as national public debates about a common problem that are linked by transnational references and intertwine in a sense that speakers, positions and arguments find their way into national debates (Benert & Pfetsch, 2020, p. 4; Brüggemann & Wessler, 2014, p. 398; Schäfer et al., 2018, p. 212). Even though transnational publics can form beyond media publics (Brüggemann & Wessler, 2014), we foreground the media reality as a relevant reference for political discussion and emphasise the key function of the media system in producing publics (Blöbaum, 2016).

Current findings indicate that transnational public spheres are rather weak even under ideal conditions (Benert & Pfetsch, 2020, p. 1; Schäfer et al., 2018, p. 207; Wozniak et al., 2021, p. 708). However, the relative distance between countries like Germany and Korea allows us to observe the role and influence of a topic that is equally significant for the political culture of a country (Lünenborg & Sell, 2018) undisturbed by other factors.

Empirically, we focus on the content dimension of transnational public spheres (Wessler & Brüggemann, 2012, p. 57). Furthermore, we consider strong legacy media organisations as constitutive for the emergence of transnational public spheres (Brüggemann & Wessler, 2014). Following Koopmans and Erbe (2003, p. 11), we distinguish between weak and strong forms of transnational public spheres: The minimum requirements are references to common topics, the maximum requirement is a high degree of synchronicity in terms of topic careers and relevance assessments (Wessler & Brüggemann, 2012, p. 65-66). An additional criterion is the openness of a national public sphere to topics and positions from abroad (Benert & Pfetsch, 2020, p. 5; Ivanova, 2017, p. 87). Overlapping interpretive patterns and homogeneous framing are also considered reliable indicators of interlinked national discourses (Wessler & Brüggemann, 2012, p. 66).

Ivanova (2017, p. 129), following Wessler and Brüggemann (2012) and others, has included the different dimensions of transnational publics into a model that is adequate for our analysis. It differentiates between a cultural and structural dimension and between a vertical and horizontal dimension. In the structural dimension, a distinction is made between the observation of transnational governance (vertical) and the observation and participation in other countries' debates (horizontal). In the cultural dimension one can observe identification with transnational collectives (vertical) and similarities of national debates (horizontal).

Journalists in general and foreign correspondents in particular contribute significantly to the emergence of transnational public spheres, especially in commenting and analysing formats (Benert & Pfetsch, 2020, p. 9; Wozniak et al., 2021, p. 690). Hepp et al. (2016, p. 57) were able to empirically reconstruct different practices and orientations that had a more or less beneficial effect on the degree of overlap of national discourses. Hänska (2018, p. 103) empirically demonstrates cosmopolitan orientations alongside provincial ones. This corresponds with findings by Archetti (2013, p. 131) and Brüggemann et al. (2017, p. 540), according to which foreign correspondents seem to have a stronger understanding of the role of contextualising events in the reporting country and keeping an eye on cultural understanding.

In addition, in a comparative approach one has to take in consideration the differences between the media systems of the two countries: Because we are analysing a highly controversial issue we focus on the dimension of political parallelism in a broader sense as an alignment of media to a particular ideology (Kaiser & Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2019, p. 332). Finally, findings on transnational publics must be interpreted against the backdrop of established journalistic practices of news selection and processing (Hafez, 2002; Heimprecht, 2017). In particular, political similarity as a news factor deserves special attention (Scherer et al., 2006) in terms of its potential as a basic prerequisite for a transnational public sphere.

To explain the entanglement of discourses, we draw on an established framing approach (Badr, 2017; Brüggemann, 2014; Dahinden, 2006; Lück et al., 2018). In

particular, Entman's (1993) perspective on frames in political reporting as a combination of problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation suits to the aims of our study. In particular, frame analysis not only allows us to identify similarities in national debates on state unity, but also connects them to the two media systems and their different degrees of political parallelism.

Empirical findings

The corpus of research on transnational public spheres is on the one hand very broad, but concentrates on fields that offer theoretically favourable conditions for formation (e.g., Schäfer et al., 2018, Hepp et al., 2016, Badr 2017). Therefore, we focus on findings which help us to understand, under what conditions a transnational public sphere between South Korea and West Germany emerges. Survey data from South Korea show a high importance of national unity for the population (Hwang, 2018; Kang, 2018), but also a great importance of Germany as a point of reference and a foil for comparison for the South Korean discourse on national unity (Chai, 1998; Chung, 2013; Kwon, 2016; Lee & McKibbin, 2019; Yang, 2015).

In Korea, the role of the media in relation to unity is attributed to reviving the self-perception as a unified state (Lee et al., 2015a). Their integrative power is not as high as political actors had hoped for or expected (Rhee, 2004; Sun, 2013): Attitudes towards national unity within the population differ depending on whether they are politically anchored in the conservative or liberal spectrum of South Korean politics (Lee et al., 2015a). These differences seem to be reinforced rather than levelled out by media coverage (Lee et al., 2015b).

One also has to keep in mind that South Korea still has structural deficits in terms of institutions, socio-economic outcomes and civil society, despite considerable progress in democratisation (Mosler, 2020). Typical problems of post-authoritarian states overlap with post-democratic developments (Kang, 2021; Shin, 2020). A very specific role of South Korean media has developed with regard to this constellation. They have established themselves either as a provider of information and control institution for an elite-oriented public or as a forum for civil society positions. That corresponds with pendulum movements between democratisation and authoritarian backlash (Rhee et al., 2011; Shin, 2020).

South Korea's media system is characterised by high political parallelism, relatively low professional journalistic standards and relatively strong state intervention. Its coverage consists to a remarkable extent of clear partisanship, political sensationalism and conflict-reproducing ideology (Rhee et al., 2011). Especially in case of a controversial topic such as national unity, this is significantly shaping national and transnational publics. Lee (2011, p. 182) shows, for example, that newspapers close to the liberal spectrum tend to recognise the division and call for cooperation with

the North. Conservative newspapers view the same process critically with reference to the unreliability of the regime in North Korea and its military provocations.

In Germany, too, studies have dealt with the unification of Germany and the role of the media in this process from different angles (e.g., Früh et al., 2011; Holtz-Bacha et al., 1999; Schenk, 1998; Buttlar, 2006; Hagen, 1997; Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2010). None of these studies, however, explicitly addresses transnational public spheres that are constituted around this topic. The study by Horsten (2017, pp. 192ff) on the reception of German unification in South American media is informative for our question. This content analysis initially shows a clear event orientation. At the same time, the comparison of the situation in Germany with that in the respective home country shapes the reporting. Current findings indicate, that political parallelism is also relevant for the German media system, but on a significantly lower level compared to other European countries like Spain (Kaiser & Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2019, p. 344) or France (Maurer, 2019, p. 1242).

Research questions

Against the background of our theoretical framework we explore the field along the following research questions:

(1) Do topical references emerge in the reporting as a minimum condition for the emergence of a transnational public sphere?
(2) Can a degree of synchronicity in terms of similar issue frames be observed that favours the intertwining of national discourses?
(3) To what extent do we find evidence for transnational public spheres both in its cultural and structural respectively vertical and horizontal dimension?
(4) To what extent are the different media systems shaping the coverage on unification and the public sphere emerging around it?

We explore all questions using one key event respectively from Germany (unification 1989-1991) and Korea (peace efforts 2018/19). In this way, we can examine the mutual observation of the two countries from a synchronic perspective and explore in a diachronic perspective whether and to what extent the degree and character of entanglement develop over time.

Methodology

To answer our question, we have designed a qualitative frame analysis. A qualitative deductive approach seems to be appropriate here, because the aim of the study is the reconstruction of frames from the material under investigation. A quantitative analysis of generic news frames, on the other hand, would not be suitable for the specific object of study and would not consider the different cultural backgrounds. We trace the West German discourse based on an analysis of the reporting of the

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ), the South Korean discourse based on an analysis of *Chosun Ilbo* (CSI) and *Hankyoreh Shinmun* (HKR). FAZ and SZ are German quality papers, with FAZ being regarded as conservative and SZ as liberal; CSI and HKR are among the leading dailies in South Korea, with CSI being regarded as conservative and HKR as liberal (Choi, 2018; Han, 2004; Peters, 2014).

Due to our theoretical perspective, we are comparing discourses in democratic countries. In 1989 this was exclusively the case for Western Germany and South Korea. Regarding the coverage of the Korean peace initiatives in 2018 one may ask, whether it could have made sense to include Eastern German media outlets in our analysis. We refrained from that for two reasons: Even 30 years after unification, western media outlets are still dominating the media discourse in Germany (Beck, 2018, p. 153) Moreover, only these newspapers are willing and able to spend resources on a continuous and broader foreign news coverage with own correspondents for East-Asia.

We have defined the investigation periods of our study along key events. The starting point for the German case study is the second quarter of 1989, with protests against the local elections in the GDR. The study period ends in the first quarter of 1991, when the massive economic problems on the territory of the GDR become apparent. The period of investigation for the Korean case study lies between the coverage of the Winter Olympics in January 2018 and autumn 2019, when diplomatic efforts clearly lose intensity after the last summit between Kim Jong-Un and Moon Jae-In in Panmunjom.

In both cases, the asymmetry in the scope of reporting between Germany and South Korea proved to be a challenge. Therefore, we designed the Korean sub-study in the period 1989-1990 and the German sub-study in the period 2018-2019 each as a full survey and identified all texts in the politics sections that dealt with unification or unification efforts on a keyword basis. Since we were interested in frames, we analysed long reads, background pieces, and opinion pieces.

For the reporting in the event country, on the other hand, we sampled two weeks from each quarter randomly and analysed all articles dealing with our topic. Doing this, we ensure that the respective discourses are represented in their temporal dynamics. The sample was specifically supplemented with coverage of key events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall or the summits between Kim Jon-Un and Donald Trump, as we expected a high density of political interpretations around these events. The structure of the sample is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Structure of the sample[1]

	FAZ	SZ	CSI	HKR
1989-1991 Texts	176	68	88	88
1989-1991 Frames	192	122	106	97
2018-2019 Texts	34	44	141	113
2018-2019 Frames	71	63	170	140

In our corpus we identified frames text by text and recorded the key elements. To increase the consistency of the individual reconstructions, the entire research team first worked together on a test sample. In addition, all reconstructed frames were double-checked. In a second step, we condensed the frames into clusters (Badr, 2017). In a third step, the frame clusters were assigned to thematic aspects. The thematic aspects in turn were condensed into thematic fields.

Findings

Topic structure

The discourse on German unification is formed around five major thematic fields that correspond to the process of German unification, both in the German and the Korean sample: questions of mentality, the agony of the SED state, the West German government's policy on Germany, the political structures in a unified Germany and the economic implications of unification. 69% of our frames can be assigned to these five topic areas. Even when looking at the topic areas in detail, the similarities in the Korean and German samples predominate.

An exception is the discourse on political structures in reunified Germany: The Korean newspapers interpret unification primarily as part of a process of European change; other aspects of this field are touched on only sporadically, unlike in the German media. The resolution of the foreign reporting of CSI and HKR also reaches its limits when it comes to economic implications of unification.

The reporting on the policy of détente on the Korean peninsula in 2018/19 in German and South Korean leading media is, on the one hand, very strongly oriented towards the most important political actors, Donald Trump, Moon Jae-In and Kim Jong-Un. With regard to topics, the corpus focuses on three overarching aspects: diplomatic initiatives in the narrower sense, from the Olympic Games to the summits, economic implications, and embedding current events in a historical context.

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[1] An overview of the articles included in the analysis and the categories assigned can be requested from the authors by email.

Almost exclusively in Korea, however, we find frames that focus the general security situation on the Korean peninsula. All in all, clear topical references between the discourses can be identified in both periods of investigation as a minimum condition for the emergence of a transnational public sphere. The similarities as well as the differences can be explained as a consequence of established practices of selecting and classifying events.

Synchronicity of national discourses

There is a high degree of temporal congruence between the discourses that develop in German and Korean leading media about German unification, except of three remarkable differences: The irregularities in the local elections in April 1989 are not covered by the Korean outlets. They do not seem to have a sufficiently high news value at that time to be thematised or even interpreted as an indication of the approaching collapse. Moreover, the first symptoms of crisis in East Germany are already interpreted in a European context in Korean titles. The German dailies adopt this perspective after the fall of the Wall. Moreover, even after this key event, the focus of the Korean debate remains on the West German parties' policy options. HKR and CSI analyse the events in Germany against the backdrop of the unification policy options of the political actors in South Korea.

The coverage of President Moon's diplomatic initiatives in Korea is timed in both countries by major media events, namely the Olympic Games and the series of summits between South Korea, North Korea and/or the United States. Switching to the layer of *frame clusters*, this synchronicity dissolves to some extent. In terms of the main actors, it can be seen above all in the portrayal of Moon as a broker and Kim as a skilful tactician in the early phase of the détente process. To a limited extent, this also applies to frames portraying Trump as a hothead and Moon as a diplomat willing to take high risks. In contrast, very early in 2018, the Korean titles feature critical framings of Kim as having miscalculated with his open stance towards the US and South Korea and Trump as the actual profiteer of the peace efforts. Both interpretations appear in the German sample with a time lag.

With regard to the issue-oriented frame clusters, there is a relatively high degree of synchronicity in relation to diplomatic efforts in the narrower sense – in terms of negative and positive framings – and their economic implications. In terms of historical classification, references to Germany can be found in the Korean titles at an early stage, while again we find them in German titles later.

In summary, there is, as expected, a high degree of synchronicity in reporting. However, the deviations in the dynamics of reporting on German unification could at least create the prerequisite for discussing governance options in one's own country in close relation to a globally significant event. This is also supported by appearance of Germany as a point of reference at a very early stage of Moon's diplomatic efforts in the Korean titles in the 2018 sample.

Indicators of the entanglement of national discourses

We had to have a closer look at the *frame clusters* in the Korean and German corpus to explore whether a transnational public sphere has emerged. Our findings are presented first in the horizontal and then in the vertical dimension of our theoretical model.

Similarities in national debates (horizontal, cultural)

Similarities in national debates represent the weakest criterion for a transnational public sphere and can be easily identified in our material: Whenever reports on German unification explore the sensitivities of the population, frames in the Korean and German texts emerge along mental rifts between West Germans who feel exploited and East Germans for whom disillusionment and fear of the future have set in after the initial euphoria of unification. However, special attention is paid to the "soul" of the East Germans, often based on a paternalistic attitude.

The agony of the GDR is interpreted in both German and Korean media frames as a process of alienation between GDR citizens, which sets in motion a downward spiral that ultimately leads to a power vacuum. At the same time, growing gaps are seen between the self-perception and ability to act of the SED elites and between the forces of reform and perseverance within the SED. Both in the Korean and the German corpus, unity is interpreted as the result of a long-standing policy of détente.

The tenor of the frames on the political structures in Germany in all the titles examined can be summarised as a development from noble ideals to pragmatic solutions. Change in the GDR is framed as risky but necessary, while there is rather little reflection on what could have changed in Western Germany. The urge towards pragmatism, which is recognisable in the framing of the discussion about political structures, also arises in relation to the economic order. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, considerations about the meaningfulness of a "third way" between a social market economy and "actually existing socialism" are discussed, but the focus quickly shifts to operational details of rolling out the market economy in the East.

With regard to the peace efforts in Korea, we also find very similar framings of the political events in the German and Korean leading media. On the one hand, this applies to the main actors in the events, all three of whom are portrayed in very contrasting roles. Donald Trump is regarded as a profiteer of détente who can distinguish himself as a serious foreign politician, and then again as a gambler who risks the security of the USA through his symbolic politics without a diplomatic foundation. We identified a frame cluster describing Moon Jae-In as an honest broker who knows how to use Trump's initiative in South Korea's favour, as well as a frame cluster portraying him as a risk-taker who makes too many concessions to the North. Finally, Kim Jong-Un appears in one frame cluster as a skilful tactician, and

in another as a dictator who has miscalculated with his combination of nuclear threats and signals of détente.

On the issue level, we also see a number of common interpretations: In the context of the Winter Olympics, both German and Korean newspapers emphasise the diplomatic significance of sport as an icebreaker. These frame clusters point out how valuable it is that the parties involved talk to each other at all, whereby denuclearisation is equally identified as a key issue against which the seriousness of the unification efforts is to be measured. In both German and Korean titles, however, the strategic interest of all actors is also framed as the central obstacle to a serious success of Moon's efforts. These also play a role when Korean and German media discuss the extent to which Germany could be a role model for Korea.

However, there are also some differences: Only German titles make explicit historical references to the so-called "sunshine policy" of Moon's predecessor in office, Kim Dae-Jung, and paint a picture of peaceful coexistence between North and South Korea as the maximum achievable outcome of all diplomatic efforts. In contrast, the South Korean titles paint a clearly differentiated picture of the effects of Moon's initiative on the security architecture in South Korea: The opportunity for lasting peace, but also the dangers to national security are more clearly elaborated, as well as the South Korean government's perceived excessive subservience to the North Korean regime from a Korean cultural context. At the same time another cluster frames the peace process as paving the way to perceive North Korea as an ordinary state and not as a pariah.

Debate monitoring (horizontal, structural)

Beyond the commonalities in the interpretations, patterns in our frame clusters are indicating the mutual observation of the national discourses. However, there are also indications that this observation is asymmetrical. In the German corpus references between the German unification process and the prospects for national unity on the Korean peninsula are only made once and, moreover, at a late point in the debate. In Korean reporting this aspect of our issue is strongly represented throughout the entire period under investigation. It seems like the similarity between the two countries is clearly eclipsed by other news factors in the German media.

The interpretations of the Korean titles on this topic can be assigned to three frame clusters: The first one addresses short-term consequences of German unification for political actors in Seoul. This usually leads to the recommendation to carefully analyse the German situation, even if the situation in Germany is not comparable to that in Korea.

The second cluster focusses on lessons learnt from German unification for shaping Korean unity. CSI and HKR agree in the demand for cautious steps in the form of offers of dialogue and cooperation, comparable to the FRG's "Ostpolitik". In CSI, a

reference to the German discourse is explicitly made by quoting the daily newspaper "Welt" in connection with the mutual ritualised threatening gestures of the two Koreas with the phrase that this is a "circus without an audience". But while CSI then insists on a clear commitment to the West, HKR brings a genuinely Korean solution into play and demands, for example, the withdrawal of American troops from South Korea.

In the third cluster, CSI and HKR emphasise the high expectations that, at least in the long term, have been raised by German unification in the South Korean population with regard to Korean unification. Both newspapers interweave optimism about future changes and bitterness about the real situation.

The only frame found in a German text published between 1989 and 1991 that addresses the effects of German unification on Korea strongly resembles the Korean perspective. German unification is not a blueprint for South Korea. Moreover, the free flow of information is an important prerequisite for the rapprochement of divided states, but unlike in Germany, that is inconceivable in Korea. The key to Korean unity therefore lies in the fact that friendly minded countries should contribute to the opening of North Korea.

Even beyond the frame clusters that explicitly emerge around references to the respective other country, there are indications of the mutual observation of debates. Thus, in reporting on the agony of the GDR in the German press, no later than the fall of the Wall, the consequences of the migration movement for the FRG come to the fore. Migration from the GDR to the FRG is described both as a solvable task and a serious problem in the German titles. A sceptical perspective is also taken up in HKR.

Furthermore, CSI explicitly links the stubbornness of SED bigwigs trying to secure their claim to power with that of the functional elites in North Korea. Only if elites stopped playing for time and stopped delaying reforms would there be a real chance for change. Both Korean newspapers explicitly contextualise the pragmatic approach of the German government's policy with regard to North Korea. In an article on the ritualised mutual threatening gestures of the two Koreas, explicit reference is made to the media discourse in Germany.

However, our analysis of reporting from 1989 to 1991 also suggests that there are limits to entanglement: While the frame of the "exploited" West German is often used in German media, it is not reflected in Korean discourse – although this is precisely the role that could be played by the rich South in the event of a Korean unification. The German media paint a picture of West Germans who feel overburdened. This individualistic interpretation may not align with the more collectivist thinking of Korea in the early 1990s. Additionally, the costs of unification are not seen as sacrifices for the population in West Germany by HKR and CSI. This is surprising given the potential significance for the population of South Korea in the event of a

Korean unification. It is important to consider these perspectives in discussions of the possible unification of the two Korean states.

Compared to the coverage of German unification in the years 1989 to 1991, there are once again significantly fewer explicit references to the respective other discourse in the coverage of Moon Jae-In's policy of détente in 2018 and 2019. At this low level, however, the basic constellation remains the same, albeit under the opposite sign: German media refer to German unification on a regular basis, while this is rarely the case in Korean titles.

In a total of nine cases, FAZ and SZ focus on parallels between the path to state unity in Korea and German reunification at different points in the period under investigation. This is often done in background pieces and reports that focus on actors with an East German biography. At one point, even South Korean President Moon Jae-In personally describes his ideas for a new security architecture on the Korean peninsula in the FAZ.

With regard to problem descriptions, the frames often focus on how difficult it is to compare the situation in both countries, because the separation has lasted much longer and contacts between the people have been cut off for much longer and more rigidly. In the causal interpretations, the high symbolic value of Germany and especially Berlin for Korea is stated, once even by the South Korean ambassador in Berlin, but references are also made to the complex geostrategic situation and the differences regarding the economic gaps between the two parts of the particular countries.

The moral evaluations as parts of the analysed frames (see Theoretical framework) are contradictory: Despite all the symbolism, which political actors in particular point out, the actual unification of Korea is unlikely to be achieved and cooperation is risky. The necessity of exchange is nevertheless stated, because the political situation might change quickly. However, according to the East German experts with SED backgrounds cited by the German news outlets in our sample, Germany's "mistakes" should be avoided, and North Korea should be taken seriously as a socialist state. The treatment recommendations in this cluster are not so much based on German unity in the 1990s, but on the diplomatic efforts that prepared it in the long term.

This very point is also emphasised in the only frame in South Korean newspapers, in which a US diplomat is quoted as stating that the main thing to learn from Germany is to talk to each other. The low chance of unification in the short term could be one reason why Germany hardly appears as a point of reference, but it could also be the political position of the Moon administration, shared by HKR, that Germany is not a role model for the Korean unification process, especially with regard to the dominance of the market economy model. The conservative CSI, on the other hand,

considers the core security issue of nuclear weapons to be so important that best practices from Germany are seen as irrelevant.

References to transnational identities (vertical, cultural)

Unlike in the horizontal dimension, in the vertical dimension we come across significantly fewer indicators of a transnational public sphere in our corpus. Against the background of shared experiences of separation, the fall of the Berlin Wall plays a key role in the first period under investigation (1989-1991). The Korean and German newspapers deal with this highly emotional event in gradually different ways: SZ and FAZ only depict scenes of fraternisation in the context of the fall of the Wall. In contrast to the German outlets, the Korean papers take up this motif again in their later coverage, especially in their reports on October 3rd, 1990. Two interpretations are conceivable here, which may reinforce each other: disillusionment on the German side and a Korean perspective that looks at the events with a little envy.

With all caution this could be interpreted as a mental bridge between South Koreans and West Germans in particular. However, this interconnectedness of the Korean and German arenas seems to be rather unstable. The fall of the Berlin Wall, for example, which is symbolically charged in the Korean corpus strongly, does not lead to the German discourse on moving the capital back from Bonn to Berlin being taken up more intensively. This shows the limits of the foreign reporting of the Korean papers.

This is even more evident in the German coverage of Moon's diplomatic efforts in 2018/19. The papers hardly interpret this initiative from a shared perspective as divided countries, but rather as a global security issue, which the German newspapers accompany from a distanced bird's eye view. A common identity tends to emerge even more – at least with regard to CSI – from a common understanding as members of a transatlantic alliance with the USA. From this perspective the actual leeway of Kim and Moon respectively is framed rather sceptically, and Trump's activities are commented from the perspective of worried allies.

In parts, even cultural boundaries for a common identity become visible: Mutual respect is deeply anchored in South Korea's culture. Against this background, CSI criticises Kim's aggressive political communication and the Moon government's domestic confrontation course particularly strongly as disrespectful. This aspect is not explicitly taken up by the German media at any point. Instead, the polarisation in South Korea and between the two Korean states are referred to.

Governance (vertical, structural)

Based on our theoretical framework, we did not expect an intensive debate on governance structures in our corpus. Our data proofs this assumption widely. Nevertheless, in the 1989 sample we find individual references to governance concepts that are discussed from a transnational perspective: For example, CSI highlights the risks of a monetary union for the stability of the Deutsche Mark in relation to its significance as an international reserve currency. On the other hand, the German-Korean differences in the interpretation of Germany's role in Europe are revealing. The newspapers in both countries agree that no one in Europe should be afraid of an emerging "Fourth Reich". In CSI and HKR, however, the concerns of Germany's neighbouring countries are more prominently reported on. The same applies to the framing of unity as a solution to European problems.

Differences in Media Systems

The particularities of the South Korean media system described in section 2 make a specific segmentation of a transnational public sphere around the topic of national unity seem likely, even if it is weak at best. Our qualitative data cautiously point in this direction: In Germany, the national discourse is reflected broadly in both newspapers in both periods, despite gradual differences between SZ and FAZ. In Korea, however, we find significant differences in both periods, which can be explained by the fact that CSI is anchored in the milieu of the established conservative elites and HKR emerged from the civil society's resistance against military dictatorship.

With regard to German unity, CSI interprets the October protests in the GDR as a symptom of the failure of the socialist model, based on its sceptical attitude towards socialism. From the same stance, it explicitly places the will for freedom of the citizens of all Warsaw Pact countries in opposition to the forces of inertia in the SED. These forces of inertia are more strongly reported on by CSI than by HKR. Similarly, only CSI highlights the merits of German Chancellor Kohl. CSI unreservedly shares Kohl's convictions about Western ties and the consistent application of the market model to save an ailing GDR. Consequently, only in CSI reports the topos of German-German fraternisation is to be found.

HKR sees events in Germany through the lens of a movement anchored in civil society that sees democratic socialism as a possible alternative to the market economy established during the years of military dictatorship. This is shown by the fact that only HKR looks at the reform efforts of the Krenz government, critically analyses the "absorption" of the GDR by capitalist West Germany and at the same time places unity in the context of Brandt's Ostpolitik. HKR, on the other hand, hardly takes up the protests of the GDR citizens against the state leadership in October. The preservation of the GDR is also a serious option only in HKR, as are considerations on the

power options of an all-German socialist party, on the future of the trade unions and on a third way between capitalism and real existing socialism.

30 years later, little has changed in this polarisation between HKR and CSI. On the contrary: Moon Jae-In's peace efforts are framed very differently in the two newspapers. From the very beginning, CSI paints a picture of the president as a risk-taker who is making himself a stooge of the North Korean regime. In contrast, HKR emphasises Moon's achievements as a broker between North Korea and the United States and as a skilful negotiator. CSI also takes a much more critical view of the other two main actors than HKR. Above all, CSI frames Trump as a hothead and Kim as a tactician who takes advantage of Moon's weakness.

The differences between the two newspapers are hardly less pronounced in the issue-oriented frame clusters: CSI frames the events of 2018-2019 as risky overall, linking unity and détente efforts intimately with the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula and presenting it as a threat to national security. A supposedly incompetent government in Seoul is presented as the biggest obstacle on the road to unity, its diplomatic efforts as mere symbolic politics. Submissiveness towards the North is mixed with restrictions on the critical press in South Korea. Only CSI makes an explicit reference to German unification – with a sceptical conclusion regarding the transferability of experiences. HKR, on the other hand, frames the diplomatic activities much more strongly as opportunity-oriented: That the two states in Korea are talking to each other at all is seen as extremely valuable; this would create opportunities for a lasting peace. Economic cooperation plays a key role here, but so does cooperation with China and Russia. HKR identifies the South Korean conservative opposition and the North Korean leadership as major obstacles to unity.

Discussion and Conclusion

In summary, for all the indicators we examined, our data reveal evidence of a transnational public sphere between Korea and Germany in relation to unity. Topical references between the discourses can be discerned clearly. The similarities and differences can be explained as a consequence of established practices of selecting news: Korean titles tend to frame German unification as part of a European unification process. That tends to indicate a transnational contextualisation of the unification. But we found no evidence for a similar trend German leading media's coverage on Moon Jae-In's peace efforts.

In terms of temporal development, there is a high degree of congruence between the discourses that develop in German and Korean leading media about German unification, with specific deviations in the Korean titles. The reporting in German and Korean media is congruent above all with regard to the dynamics of the unification process triggered by the opening of the Berlin Wall. We also see a similar dynamic 30 years later in the coverage of the unification efforts in Korea, which is timed by

major media events. If we switch to the level of frame clusters, however, this synchronicity dissolves to some extent.

Similarities in the national debates represent the weakest criterion for a transnational public sphere but can be identified in our material through the systematic comparison of the frame clusters in all topic areas of the reporting. Beyond the commonalities in the interpretations, patterns that can be interpreted as an indication of debate observation emerge at least to a small extent. However, they turn out to be asymmetrical and weaken once again in the 2018/19 study period. References to transnational identities can be found in the reporting on German unity, especially in the context of Berlin as a highly symbolic place but are anything but dominant. This is once again even more true for the politics of détente in 2018/19. A transnational identity emerges – if at all – along the Western alliance instead of divided countries. Finally, as expected, our data argue against an intensive negotiation of governance structures. Weak indications of this can at best be found in the 1989/91 corpus. In contrast, the segmentation of the public sphere in both study periods is stressed in the Korean newspapers, each of which frames events strongly from their basic political position, whereas in Germany the unity discourses are broadly reflected across the board in both newspapers.

The comparison between the years 1989/91 and 2018/19 in particular shows that transnational public spheres tend to develop along long-term issues, even over relatively large cultural distances. However, it seems that this requires a key event with a global reach. This was evidently the case with the fall of the Berlin Wall. However spectacular the images of the summits in 2018 and 2019 may have been, they are probably nowhere near achieving this power.

The findings presented here should be interpreted with caution in the light of several limitations. In our case study, we initially chose to access only selected media outlets. It could be fruitful to expand the circle of media offerings examined in further studies on the current situation. Quantitative or even automated content analyses could also underpin our interpretive approaches on the basis of a much broader corpus. Our focus on patterns of interpretation could also be supplemented by more in-depth analyses of speakers.

After the intensive empirical examination of our corpus, we see analytical strengths of a public spheres perspective on our topic. However, this should not obscure the fact that several patterns in our data can also be explained from the perspective of news value theory in view of the high factuality of the events in the highly dynamic German unification process and the political proximity of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Republic of Korea.

The large overlap in the interpretation of the events can in turn be explained by the very careful observation of the unification discourse by the respective foreign editorial offices and correspondents. The stronger framing of the unification process as

part of a pan-European dynamic speaks for a polyglot, but quite distanced orientation of the Korean foreign correspondents. 30 years later, the German correspondents also accompany the peace efforts from a distanced bird's-eye view and place it in general considerations of the security architecture in Northeast Asia. Their particular framing can be interpreted on the background of the correspondent's self-conception as journalists making sense of international news. On the Korean side this is additionally influenced by a strong political parallelism. Depending on the ideological affinity of the media outlets, this leads to two significantly different ways to tell the story of unity.

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