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Norwegian Media and the Cold War 1945-1991

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Abstract

The theme of this article is how the Cold War influenced the media – but also how the media influenced the Cold War. In order to study this, the article connects Norwegian media to the broader international Cold War history between 1945 and 1991. The aim is to show the relevance of the Cold War for media development and of the media for research on the Cold War. The goal is to construct a tentative fundament for further research on the role of the media during the Cold War.

Keywords: the Cold War, the East-West conflict, mass media in the Cold War, Norwegian media history

Introduction

The period from 1945 until 1991 was decisive for the development of international mass communications – the rise of television being the most important example. These years were also marked by the Cold War between the East and West – the conflict between two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. If we wish to understand the development of the mass media during this period, we also need to investigate the relations between the media and the Cold War. It seems obvious that the Cold War influenced media content for decades. However, perhaps a more interesting question is: To what degree did the media influence the Cold War?

Scholars have already related modern mass communications to earlier conflict periods of the 20th century, such as World War I, the years of mass society in the 1920s and 30s, and World War II. In fact, the period from the late 1800s until the late 1940s saw modern technology being utilized as mass communications as never before in world history: The press became a huge industry of news and opinions, Hollywood dominated film and cinema, while radio broadcasting quickly emerged as the third mass medium. All of them had the ability to reach millions of people and thus to influence public opinion. No one really understood the consequences of mass communications on such a huge scale.

If we continue this perspective into the postwar period, we quickly enter the era of the Cold War. It became *the* main international conflict dominating the world after 1945. Walter Lippmann introduced the term ‘Cold War’ in 1947 in reference to the dramatic East-West tensions that were escalating at the time between the United States and the Soviet Union in Europe. Later it has been used to refer to the entire East-West conflict, which, at varying levels of tensions, lasted until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

During this period, the Cold War dominated international news and politics. It was a struggle between two superpowers and their ideologies – capitalism and communism – with many allies on both sides. Some of them were voluntary allies, others involuntary. The tension between them was sometimes extremely high – with consequences that affected the rest of the world. The most threatening possible consequence was a nuclear war, which could end the future of mankind.

Mass Communications and the Cold War: a Neglected Topic?

Let us start with a brief discussion of the general relation between the Cold War and the field of mass media research. A great many historians have specialized in Cold War research. Three historiographical schools have emerged: the traditionalists, the revisionists and the post-revisionists. The traditionalists blamed the Soviet Union for the origin of the conflict, while the revisionists took the opposite view and blamed the US. The post-revisionist school has not been interested in assigning blame, but more interested in explaining why the different actors acted as they did. The three different schools followed each other chronologically, but their viewpoints are present both in new literature and in historical television documentaries, etc. Even today, the debate continues in recent literature on the topic.¹

The first point of interest is whether Cold War scholars have included the mass media in their works. The main impression is that experts have generally neglected the importance of the media.² What they do is to analyze the superpowers and their actions – concentrating on events, motives, strategies, causes and effects. In doing so, they seem to have underestimated the importance of communications: how the Cold War influenced the media and how the media presented and interpreted Cold War events for their audiences. For decades the most important international news items were related to Cold War events, in Norway as elsewhere. Ordinary people were dependent on the media to keep informed about world events. That was the situation during the whole period, from the late 1940s until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. But very little has been written about this in the Cold War literature. Thus, we can conclude that Cold War historians are not media scholars. In their publications, they are normally not interested in the importance of mass communications: the media are absent from their books. Cold War historians have little to say about the impact of the press, film, radio or television during the Cold War.

But this fact does not mean that media scholars have neglected the Cold War. We find many studies about the media during the Cold War – especially in the United States. These studies show how the media treated the Cold War.³ The Cold War is also dealt with in textbooks by, for example, Briggs and Burke (2002), Chapman (2005) and Kovarik (2011). Media historians have generally been more interested in the Cold War than Cold War historians have been interested in the media.⁴

We need to delve a bit deeper into the field of mass communication research in order to get a better understand of the complex relations between the Cold War and this kind of research. When Paul Lazarsfeld and others developed mass communication research in postwar America, it was at the same time as tensions increased between the US and the Soviet Union and the Cold War developed. Thus, the new warlike atmosphere between East and West also came to influence communication research. During the 1950s, the

new field of mass communication research developed a deep interest in *propaganda* and public opinion through intensive studies of media effects.⁵ The motivation for many of these projects can only be understood in light of the Cold War confrontations that occurred between the two superpowers. *Project Revere* was one of them: In the early 1950s, scholars studied leaflets as a medium of last resort, looking at the degree to which leaflets could be used to reach the population of an enemy country (read: Eastern Europe), when all other possibilities were impossible. The US Air Force sponsored the project.⁶

Another example showing how the Cold War influenced the development of mass communication research is the 1956 book *Four Theories of the Press*, written by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm. The authors analyzed the media by dividing them into "authoritarian" and "liberal" systems. Another pair of concepts – "the social responsible" media theory and the "Soviet media theory" – developed the contrast between the media in West and the East even further: The Western media were characterized using sympathetic terms ("responsible"), while the Soviet media were characterized in a negative way, as totalitarian and controlled by the communist party and the state. There were many good reasons for these characterizations, but most important is how that book portrayed the East-West confrontation at the time. *Four Theories of the Press* became a classic cited text within the field of mass communication research on how we understand the role of the media in modern societies.⁷

Thus, there are many reasons to study the complicated relations between the Cold War and the media in a country. I have chosen the Norwegian media as an example in the following discussion. We begin with an overview of the media development in Norway at the time – as the first of three steps.

PART ONE: Norwegian Media History in the Cold War Era

From the standard text book on Norwegian media history, we can summarize the periods between 1945 and 1991 and their characterizations:

Table 1. *Periods from the Norwegian Media History in the Cold War Era 1945-1991*

Years	Name of period
1945-1950	The Age of the Mass Society The party press and cinema. Radio broadcasting develops NRK 1933. Use of advertising and propaganda during crises and war.
1950-1960	The Media Turn Visual The Post-War Age. Four big mass media: newspapers, weeklies, film and radio. Competition and popularization leading to market saturation. First experiments with television 1954-60.
1960-1980	The Norwegian Media System at its Peak The rise of television as dominant mass medium. Competition between five big mass media: all of them adapt to television. State regulations on broadcasting and cinema theaters, state subsidies to books and the press. Dissolution of the party press.
1980-1991	Transformation of the Media System End of the party press. Breakthrough for market economy: liberalization, deregulation, privatization and commercialization. End of the NRK monopoly. New radio and TV channels: TV3 (1987), TVNorge (1988) and TV2 (1991).

Note: Based on Bastiansen and Dahl 2008: 526-527.

This table provides an overview of the 47 years of Norwegian media history that coincide with the Cold War. In this table, the periods lack international aspects, especially the Cold War. To include it, we need a basic overview of the Cold War chronology.

PART TWO: The Cold War

Even today, there is no agreement among scholars on how to make a periodization of the Cold War. It was so complex that it can be categorized in many different ways. This makes the situation complicated, but it also makes it easier to develop a simple and elementary overview of the Cold War that is adapted to our needs. In a simplistic manner, we may summarize the conflict as follows:

Table 2. *The Cold War Chronology 1945-1991*

Years	Period
1945-1962	Origin and Early Years of the Cold War Tension between the US and the USSR. Atomic weapons create fear of a nuclear Armageddon, but also thaw periods. The tensions reach climax with the Cuban crisis in 1962.
1963-1979	The Era of Détente A long thaw period after the Cuban crisis. Negotiations for peace and disarmament: SALT I in Moscow 1972, the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and SALT II negotiations. Vietnam War. The Period ends with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the NATO Double Track Decision, December 1979.
1980-1985	New Confrontation between East and West New tension between the US and the Soviet Union. Western boycott of Olympic Games in Moscow 1980. President Reagan's "Evil Empire" speech in 1983. A new peace movement and a strong movement against new generations of nuclear missiles.
1985-1988	The Era of Glasnost Michail Gorbachev and his policy of Glasnost, Perestroika and New Thinking. Glasnost reaches its climax with Gorbachev's speech to the UN in 1988.
1989-1991	Revolts of the Masses and the Fall of Communism Eastern Europe moves from one-party communist regimes to multiparty democracies. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the unification of Germany in 1990 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 end the Cold War.

This table shows the Cold War as two main conflict periods characterized by a high level of tension (1945-1962 and 1980-1985) and separated by a period of Détente (1963-1979).

The years 1945-1962 contain the origin of the East-West conflict, even though the experts still discuss how and when it really started. Stalin ruled the Soviet Union while Truman was the US president. In 1946, Churchill, talked about the "Iron Curtain" dividing Europe. The so-called "long telegram" from George Kennan in 1946, defining for the first time the Soviet threat, led to the development of the US containment policy. The aim was to establish barriers for Soviet influence in Europe. In 1950, this US containment policy became global with the war in Korea (formulated in the so-called NSC-50 document).

The conflict escalated when both superpowers got the atomic bomb. It was also intensified by the Stalin blockade of Berlin and the Western airlift in 1948, the origin of NATO

in 1949, the war in Korea in 1950, the revolt in the DDR in 1953, Nikita Krustchev's way to power, the Hungarian crises in 1956, the Polish protests in 1956, the U2 crises in 1960 and the US Bay of Pigs invasion on Cuba in 1961. The conflict in Europe thus developed into a global conflict. However, Germany came to be of special importance. The allies divided Germany after WWII, including the capital Berlin. The Soviet zone became the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR), while the western zone became the Bundesrepublik Deutschland (BRD). In no other place was the Cold War more visible than on German soil, and especially in the divided Berlin – and even more so after the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961.⁸ However, the most dangerous episode came with the Cuban Missile Crises in 1962. Then, the world truly feared a nuclear war.⁹

After the Cuban crisis, the East-West conflict changed character; the years 1963-1979 became an era of *détente*. The superpowers tried to reduce the direct tension. They established a hot line between the White House and the Kremlin, in order to prevent a nuclear war being started inadvertently. Despite events like the Tet offensive in Vietnam and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, both in 1968, the lower level of tension was combined with negotiations on arms reduction and other issues between the superpowers; the SALT I treaty was signed in Moscow in 1972, while the Helsinki negotiations were underway. American astronauts and Soviet cosmonauts met in space, illustrating the more friendly East-West relationship. Nevertheless, the Cold War was still there, but developed more indirectly by proxies, in Vietnam and in other third-world countries like Angola, Somalia and Ethiopia. In such countries, various political actors were supported either by the the US or by the Soviet Union. The *Détente* period reached its climax with the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, but was weakened in the late 1970s and ended in 1979.¹⁰

The years 1980-1985 became a new era of confrontation between East and West. It started with the Soviet SS-20 nuclear missiles in the late 1970s. It escalated with the invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, which was followed by a partly Western boycott of the Olympic Games in Moscow 1980. In addition, the Polish crises in 1980 and the Soviets shooting down a Korean Airliner (K007) in 1983 contributed to the general tension. President Reagan held his speech about the Soviet Union being an "evil empire" the same year. The NATO Double Track Decision of December 1979 linked deployment of new nuclear missiles in Western Europe to NATO negotiations on arms reduction with the Soviet Union. A new fear of nuclear weapons and nuclear war arose in Europe, motivating a large peace movement. The death of Leonid Brezhnev in 1982 was followed by the brief periods of Jurij Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko until 1985, without reductions in tension and confrontation.

Michail Gorbachev was appointed as new party leader in March 1985. The new Soviet leader soon started to change the signals sent to the West. Gorbachev and Reagan's East-West summit in Geneva the same year was a success. Gorbachev developed many new policies: The "Glasnost" program in 1986 and the "Perestroika" program in 1987, including the "New Thinking" about the role of the USSR in the world.¹¹ Gorbachev and Reagan had important talks on arms reductions the following years. Gorbachev declared, in an important speech to the UN on December 7th 1988, a one-sided significant Soviet reduction of armed forces in Europe. This speech became the climax of these years.¹²

The years 1989-1991 were dramatic. The period started with unrest in Eastern Europe that soon escalated to a popular revolt, which swept across the Eastern bloc. Demonstra-

tors demanded the end of one-party rule by the communist party and the establishment of democratic multiparty systems. The result was stunning: In country after country, the power of the ruling communist elite collapsed. This made the year 1989 as historical as the French revolution of 1789. The most famous single event was the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9th 1989.¹³ However, this was soon followed by other sensational events: the unification of the two German states in 1990 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. As a whole, these events implied the end of the Cold War.¹⁴

PART THREE: Norwegian Media and the Cold War

We have now presented some traits of the Norwegian media development *and* the Cold War chronology between 1945 and 1991, but thus far we have treated them separately. Now, let us try to connect them. In order to do this, we need to make some adaptations and re-formulate the labels of the media history periods, but the names of the Cold War periods are the same as in the former table.

Table 3 links the Norwegian media development *and* the Cold War chronology for the whole period 1945-1991, identifying five main periods.

The First Period: 1945-1962

At the same time as the world saw the origin of the Cold War as a fundamental geopolitical and ideological confrontation between the US and the USSR, the Norwegian newspapers re-established its role from the prewar years: as a party press. The press was divided into the Labour press, the Conservative press, the Liberal press, and the Agrarian press.¹⁵ In the years after 1945, big newspapers like *Aftenposten* and *Arbeiderbladet* started to establish their own network of foreign correspondents covering world events. Simultaneously, the public service broadcaster NRK re-established its role as the national radio broadcaster of both national and international news reports.

The Cold War made a huge impact on the cinema screens from the late 1940s and into the 1950s.¹⁶ The way Hollywood engaged in the East-West struggle soon became visible also in Norwegian cinema theaters. At the same time, a weekly newsreel was launched – *Filmavisen* (NorskFilmrevy). It presented current affairs in sound and picture to the movie audience. It was established in the first days after the liberation, in May 1945. It became so popular that the producers made it into a permanent attraction. In 1960, it met competition from the new NRK television. At the end of 1963, it was closed down because NRK television news had made it irrelevant. From then on, it became the task of the TV news broadcast “Dagsrevyen” to cover the world news with pictures.¹⁷

All of this had important consequences for how the media covered Cold War news: from the late 1940s, the East-West conflicts were presented only by the party press or by NRK radio. The communist coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948 frightened not only the Labour Government, but also the Labour press and the non-socialistic party press on the Center/Right. Thus, most of the party press supported the Norwegian NATO membership in 1949.¹⁸ The NRK also reflected the official policy, while *Filmavisen* had a very limited international coverage.¹⁹ The result was very limited scope for alternative views – in fact, these years have been called an “ice age” for freedom of expression on foreign policy in Norway.²⁰ Several important Cold War news events were undoubtedly presented in such

Table 3. *Norwegian Media and the Cold War 1945-1991*

Years	Norwegian Media:	Cold War Chronology:
1945-1962	<p>The party press, newsreels and the golden age of the NRK radio monopoly. Early Television</p> <p>Reconstruction of the party press and the NRK radio after WWII. The newsreel <i>Filmavisen</i> 1945. All media turn visual because of competition. The NRK television 1960 marks the beginning of the Age of Television. <i>Filmavisen</i> ends 1963.</p>	<p>Origin and the Early years of the Cold War</p> <p>Tension between the USA and the USSR after WWII. The Churchill talk about the "Iron Curtain" in Europe 1946. The atomic bomb. Fear for nuclear war. The communist coup in Czechoslovakia 1948. Berlin blockade and western airlift 1948. The origin of NATO 1949: Norway became member. The revolt in DDR 1953. The Hungarian crises 1956. Some brief thaw periods. The U2 affair 1960. The Berlin Wall 1961. Tension reaches climax with the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.</p>
1963-1979	<p>The Norwegian Media System at its Peak</p> <p>The Golden age of the NRK monopoly. Television as the dominant mass medium: all other media adapt. State regulations create the 'Peak' of the Norwegian media model. Coverage of the Vietnam war and of the national debate on membership in EEC in 1972. The liberal press starts the dissolution of the party press. Also, debate about the NRK monopoly.</p>	<p>The Era of Détente</p> <p>Lower East-West tension after the Cuban crisis. A telephonic "hot line" between the White House and the Kremlin. Negotiations for peace and disarmament. SALT I in Moscow in 1972. The Helsinki Final Act of 1975. SALT II negotiations. Space race. US engagement in Vietnam escalates under Kennedy and Johnson and continues under Nixon, until the war ends in 1975. Conflicts in the third world show the East-West conflict indirectly. After the Soviet SS-20 nuclear missiles in Europe, the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan and the NATO Dual Track Decision, the Era of Détente ends December 1979.</p>
1980-1985	<p>The Transformation of the Media Begins</p> <p>The end of the NRK monopoly 1981. Liberalization, privatization and commercialization of media. New radio and TV channels established. Video and satellite TV. The dissolution of the party press reaches the conservative and agrarian press.</p>	<p>New Confrontation between East and West</p> <p>New tension between the Soviet Union and the US. Soviet war in Afghanistan. Western boycott of Olympic Games in Moscow 1980. The Polish crisis in 1980 and the rise of Solidarity. The Soviets shooting down a Korean airliner 1983. President Reagan's "Evil Empire" speech. The death of Brezhnev in 1982. Andropov and Csernenko as Soviet leaders until 1985. Widespread fear of nuclear war. Peace demonstrations and a strong movement against nuclear weapons in Europe.</p>
1985-1988	<p>The Transformation Continues</p> <p>More newspapers declare independence from political parties. Orkla Media starts its expansion in the media sector. New TV Channels: TV3 (1987) and TVNorge (1988). Free market economy ideas transforms the media; investors and stockholders.</p>	<p>The Era of Glasnost</p> <p>Michail Gorbachev and his policy of glasnost (1986), perestroika and new thinking (1987). Four summit meetings between Gorbachev and Reagan. Climax of his policy in 1988 with his speech to the UN General Assembly 7 December 1988.</p>
1989-1991	<p>The Last Days of the Party Press and the Rise of Commercial Media Groups</p> <p>Shaping of big media groups: Schibsted and the A Press as an answer to Orkla Media. End of the party press. TV2 established 1991, starts broadcasts 1992.</p>	<p>Revolts of the Masses and the Fall of Communism</p> <p>Hungary opens the Iron Curtain. The Fall of the Berlin Wall 1989. Communist regimes fall in Eastern Europe. Change to multiparty democracies. Unification of East and West Germany in 1990. Collapse of Soviet Union in 1991. The end of the Cold War.</p>

a context: the Soviet blockade of Berlin in 1948, the revolts in the DDR in 1953 and in Hungary in 1956, and the Berlin crisis in 1961. News reporting on such events was done by newspapers and broadcasting, with close connections to the political parties and the Labour Government of the time. The US war in Vietnam was supported by the conservative newspaper *Aftenposten*, while the liberal *Dagbladet* criticized it. The main Labour

newspaper, *Arbeiderbladet*, changed its view from support to critique.²¹ After establishment of NRK television in 1960, the Cold War news soon began to fill the television news reports. Studies have shown that NRK's TV coverage of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 was a breakthrough for TV coverage of international Cold War events.²²

The Second Period: 1963-1979

Table 3 shows a remarkable parallel between the Détente period of the Cold War and how the Norwegian media system was reaching its highest level of public regulation and state subsidies at exactly the same time. The era of Détente meant a lower level of tension in the East-West conflict, negotiations about SALT I and II and the signing of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. The US and the USSR were seeking to avoid direct confrontations, although there were several wars and conflicts by proxy in the third world, motivated by the same rivalry.²³

News about the Cold War events of this period was reported by Norwegian media at their peak as a national media system: the combination of the party press and the NRK radio and television monopoly *and* state subsidies for newspapers and film. Nevertheless, the party loyalty of the press was changing. The Liberal press soon disappeared after an intense debate and national referendum – concerning Norwegian membership in the EEC in 1972. It was the first group of the party press that disappeared. One of the main reasons was the competition from NRK television. In its coverage of party politics, the NRK had to be balanced and fair to both supporters and opponents of Norwegian EEC membership, while the party loyal newspapers were dominated by a partisan pro-EEC viewpoint. The Liberal press was being squeezed by both sides in the issue. Television expanded rapidly after 1960 and became the dominating mass medium, nationwide from 1967. In the late 1960s, the TV news made place names like Vietnam and Biafra known to everyone. Television also provided extensive coverage of the Tet offensive in Vietnam and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 – as well as the Apollo moon landing in July 1969.

All this meant that the NRK became even more important than before. In the 1960s it also started to establish its own foreign correspondent offices abroad; the first came in London (1964), then New York (1965), Paris (1966), Bonn (1967), Moscow (1968), Washington (1970), Hong Kong (1970) etc. This network of correspondents was established along the East-West axis of the Cold War.²⁴ In the 1970s, new correspondents in the Third World (Africa, Asia and Latin America) modified it.²⁵ Because the NRK covered the whole nation with radio and television every day – and did it from a privileged monopoly situation – its coverage of world events provided important common experiences for the whole population. The biggest newspapers – like *Aftenposten*, *Dagbladet* and *Arbeiderbladet* – continued to use their own foreign correspondents in the coverage during these years.

This had important consequences: It meant that the news of the detente period between East and West was presented by media in quite a different position than in the late 1940s and early 1950s – the party press had begun to disappear, while the position of the NRK as a combined radio and television monopoly was stronger than ever. The NRK correspondents produced many important programs interpreting international events, wrote books and participated in public debates. Several of them became national

celebrities with high credibility.²⁶ The Norwegian media system, with a high degree of public regulations and state subsidies, was at its peak during the era of détente.

The Third Period: 1980-1985

The third period shows a striking co-existence between the new confrontation between East and West after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and NATO's Double Track Decision in December 1979 and the beginning of a major transformation of Norwegian media. At the same time as the Western boycott of the Olympic Games in Moscow 1980, the Polish crises and the rise of the Solidarity Movement, the Norwegian party press was riddled by conflicts caused by reduced loyalty to the political parties: They occurred within the Labour press, the Conservative press and the Agrarian press in the early 1980s. They all wanted to end partisan political journalism.

The Conservative Government ended the NRK monopoly in 1981. That decision was part of the Government's liberalization and privatization policy for radio and television, which paved the way for many new local and private radio and television stations and the new "media age" of the 1980s. At the same time, the media reported about the new confrontation between the superpowers. A new "Ice Age" in East-West relations followed the era of Détente in the early part of the 1980s. It was a paradox, because all the new media channels in Western countries like Norway meant more communication, more news and more media content, while the new confrontation between the two superpowers at exactly the same time also meant more tension, harder talk and less information available for the media.²⁷ The new confrontation also increased the fear of a nuclear Armageddon. Thus, the same mass media that covered the new East-West confrontation moved into a period marked by change: newspapers moved away from the party press tradition, while the NRK expanded into the new media age with a myriad of new local radio stations and new television channels like TV3 (1987) and TVNorge (1988).

The Fourth Period: 1985-1988

The transformation of Norwegian media continued into the second half of the 1980s, but now in quite a new era of East-West relations. Soon after the appointment of Gorbachev in 1985, the USSR sent new signals to the West through international news channels. This was part of the new Glasnost policy. The Russian word "glasnost" means "openness" – and was a keyword for the new Soviet leader. In 1986, the news showed a new kind of openness within the USSR: a new desire to discuss internal problems in public. In 1987, Gorbachev launched his "Perestroika" program.²⁸ These new signals soon changed the East-West relations and reduced some of the tensions of former years. It seemed as if a new era had begun.

For Norwegian media this happened while the party press tradition in the Labour press, the Conservative press and the Agrarian press was moving quickly to its end. The NRK also began to change, in order to meet the growing competition from videocassette recorders, satellite TV and the new television channels. The media were being liberalized, privatized and commercialized away from the "Norwegian system" of the 1960s and 1970s. Thus, media coverage of the Glasnost period coincided with a time of major structural changes within the Norwegian media sector. However, the Soviet media were also changing by allowing more open and critical discussions.²⁹ However important this

development was, there is very little Norwegian research on it. One exception is a study on reception of the television coverage of the summit between Reagan and Gorbachev in Moscow in 1988.³⁰

The Fifth Period: 1989-1991

The fifth period, 1989-1991, came, surprisingly, to mark the end of the Cold War. No one could have guessed, in advance, that mass demonstrations would manage to press the communist parties out of power in Eastern Europe. The myriad spectacular events taking place included the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the unification of East and West Germany in 1990 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. It was sensational news and covered by the mass media globally.

In Norway, these events were covered by media heavily influenced by the transformations of the late 1980s. From 1987, the national economic crisis contributed to declining advertisement income for newspapers. On the other hand, most of the press had now declared its editorial independence from the political parties. The Labour press ended its formal loyalty to the Labour Party in 1991 – as the last party press to do so. Three new big media groups came out of this process: Orkla Media, Schibsted and the A-Press. In addition, from 1989 the NRK started competing in a more active and aggressive way. Now, the aim of NRK was to survive on the new media market.

A new private TV2 began its broadcasts in September 1992. It came too late to provide contemporary journalistic coverage of the fall of communism in the East and the events that followed until the end of the Soviet Union in 1991. In TV2, the Cold War was history right from the start. The only thing this new channel could do was to give retrospective coverage of selected Cold War events – and that it did.³¹

Although the coverage was massive, studies of how the media actually covered the last part of the Cold War and the fall of communism are still lacking.³²

Cold War reporting: Network or System?

This brief discussion shows that Norwegian media changed a great deal *during* the Cold War. The media that covered the Glasnost period and the fall of communism in the late 1980s were quite different from the media that covered the beginning of the conflict in the late 1940s. Any study of how the Norwegian media – the press, film or broadcasting – covered Cold War events must acknowledge these changes and incorporate them into the analysis. One important aspect is the importance of foreign news correspondents abroad.

Today, we have two models explaining the postwar growth of foreign correspondents covering world events during the Cold War. Maria Nakken developed the first one. She analyses the foreign correspondents of the NRK as a *network* of sites and persons reporting events back to Norway. How NRK did this was deeply influenced by the East-West axis during the Cold War: The correspondents were placed in New York and Washington, the capitals of Western Europe and in the Soviet capital, Moscow. Only later was this network modified with new sites in Africa, Asia and Latin America that reflected the North-South dimension and the third world.³³

Rolf Werenskjold developed the second model. He identified what he calls the Norwegian foreign news *system* – which includes the major national newspapers and the NRK.

He has identified the establishment of the Norwegian postwar system of international news coverage (1945-1964), how and why it expanded (1965-1974), when it was in its zenith with the highest number of foreign correspondents (1975-1994) as well as its later decline (1995-2011).³⁴ Interesting enough, he shows that the system was at its biggest in the later part of the Cold War, as measured by correspondent sites around the world, from 1975 until 1994. He especially identified *Aftenposten* as the leading Norwegian foreign news medium. In this last period, foreign news journalism in Norwegian media reached its climax of coverage, especially in the number of reports from Norwegian foreign correspondents

Conclusion: The relationship between Media and Events

In this article, we have studied the Norwegian media development between 1945 and 1991 (Table 1), the Cold War chronology (Table 2) and then we have connected the two (Table 3). The following discussion sums up, in a general way, how these two may be connected. This opens up a much broader discussion about what kind of influence there was between the Cold War and the media. The discussion has shown that during most of the Cold War history, the events themselves have been the non-dependent variables influencing media coverage. We can identify this influence in the world news, which created public interest and debate, but also in film and television. Without the Cold War, a huge range of topics would not have been in the media at all. Consequently, it is easy to conclude that the East-West conflict influenced the media content in a massive way – as many previous studies have shown. Future research will undoubtedly discover new examples of this from-events-to-the-media influence. Also for the Norwegian media, we need more content analyses in this area.

But is this the only form of influence between events and media? What about the *other* direction: Is there any possibility that the media could have influenced public opinions, policymakers and Cold War events? If such influences are found, they will increase the relevance of mass communication research in Cold War studies. So, what can media studies say about this?

Several Western radio stations penetrated the Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union during the Cold War: Voice of America, BBC External Service, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, Deutsche Welle, Deutschlandfunk, Radio in the American Sector (RIAS Berlin), etc. We have many evaluations of how important they were for listeners living under communist rule. Impulses from Western radio programs reached listeners with news and comments – even if they lived under communist control behind the Iron Curtain. These radio stations undermined the authority of the Communist party and inspired dissidents, at least in some parts of the population.³⁵ Some of the radio stations even conducted research on their actual audience behind the Iron Curtain.³⁶

For me, the most interesting example of this is the Glasnost era that began in 1985. After the dramatic years of confrontation 1980-1985, a new period in the East-West relationship started with Michail Gorbachev as the new Soviet leader. His idea of “Glasnost” was in fact a kind of implementation of Western ideas of openness and public debate – but within a nuclear superpower with a one-party state ruled by the mighty communist party. That was unique. The summit meetings between Gorbachev and Reagan showed improved relations between the US and the USSR. This created hope for a better future in the rest of the world.

However, the main point here is this: Glasnost was in fact a *media experiment* in the Soviet Union. Glasnost included a more lively public debate and a freer form of Soviet journalism. The media could even be oppositional and critical of communist leaders in the Kremlin. That was a radical new situation for the Soviet media – with its history as state controlled enterprises established by Lenin and Stalin. The aim of the Soviet media had always been to support the policies of the Communist Party. In the Soviet media system, there was no place for independent media working outside the control of the party. Thus, the Glasnost policy of Gorbachev was really a new phenomenon in Soviet society. In short: Glasnost made the Soviet media much more interesting than before, also for Western foreign correspondents.³⁷

So when the Soviet media entered the Glasnost period, it also influenced the reports and images sent by foreign news correspondents based in Soviet. Their news reports changed the public image of the USSR in Western media. The Glasnost policy – together with Perestroika and “New Thinking” – explains why dissidents in Eastern Europe began to look at the Soviet Union with optimism and continued their work against the communist elite – leading to the events of 1989. In fact, it is impossible to understand 1989 without understanding the era of Glasnost. It is also impossible to understand the Glasnost phenomenon without the media dimension. Thus, in Soviet society during these years, the direction of influence undoubtedly also went from the media to the events. Or more precisely, Gorbachev’s policy of Glasnost gave the Soviet media a new and more offensive role in the news and public debate. Then, the Soviet mass media began to influence the whole situation in their own society, but also in Eastern Europe, stimulating the situation that led to 1989.

Understood in this perspective, the Soviet media in the Glasnost era must be regarded as one of the contributing forces that led to the fall of communism in 1989. Thus, influence was not only moving from events to media, but also from media coverage to new news events. This means that we have a complicated situation marked by bidirectional influence. The media were not only passive mirrors, but – at least in some parts of this history – they also influenced events.

But what about the Norwegian media in this situation? Any conclusion on this must be tentative, because we need more research. Of course, their news coverage did not change Soviet society or the communist regimes in Eastern Europe. But their reporting of these years must have been deeply influenced by changes in Soviet media and how they discussed social problems in new ways. Thus, we can say that the Glasnost era in the Soviet media also changed foreign news journalism in Norwegian media – and thus the public image of the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s. Explaining how this happened is still open for upcoming research.

Notes

1. See for instance Gaddis 2005
2. LaFeber 1991, Gaddis 2005, Lundestad 2004, Lundestad 2010, Hahnimäki and Westad 2003, Leffler 2004, Tjelmeland 2006, Villaume and Westad (eds.) 2010, Loth 2010
3. Here are some examples: Aronson (1970/1990), MacDonald (1985), Short (1985); Nelson (1997), Barnard (1999), Cummings (2009) and (2010).
4. For German media see Bruner 1989, Hesse 1990, Hoff 1990 and Steinmetz 2004
5. See Klapper 1960
6. Lowery and DeFleur 1995: 213-237

7. Siebert, Peterson and Schramm 1956, Hallin and Mancini 2004
8. Taylor 2009
9. Dodds 2011, Mohn 1962
10. Thomas 2001, Knutsen 2012
11. See Gorbachev 1987, 1996 and 2013
12. See Gorbachev 2013: 490-501
13. Meyer 2009
14. Gaddis 2005, Lundestad 2010, Hahnimäki and Westad 2003 and Tjelmeland 2006
15. Bastiansen 2009
16. Evensmo 1955. Leab 1988
17. Totland 1992, see also Bastiansen 1996
18. Eriksen 1972
19. Dahl and Bastiansen 1999: 230ff, Jacobsen 1993, see also Meyer 2008, Skre 2010, Fonn 2011
20. Dahl and Bastiansen 2000: Chapter 7, p. 153-195
21. Melle 1973
22. Totland 1992: 75-77
23. For Norwegian television coverage of the Vietnam war, see Bastiansen 1997
24. Bastiansen 1996:240-245
25. Nakken 2007
26. See Johansen 1976 and 1977, and Steinfeld 1982, 1984 and 1986
27. Steinfeld 1982
28. Gorbachev 1987, Gorbachev 2013
29. See Steinfeld 1986, Røssum 1990
30. Østerud 1999
31. See Bastiansen 2011: 124-132
32. Røssum 1990, Steinfeld 1990, 1991
33. Nakken 2007
34. Werenskjöld 2011: 238ff
35. See Short 1986, Nelson 1997, Heil 2003
36. See Short 1986: 227ff
37. See Steinfeld 1986, 1990, 1991 and Røssum 1990

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