

## Popular history magazines between transmission of knowledge and entertainment - some theoretical remarks

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# Popular history magazines between transmission of knowledge and entertainment – some theoretical remarks

## 1. Introduction

Popular accounts of history have reached a new worldwide peak in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Significant factors have played a role in this development, namely the increase of leisure time and with this a correspondingly rising thirst for entertainment as well as (cultural) tourism and other cultural needs. Furthermore, higher standards of education in general and partly a greater amount of disposable income can be mentioned as well as possibly also – particularly in the so called ‘Western societies’ – the demographic development with a growing life expectancy often related to an increasing need for orientation in a more and more dynamically changing world. Last but not least, an increase in mass media representations of history in form of anniversaries and commemorations can be recorded as a medium for political statements through to propaganda and as a means to address collective identities and loyalties.

In this context, an international phenomenon can be observed which initially provokes amazement in light of the quantity and diversity of audio-visual offers of popular historical culture in the field of television, film as well as computer and video games – but at the same time it proves the media studies theory that new kinds of media do not automatically replace older ones. A very traditional medium, which in Europe dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup> and has no moving pictures, sound or interactive options, has been on the rise since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century: more and more titles of popular history magazines have appeared in increasingly dynamic and

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1 Cf. e.g. Werner Faulstich: Medienwandel im Industrie- und Massenzeitalter (1830–1900). Göttingen 2004; Rudolf Stöber: Deutsche Pressegeschichte. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart, 2<sup>nd</sup>, rev. ed. Konstanz 2005; Jürgen Wilke: Grundzüge der Medien- und Kommunikationsgeschichte. Von den Anfängen bis ins 20. Jahrhundert. Köln et al. 2000.

internationally networked markets<sup>2</sup> for history magazines,<sup>3</sup> whereby the situation can differ significantly from country to country: while in some countries the magazines have a long tradition<sup>4</sup> and have adapted to modern conditions over time, completely new approaches can be found in other countries due to major political and social changes;<sup>5</sup> then again in other countries – which are not to be neglected on a global scale – the culture of commercial history magazines is barely older than 10 or 20 years.<sup>6</sup>

Even if some newly established magazines – often also as extension lines of established magazines or as imports of other countries' formats<sup>7</sup> – have not been on the market for a long time, the overall conclusion is, however, that media companies are broadening their diverse range of history magazines – which means they assume that a sufficient market demand already exists or they believe that they can at least create it so that the investment will be worthwhile.

Even if the amount of customers and readers of those magazines cannot compete with consumers of TV and other audio-visual media, history magazines appear to be a phenomenon within the international historical culture that deserves attention particularly from the field of history didactics – also because history teachers, pupils and history students are among the readers or buyers. However, until now this medium has not received a

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2 Cf. e.g. the (independent) French version of the German magazine GEO EPOCHE (Gruner & Jahr, Hamburg); URL: <http://www.geo.fr/> (1.8.2014).

3 Cf. Susanne Popp/Jutta Schumann et al. (eds.): *Geschichte in Magazinen*. Frankfurt/Main et al. 2015 (forthcoming). This includes country-specific studies also on China and Brazil as well as contributions which evaluate the international developments.

4 As far as we can see, the UK has the longest tradition of illustrated history magazines. Cf. the contribution 'History magazines in the UK' by Terry Haydn in this volume.

5 See the Russian market for history magazines; cf. the contribution by Alexander Khodnev in Popp et al. (note 3).

6 See the Brazilian and the Chinese market; cf. the contributions by Oldimar Cardoso (Brazil) and Meng Zhongjie (PR China) in Popp et al. (note 3).

7 Cf. e.g. the contribution by Claudius Springkart in this volume, but also cf. URL: <http://bit.ly/1vIATSr> (1.9.2014): 'All about history' is an English popular history magazine that was positioned in the autumn of 2014 in German translation in the German market.

lot of attention, neither from history didactics and research on historical culture and ‘public history’ nor from research on the popularisation of academic knowledge.<sup>8</sup>

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- 8 Cf. on popular history magazines e.g. Bodil Axelsson: History in popular magazines. Negotiating masculinities, the low of the popular and the high of history. In: *Culture Unbound* 4 (2012), p. 275–295. Claire Blandin: L’histoire sur papier glacé. In: *Le Débat* 175 (2013), issue 3, p. 184–189. Fabio Crivellari: Die Medialität des Kriegeres. Der Erste Weltkrieg in der populären Erinnerungskultur nach 1945 am Beispiel populärer Geschichtsmagazine. Konstanz 2014. URL: <http://bit.ly/10df5CJ> (1.8.2014). Ernst Deissinger et al.: P.M. History. Wenn Journalisten über Geschichte schreiben. In: *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht [GWU]* 54 (2003), p. 82 ff. Valérie Hannin: L’Histoire: revue et magazine. In: *Le Débat* 175 (2013), issue 3, p. 190–197. Marlene Hiller: Der Spagat zwischen Öffentlichkeit und Wissenschaft. Oder: Geschichte schreiben für Liebhaber. In: Sabine Horn/Michael Sauer (eds.): *Geschichte und Öffentlichkeit. Orte – Medien – Institutionen*. Göttingen 2009, p. 161–168. Sven Felix Kellerhoff: Geschichte muss nicht knallen. Zwischen Vermittlung und Vereinfachung. Plädoyer für eine Partnerschaft von Geschichtswissenschaft und Geschichtsjournalismus. In: Michele Barricelli/Julia Hornig (eds.): *Aufklärung, Bildung, ‘Histotainment’? Zeitgeschichte in Unterricht und Gesellschaft heute*. Frankfurt/Main 2008, p. 147–158. Ulrich Kröll (ed.): *Massenmedien und Geschichte*. Presse, Rundfunk und Fernsehen als Geschichtsvermittler. Münster 1989. Laurène Pain Prado: *La Question de L’Histoire Grand Public: Étude Comparée de Deux Magazines D’Histoire: HISTORIA et L’HISTOIRE, 2004–2008*. Grenoble 2010. Marianne Sjöland: *Historia i magasin. En studie av tidskriften Populär historias historieskrivning och av kommersiellt historiebruk*. Lund 2011. Hans Süssmuth: Erzählte Geschichte in der Massenpresse. Darstellung und Analyse ausgewählter Beispiele. In: Siegfried Quandt/Hans Süssmuth (eds.): *Historisches Erzählen. Formen und Funktionen*. Göttingen 1982, p. 171–203. Schörken, Rolf: *Geschichte in der Alltagswelt. Wie uns Geschichte begegnet und was wir mit ihr machen*. Stuttgart 1981. Christian Spieß: Zwischen Wissenschaft und Unterhaltungsanspruch. Aktuelle Geschichtsmagazine im Vergleich. In: Horn/Sauer (note 8), p. 169–176. Christian Spieß: Zeitgeschichte in populären Geschichtsmagazinen. In: Susanne Popp et al. (eds.): *Zeitgeschichte – Medien – Historische Bildung*. Göttingen 2010, p. 61–76. Christian Spieß: Zwischen populär und wissenschaftlich: Geschichtsvermittlung in aktuellen Geschichtsmagazinen. In: Swen Steinberg/Stefan Meißner/Daniel Trepsdorf (eds.): *Vergessenes Erinnern. Medien von Erinnerungskultur und kollektivem Gedächtnis*. Berlin 2009, p. 133–151. – Cf. also Achim Landwehr: *Magazinierte Geschichte* (30.12.2013), URL: <http://bit.ly/1rxuMPu> (1.8.2014). Popular history magazines are not included in the following (selected) titles about the topics of history journalism, popular history culture, or history in the mass

The following illustrations begin with a classification of the object ‘popular history magazines’ according to different frameworks (2.). This is followed by the discussion of the questions in how far the magazines can be regarded as ‘popular’, what they do ‘popularise’ and how they can be located within the vast field of the popularisation of academic knowledge (3.). This is followed by the question about the shaping tendencies of the presentation of history in this medium (4.) as well as about their evaluation from the point of view of history didactics (5.). A brief outlook on desired research concludes this contribution (6.).

## 2. Popular history magazines

Initially, the object ‘popular history magazines’ shall be contextualised in eight approaches.

In general, history magazines are to be defined as illustrated periodicals (a) addressing a non-expert audience. Illustrations are an integral and constitutive element of the concept, and the amount of illustrations (e.g. paintings, photographs, maps, charts, tables) usually exceeds the amount of text.<sup>9</sup> Compared to other media, popular history magazines feature more text than audio-visual formats and less text than specialised literature or non-fiction. The fact that magazines address a ‘non-expert’ audience does, however, not imply, as mentioned above, that students of history, history teachers or experts from professional fields who deal with the past are not included in the group of buyers and readers of these periodicals.

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media: Klaus Arnold/Walter Hömberg/Susanne Kinnebrock (eds.): *Geschichtsjournalismus. Zwischen Information und Inszenierung*. Berlin et al. 2010. Wolfgang Hardtwig/Erhard Schütz (eds.): *Geschichte für Leser. Populäre Geschichtsschreibung in Deutschland im 20. Jahrhundert*. Stuttgart 2005. Wolfgang Hardtwig/Alexander Schug (eds.): *History Sells! Angewandte Geschichte als Wissenschaft und Markt*. Stuttgart 2009. Barbara Korte/Sylvia Paletschek (eds.): *History Goes Pop. Zur Repräsentation von Geschichte in populären Medien und Genres*. Bielefeld 2009. Barbara Korte/Sylvia Paletschek (eds.): *Popular history now and then. International perspectives*. Bielefeld 2012. Eva Ulrike Pirker et al. (eds.): *Echte Geschichte. Authentizitätsfiktionen in populären Geschichtskulturen*. Bielefeld 2010. Siân, Nicholas: *Reconstructing the past. History in the mass media 1890–2005*. London et. al. 2008.

9 Cf. e.g. the contribution of Michael Wobring in this volume.



Furthermore (b), history magazines are to be understood as a phenomenon of a society's historical culture. They combine – according to the concept of Jörn Rüsen<sup>10</sup> – a cognitive dimension (transfer of knowledge) with an aesthetic and emotional dimension (images with an aesthetic and often emotional effect) as well as a political dimension. The term 'political dimension' does not imply that a direct or indirect ideological alignment or political interference always exists, but emphasises that every historical presentation necessarily unfolds a certain idea of man and a conception of society and therewith also a certain horizon of political values. History magazines are not excluded from this.

Moreover, the magazines can be assigned to the area of historical journalism (c), which has for a long time merely received little attention in media studies.<sup>11</sup> Depending on the quality standards of the magazine either historians, journalists specialised in history or general journalists function as authors of the contributions. Also the qualifications of the permanently employed editors are significant for the particular profile of the magazine. The reasons for the reticence of media studies regarding historical journalism are among others also the fact that addressing history – beyond relevant anniversaries and commemorations – did not seem to comply with the theory of 'news values'<sup>12</sup> which is constitutive for journalism and communication studies and – simply put – explains which criteria or features the journalists ascribe to information that possesses in their eyes 'newsworthiness' and the potential to attract public attention. Since historical presentations refer to the past they seem to have no relation to the concept of 'news' – if considered superficially. The existence of the magazines and many other formats of historical journalism prove that this does not apply since not only can historical topics feature immediate topicality in the sense of having a direct relation to the present, but they also always exhibit other characteristics which are relevant for the so-called

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10 Cf. e.g. Jörn Rüsen: *Geschichtskultur*. In: *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* [GWU] 46 (1995), p. 513–521.

11 Regarding the German speaking countries cf. Arnold/Hömborg/Kinnebrock (note 8).

12 Cf. e.g. Michaela Maier/Karin Stengel/Joachim Marschall: *Nachrichtenwerttheorie*. Baden-Baden 2010. Also cf. the contribution by Susanne Kinnebrock in this volume.

‘newsworthiness’ of information, such as ‘unexpectedness’ or ‘oddity’ (persons, actions, events out of the ordinary), ‘human interest’/‘personalisation’ (historical persons as interesting characters, as powerful actors or tragic figures in the past), ‘reference to elite persons (big names) or elite nations’, ‘proximity’ or ‘nearness’ (e.g. regional or national history; psychological aspects, relation to everyday life) and ‘meaningfulness’ or ‘relevance’ (significance and consequences of past events which affect the reader). That the events presented are in the past is revoked by the fact that the people in the present turn towards the past – in a cognitive, emotional, and often identifying way.

From an etymological point of view (d), the term ‘magazine’ derives from the Arabic word ‘makāzin’, which means ‘storeroom’ or ‘storehouse’ and which, borrowing from Italian and French, became an internationally used term for periodicals that collect written articles about different topics. However, in addition to the multi-thematic ‘history magazines’, which combine several primary and secondary topics in one issue, there are nonetheless also mono-thematic magazines: ‘GEO EPOC’ is an internationally known example of this format.

Moreover, a distinction is made (e) between so-called ‘special interest magazines’ that deal with history in general and ‘very special interest magazines’ that focus on specific sub-themes such as certain periods (e.g. ancient times), people (e.g. ethnic or national or other collectives) or objects (e.g. weapons, cars, clocks). A special case are so-called ‘military magazines’ which often blur the line to a more or less right-wing ideology.<sup>13</sup> Those ‘military magazines’ very often deal with the First and Second World War, whereby the presentation of historical events and connections are less important and rather the military and national(istic) ideology, which is projected onto history, is paramount. In this volume – as is also the case in the EHISTO project<sup>14</sup> – the interests focus on the ‘special interest magazines’ exclusively. Even though also in this case the First and

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13 Some of them are indicated as right-wing by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution. Also cf. on this the contribution by Claudius Springkart in this volume.

14 Cf. the report about the EHISTO project (URL: <http://www.european-crossroads.de/>, 1.8.2014) in this volume.

the Second World War are one of the most popular topics on an international level<sup>15</sup> they are presented from a different perspective and different intentions are followed than in ‘military magazines’.

If one turns to specialist journalistic classifications (f) then one finds in the German case the ‘popular history magazines’ either categorised in the field of ‘popular knowledge magazines’ or the areas ‘arts and culture’ or ‘hobby and entertainment’. The considerable differences in quality between the various history magazines are not reflected in any way in this classification. Accordingly, very sophisticated magazines such as the German magazine ‘DAMALS’<sup>16</sup> can be found in line with ‘knowledge magazines’ e.g. on ‘how to build terraria’ or ‘gardening magazines’. This is reminiscent of the British historian John Tosh, who in his book ‘Why history matters’<sup>17</sup> ironically described the ubiquity of history in the entertainment sector (e.g. history channels, re-enactment, videogames, costume parties and not least also magazines) as ‘the new gardening’<sup>18</sup>.

History magazines are also to be considered as commercial products (g) – at least in societies with a market economy. Their primary objective is not the conveyance of history, but the financial sales success.<sup>19</sup> If this goal is not achieved in an adequate way then they disappear from the market.

In general, the magazines contain adverts, which in addition to the price range, the design, and other factors allow conclusions to be drawn about the target group of consumers. Even though reliable run and sales figures are fundamental to the advertising market it is often difficult and sometimes even impossible for outsiders to reliably and comprehensively determine

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15 Cf. the contributions by Katja Gorbahn and Monika Vinterek in this volume.

16 Cf. URL: <http://bit.ly/1sYXMIQ> (1.8.2014).

17 Cf. John Tosh: *Why history matters*. New York et al. 2008.

18 Cf. John Tosh (URL: <http://bit.ly/YG0pKU>) (1.8.2014): ‘History is tied to heritage, to costume drama on television. The very prominence of history on television channels has led to the notion that history is the “new gardening”’.

19 There are, however, also cases where the state – as in Brazil – buys individual magazine issues and distributes them in schools (cf. the contribution by Oldimar Cardoso in Popp et al. (note 3)) or where the state itself either publishes a magazine or financially supports the publishing. Especially in the PR China it is difficult to determine the economic status of history magazines.



such data. In addition to the lack of transparency perhaps intended by the publishers the fact that many history magazines have websites nowadays also contributes to this since also older issues are distributed online which are no longer available on the retail market. In addition, certain marketing strategies begin to emerge in several cases<sup>20</sup> which aim at selling further products from the own company or business that reach beyond the magazine issue, e.g. books, CDs and DVDs on a topic addressed in an issue. In this way, also educational tourism is also advertised. If the magazines enhance history-related consumption in this way then this could mean a significant commercial surplus – also beyond the specific sales figures.

The relation between the subscriptions and the retail sale<sup>21</sup> in (train station) book stores, kiosks, and in supermarkets is very different when it comes to the individual magazines, whereby considerable fluctuations may occur over time. The largest share of history magazines is bought by individual or impulse buyers, e.g. at the station – as reading material for a journey and waiting times which retains its information value for a long time and can be read over and over again. In this context, illustrated periodicals can be more suitable than books since – thanks to their illustrations and the ‘magazine’ structure – they can be read selectively with reduced concentration while at the same time requiring no technical provisions – in contrast to audio-visual media. The flexible use, which is typical for illustrated periodicals in general, is also an advantage of history magazines.

The design of the cover pages is of paramount importance for impulse buyers. They have the task to direct the attention of the potential buyer to the particular issue – in midst of a very broad range of illustrated periodicals and in competition to other history magazines.<sup>22</sup> In addition to

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20 Cf. e.g. Axelsson (note 8).

21 In the Lesezirkel market, which provides illustrated periodicals for waiting rooms of hair dressers and medical practices, history magazines – with the possible exception of GEO EPOCHE – are not included in the German case.

22 The analysis of cover pages was the focus at the beginning of our research on European history magazines and also played a major part in the EHISTO project. In this context, an analytical framework was developed to be used in the ‘initial teacher training seminar’. Cf. on this URL: <http://bit.ly/1s3Vq2V> (1.8.2014).

announcing the main topic in headlines and images the magazines in their layouts make statements about their cultural level of aspiration. If only one illustration instead of several is used, if the image depicted originates from the time period which the main topic deals with, if words and colours are used scarcely, but purposefully then – at least this is what the layout suggests – particular attention is paid to a serious presentation of history therewith drawing the line to other formats that fight for attention and customers with more dazzling means – and often also with a cheaper price per issue.

In any case, however, the image of history the magazines convey is shaped commercially: the magazines with the highest sales figures are said to be the most successful and in turn influence the producers' assessment of the success when it comes to deciding on the choice and the design of the topics of the prospective issues.

The focus of the history magazines throughout Europe lies in the national historical culture (h) and emphasises – not least due to the language and the previous knowledge of the customers – the national history. However, an international comparison reveals trans-national convergences: there are certain topics – the First and the Second World War have already been mentioned – which play a part in many national narratives. Regarding European history, one can speak of 'European History Crossroads' (EHC) which reflect Europe's 'shared history': the European regions and states have shared many historical experiences which they have, however, experienced from a different perspective and which they still remember in a different way today.<sup>23</sup>

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23 Such EHC – this is a finding of the EHISTO project – which are part of the national history syllabi as well as of popular history magazines (PHM) in all EHISTO-partner countries – are the following ones: Columbus and the 'great discoveries', World War One, World War Two, Holocaust, Hitler, Migration. Other EHC, which are part of the national history syllabi as well as of PHM in most of the EHISTO-partner countries, are the following ones: Alexander the Great, Islam, Charlemagne, Reconquista, Crusades, Vikings, Wars of religion in the context of Protestant Reformation, Absolutism (Louis XIV of France), French Revolution, Napoleon, Industrial Revolution (modernization, change of living conditions), Imperialism, Colonialism, Cuban Missile Crisis/Cold War.

### 3. The ‘popular’ dimension of popular history magazines

Two questions are at the core of the following part: history magazines are to be understood as part of a popular history culture: in which respect can they be categorised as ‘popular’? And secondly: the history magazines are to be contextualised in the vast field of the popularisation of scientific or academic knowledge: how can their relation to historical studies and research be described?

The notion of ‘the popular’ possesses a very large range of meanings in connection to cultural phenomena so that some papers in cultural studies do not define the term at all.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, an attempt shall be made at categorising ‘popular history magazines’. To this end, we have focused on a study by Holt N. Parker<sup>25</sup> which differentiates between the following, partially overlapping areas of meaning.

- (a) ‘Popular’ defined by a quantitative aspect: Cultural products are regarded as ‘popular’ if they address and/or are received by a very large number of people. The problem of this approach is, on the one hand, that many cultural products produced for mass consumption fail to appeal to a large amount of people; can they, accordingly, be regarded as ‘popular’ or not? This also applies to popular history magazines – to magazine types as a whole as well as to individual periodicals. On the other hand, the question arises who defines the quantitative distinction line between ‘popular’ and ‘non-popular’.
- (b) ‘Popular’ defined by the qualitative aspect of a cultural hierarchy: Cultural products are considered ‘popular’ if they are seen as ‘trivial entertainment’ and address and/or are received by ‘ordinary and non-well-educated people’ who do not enjoy ‘serious’ culture. The problem of this approach is, on the one hand, that many members of cultural elites selectively participate in non-elite culture; they have ‘two cultural accesses’. On the other hand, the equation of ‘ordinary’ with ‘non-educated’ people and of ‘(trivial) entertainment’ with ‘low

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24 Cf. Holt N. Parker: Toward a definition of popular culture. In: *History and Theory* 50 (2011), No. 2, p. 147–170, p. 147.

25 Cf. note 23.

culture' is far too simplistic – since, for instance, not everything beyond the so-called 'low culture' can be classified as 'high culture'.

- (c) 'Popular' defined by the qualitative aspect of a difference between the academic and non-academic (e.g. journalistic) discourses: Cultural products – e.g. history magazines – are regarded as 'popular' if they are seen as the result of a 'translation' and 'mediation' process of scientific concepts and research findings to a non-expert and/or non-academic audience. One problem of this approach is that only some small parts of 'popular culture' can be understood as a result of the 'translation' from the academic to the public. Another problem is that the so-called 'theory of diffusion' of academic knowledge to the non-expert public is too simplistic and is no longer accepted by research as will be shown in this chapter.
- (d) 'Popular' defined by the qualitative aspect of a commercialised and industrialised 'mass culture' producing 'mass products' for 'mass consumption': Cultural products – and this possibly also applies to the presentation of history in magazines – are regarded as 'popular' in a very pejorative way by, for instance, Horkheimer/Adorno<sup>26</sup>. In their eyes, they only serve for mass consumption and sales success thereby sacrificing their quality, becoming strictly affirmative and do not offer a reasonable support to their audiences to orientation in their real life. One problem of this dichotomist approach is that, on the one hand, it historically limits the origin of 'popular culture' to the time of industrialisation. On the other hand, there is no evidence that cultural products produced for mass consumption in general lack an illuminating function. And lastly, many products of the so-called 'high' or 'serious' culture have become mass products; one may only think of e.g. the composition *Bagatelle No. 25 in A minor* by Ludwig van Beethoven, commonly known as 'Für Elise'.
- (e) 'Popular' in the sense of 'traditional, folk-like, folksy or folkloristic' (= in general: not modern, not industrialised etc.). One of the problems of this approach can be seen in the fact that many of those

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26 Cf. e.g. Max Horkheimer/Theodor W. Adorno: *Kulturindustrie. Aufklärung als Massenbetrug*. In: Idem: *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente*. 16. ed. Frankfurt/Main 2006, p. 128–176.

‘traditional’ folk-like cultures were and are not really ‘popular’ but live in cultural niches. Another problem is that some of those ‘traditional’ folk-like cultures are ‘inventions’ of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and of later times, which were supposed to ensure social identity, social cohesion and national (or regional or ethnic) pride.<sup>27</sup>

- (f) ‘Popular’ in the sense of the ‘culture of the subordinate’ (e.g. the opposition, protest, and fight of the ‘people’ against the ruling or privileged classes). Cultural products are regarded as ‘popular’ in this political sense by Antônio Gramsci<sup>28</sup>, for instance. They are related to the ‘people’ who resist against repression or discrimination and who fight for their own rights. One of the major problems with this very narrow approach is the difficulty of the term ‘people’ and the problem with defining who is included and who is excluded. Another problem is that this sector does not represent the entire mass culture and popular culture of a society.
- (g) ‘Popular’ in the sense of easily accessible cultural offers for a general non-expert audience and for people with low ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu<sup>29</sup>). This approach aims at neutralising the dichotomy between ‘popular culture’ and ‘high culture’ in that a continuum of more or less available ‘cultural capital’ is set out for producers and consumers of culture. A cultural product is regarded as ‘popular’ if it lowers the access barriers for communication partners with low ‘cultural capital’. In this way, no statement is made about the cultural quality, the political intention or the categorisation of ‘traditional/modern’; furthermore, it is not differentiated whether or not the cultural product derives from the commercial cultural industry.

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27 Cf. e.g. Eric Hobsbawm/Terence Ranger: *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge 1992. Examples for ‘invented traditions’ are the Scottish kilt, the Greek dance Sirtaki, the South African wind instrument Vuvuzela, or the Olympic Winter Games.

28 Cf. e.g. Antônio Gramsci: *Os Intelectuais e a Organização da Cultura* [The Intellectuals and the Organization of the Culture]. Rio de Janeiro 1984.

29 Cf. e.g. Pierre Bourdieu: *Ökonomisches Kapital – Kulturelles Kapital – Soziales Kapital* [1983]. In: Idem: *Die verborgenen Mechanismen der Macht*. Hamburg 1992, p. 49–80.



It is apparent that not all of this is relevant to ‘popular history magazines’ in the same way. Considering our object, especially the removal of socio-cultural access barriers (g) is relevant, which focuses on an expanded social participation in cultural communication. In this way, history magazines lower the threshold for the access to the historical discourse in that their choice of topics (e.g. connection to commonly known topics), their design of the content (e.g. less complex and heavily presuppositional or abstract historical presentation), their language register (e.g. easy words and grammar, no specialist terms), their presentational style (e.g. the characteristic vivid and descriptive narrative, illustrations) and their dissemination strategies (sales at kiosks, train stations and in supermarkets) address those whose ‘cultural capital’ is limited in this area and promise those who might also turn towards historical specialist literature an accordingly laid-back read.

This concept of ‘cultural capital’ without doubt has the advantage that it can integrate the existing difference between a ‘popular’, here: journalistically shaped non-academic, discourse and an ‘academic’ or specialised discourse while the hierarchy between ‘high culture’ and ‘trivial culture’ is avoided. At the same time, ‘popular history magazines’ point out the limits of the criterion of quantitative dissemination (a) since in comparison to the demand for history presentations in mass media such as films and on TV the demand for history magazines is to be evaluated as relatively moderate. In this way, it can be indeed imagined that the apparent neglect of history magazines in studies on popular history culture and historical journalism indirectly reflects this fact.

Finally, the second question remains to be clarified, namely in how far popular history magazines are to be regarded as ‘popularisation’ of academic knowledge relevant to research. In line with the emergence of post-industrial societies, which are often referred to as ‘knowledge societies’, a field of research has also been established that mainly deals with the historical ‘popularisation’ of academic knowledge, meaning the presentation and mediation of new knowledge – gained by experts using scientific, academic methods – to a broad, non-expert but nonetheless interested audience.<sup>30</sup>

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30 Cf. about the history of this research field e.g. Andreas W. Daum: *Wissenschaftspopularisierung im 19. Jahrhundert. Bürgerliche Kultur, naturwissenschaftliche Bildung und die deutsche Öffentlichkeit, 1848–1914*. München

This strand of research, this has to be mentioned in advance, has from its beginning until today been very strongly geared towards natural-scientific, technical or also medical knowledge; historical knowledge has found little attention so far.

This research initially followed a hierarchical one-sided linear process model of ‘popularisation’, the so-called ‘diffusion model’ (A. Daum), which implies that special knowledge inaccessible to the general public is delivered in a simplified way by the researchers themselves or by journalists.<sup>31</sup> It has been realised that certain factors are thereby significant, e.g. the contextualisation of the topic, the attribution of relevance, the lowering of language barriers (especially, but not exclusively, in the area of specialised terminology), the use of metaphors and analogies that correspond with the everyday life of the audience and especially the narrativization of the scientific research process.<sup>32</sup> The insight into these factors is significant, but this concept in general has been set against a different, now widely accepted model which describes the popularisation of knowledge as an interactive process that is influenced by the recipients and their interests and that is not solely derived from the academic discourse, but has significance in its own right. In our case, the commercial factor already illustrates that it has to be an interactive process since whatever the customers do not accept is no longer

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1998, p. 14–29; Angela Schwarz: *Der Schlüssel zur modernen Welt. Wissenschaftspopularisierung in Großbritannien und Deutschland im Übergang zur Moderne* (ca. 1870–1914), Stuttgart 1999, p. 38–47, 95–102.

31 Cf. in extenso about the two concepts e.g. Roger Cooter/Stephen Pumfrey: *Separate spheres and public places. Reflections on the history of sciences. Popularization and science in popular culture*. In: *History of Science* 34 (1994), p. 237–267; Richard Whitley: *Knowledge producers and knowledge acquirers. Popularisation as a relation between scientific fields and their public*. In: Terry Shinn/Idem (eds.): *Expository science. Forms and functions of popularization*. Dordrecht et al. 1985, p. 3–28. Cf. also Carsten Kretschmann: *Wissenschaftspopularisierung – Ansätze und Konzepte*. In: Bernd Hüppauf/Peter Weingart (eds.): *Frosch und Frankenstein. Bilder als Medium der Popularisierung von Wissenschaft*. Bielefeld 2009, p. 79–89.

32 Cf. Jürg Niederhauser: *Das Schreiben populärwissenschaftlicher Texte als Transfer wissenschaftlicher Texte*. In: Eva-Maria Jakobs/Dagmar Knorr (eds.): *Textproduktion in elektronischen Umgebungen*. Frankfurt/Main 1997, p. 107–122. URL: <http://bit.ly/1s0tWLd> (1.8.2014).

produced. It is hard to tell whether the consumer's behaviour or the producer's strategies exert more influence on the magazines. As in many fields of market economy, supply influences demand and demand influences supply: Both sides interact in a specific way.

Following Carsten Kretschmann's notion of 'popularisation' – (a) a striking knowledge divide has to exist between the producers and the recipients, (b) the number of recipients has to be larger than the number of producers and (c) possess relevance for the entire society, (d) the popularisation occurs intentionally and (e) uses mainstreaming media with multiplying effects<sup>33</sup> – then history magazines can also be regarded as strategies of popularisation which process historical knowledge so as to satisfy communicative needs and which are dedicated to generally understandable and entertaining presentations and not to specialised texts.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, if the concept by Andreas Daum<sup>35</sup> is used then (a) the 'popularisation of the use of language', (b) the 'perception' as well as (c) the 'effect' as 'popular' and lastly also (d) the 'popularisation as intention' can be established for history magazines, too.

However, this does not yet answer the question of what history magazines actually popularise. In this respect our research revealed the following: the classic 'popularisation' of new research results and recent research discussions plays a role only in some cases. A recent example is interviews with Christopher Clark, the author of the successful book 'The Sleepwalkers'<sup>36</sup> in history magazines which deal with World War I. But even if many magazines have sections in which they present newly published academic literature – especially about the main articles – the design of the cover pages and the content of the articles show a clear trend to 'popularise the popular'.

This is true in two respects: Firstly, the magazines – especially on their cover pages – offer predominantly topics which the potential consumer

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33 Cf. Carsten Kretschmann: Einleitung: Wissenspopularisierung. Ein altes neues Forschungsfeld. In: Idem (ed.): Wissenspopularisierung. Konzepte der Wissensverbreitung im Wandel. Berlin 2003, p. 7–22, p. 14.

34 Cf. Daum: (note 30).

35 Cf. Ibid, p. 246.

36 Christopher M. Clark The sleepwalkers. How Europe went to war in 1914. London 2012.

can link to specific previous knowledge, prevalent imaginations and often a specific ‘aura’ (e.g. power, crime, exceptional fate). The popularity of the topics conveys to the readers the impression of historically very relevant objects. This ascription is supported by the fact that many topics are known from school which again ‘authorises’ them and that they are very widespread in historical culture (e.g. films, historical novels, exhibitions). This means that the producers’ agenda setting relies on a popular established canon of topics and at the same time reproduces it.<sup>37</sup>

Secondly, the popular topics are presented in a ‘popularising’ way. This refers not so much to illustration, layout, language and the like. It rather is about the fact that in general historical knowledge is presented as ‘objectively established’ knowledge which supposedly informs about how the past ‘really’ was and ignores the fact that the historical knowledge is continuously reviewed, critically discussed and often modified for research reasons. Unlike magazines that popularise knowledge in the field of natural science or archaeology, history magazines rarely, if ever, discuss the research process.<sup>38</sup> They neglect to make clear to the reader that historical knowledge continually changes in the process of academic discourse.

The link to historical sciences is obviously weaker in history magazines than that in natural science magazines. The actual focus is not so much historical science but rather popular, often commercialised historical culture with its agenda of commemoration days, popular films and movies, exhibitions and, not least, of cultural tourism destinations. The analysis of cover features revealed that history magazines at best recur to recent phenomena of historical culture and not to recent topics of historical science: Thus, the cover features of all German magazines of the last two decades hardly give clues about the questions that were relevant to German historical science in that period. Moreover, stills taken out of period films which are sometimes used for the cover design, and hints to cultural events with historical themes (e.g. TV, movies, games, exhibitions) underline the

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37 This does not mean that this ‘canon’ is unchangeable. In the last two decades, for instance, new academic approaches were in fact partially taken into account in magazines (e.g. women and gender history, social history, environmental and technical history).

38 Cf. Niederhauser (note 32).

magazines' links to recent historical culture. These references assure potential consumers that the magazines' contents have very high historical relevance and are up-to-date<sup>39</sup> and moreover have a high communicative factor: readers deal with topics which allows them – that is the promise – to be in the know if culture and history come up in conversations.

Admittedly, 'popularisation of knowledge' cannot be reduced to 'popularisation of science'. However, given the narrow line between 'history' that is 'popularised' by magazines and 'history' presented by academic literature, there are indications that the presentation of history in the magazines is not to be understood as 'popularised' science but rather as a genre in its own right.<sup>40</sup> Although the producers provide knowledge that in the end once has been scientifically generated, unlike in 'popular science magazines' the concepts of 'scientific progress' and information about 'new' knowledge do not play a constitutive role. It is rather about 'established' knowledge, selected according to (popular) relevance criteria and made accessible in an easily understandable and catchy way.

It is understandable that buyers and readers of history magazines expect correct and verified information, however, the essence is neglected: the constructed character of historiography, the fact that historical questions and answers are bound to place and time, the extent of perspectives that are given in the historical process as well as in the often controversial or plural interpretation processes. The always controversial demarcations between 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity' as well as between 'fact' and 'fiction' are largely ignored: Following the argument of publishers and editors of history magazines, the 'objectivist illusion' has to be maintained for the sake of commercial success. In their eyes only those accounts of history seem to be commercially successful which offer room for imagination and are opulently illustrated and above all offer a so-called 'good story'.<sup>41</sup>

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39 In relation to the prevailing culture of history in the society.

40 Manfred Nissen's analysis of historical non-fiction books had a similar result. Cf. Martin Nissen: *Historische Sachbücher – historische Fachbücher. Der Fall Werner Maser*. In: Korte/Paletschek (note 8), p. 103–119, URL: <http://bit.ly/1s2fV0Z> (1.8.2014).

41 Of course, thereby the history presented by popular magazines diverges from the political and social challenges of the present, in which increasing tensions



Even though the relation to historical science might be very little and especially selective, which makes a classification of history magazines as ‘popularisation of science’ questionable, the rhetorical reference to science plays a decisive role in the magazines’ self-representation, for example in the editorials. The editors assure their readers that the articles are strictly science-driven and the presented historical knowledge is thus authentic and reliable. According to them, the only difference to science is that the magazines depict the past world in a more ‘graphic’ and ‘vivid’ way.<sup>42</sup> That means that readers are promised immersive experiences: an immersion into the depicted world which is enabled by a focus on historical imagination, i.e. the aesthetic function of historical culture, and thereby creating that emotional proximity to a per se distant past that the customers seem to expect.

Interestingly, these editorials rarely use the term ‘entertainment’ which shows that the stereotypical contrasting juxtaposition of ‘light entertainment’ and ‘serious engagement’ is still intact in this area. History, it seems, cannot per se be seen as ‘light entertainment’; due to its significance it is a ‘serious’ topic – although the makers of the magazines leave nothing undone to present history as ‘light entertainment’.

#### **4. Some characteristics of the magazines’ construction of history**

The main question of this chapter is about the concept of history which the magazines prefer. Firstly, it has to be noted that the magazines can show huge quality differences in presenting history.<sup>43</sup> The EHISTO project’s research revealed that for instance in covering the ‘outbreak

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between nations, cultures and religions are frequently underpinned by historical arguments.

42 This suggests that the transformation of history conducted by popular history magazines is merely a change in the mode of representation. But actually all issues and topics that cannot be represented in this mode are dropped.

43 Cf. the report about the EHISTO project 3.1.2 in this volume: For example the article of Felipe Fernández-Armesto (‘Columbus – hero or villain?’). In: *HISTORY TODAY* 42 (1992), p. 4–9) deals on a very ambitious level and on the basis of historical sources with the change of the image of Columbus during the course of the centuries.

of World War I', differences between the national perspectives on the topic were far less strong than differences in quality standards within the countries. Some magazines for instance dramatise the 'July Crisis' in a sensation-seeking way by depicting the process of the assassination in Sarajevo to the declarations of war as an inevitable catastrophe that turned a relatively minor regional cause into a global disaster. In contrast, other magazines reconstruct the 'July Crisis' in a historically correct way as an open process which took a specific direction as a result of specific conditions and decisions.<sup>44</sup> In other cases, as for example the presentation of Columbus,<sup>45</sup> not only the quality standards differ within the countries, but also the national perspectives on this topic.

The following comments on the concept of history in popular history magazines are not comprehensive but broadly outline the most important trends that characterise the presentation of history in this genre, although there are exceptions in the wide landscape of history magazines in Europe.

To begin with, it should be noted again that historical magazines are illustrated magazines. As stated before, the illustrations play a constitutive role for the magazines' concepts of history. It seems that an article that cannot be illustrated would not be in the magazine. However, the question is if not the magazines could illustrate any topic, as they cultivate a style in which illustrations play a rather independent role even though they supposedly support the presentation of a historical topic. Unlike in academic articles, there are rarely references between illustration and text.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, these illustrations are often not historically adequate as they do not originate from the period the corresponding article covers. Articles about Antiquity, Middle Ages or Early Modern Times are often illustrated with 19<sup>th</sup> century history painting as these depict charismatic persons and dramatic events in an 'illusionist' and emotionalising way that gives the viewer the impression of directly glancing on bygone times through a 'window to the past'.

Magazines also partially use stills taken out of current historical films; those are usually magazines of a low aspiration level – exempt from articles dealing with the historic-cultural reception of a certain topic in the public

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44 Cf. the report about the EHISTO project 3.1.1 in this volume.

45 Cf. the report about the EHISTO project 3.1.2 in this volume.

46 Cf. Niederhauser (note 32).

history. In most cases the links between images and the historical event are not explained and those illustrations that depict iconic sources of the period of the historical event are not analysed as historical documents. The use of photographs is often careless and inaccurate,<sup>47</sup> and the magazines with low aspiration levels can also be recognised by the fact that they do not refrain from the manipulation of photographs and apparently rely on the readers' inability to discover these interventions. Finally, the captions do not always inform the non-expert reader even about the year of production of the image on display.

The illustrations have a function in their own right. On the one hand, they serve to enhance the vividness of the topic, to emphasise the aspect of entertainment, and to convey a specific historical atmosphere or 'aura'. On the other hand, the iconic presentations of the past suggest or even create the illusion of authenticity of the representation of the past and help to reinforce the illusion of an 'objectively fixed' knowledge of the past. We all know that pictures suggest a rapid, concrete and (seemingly) easily understandable access to historical subjects and in reality are – due to the characteristics of the iconic code – not only more ambiguous than texts, have more requirements for understanding and finally have inherent medium-specific limitations: they can only depict the visible. For the construction of meanings they have to refer to semantic conventions which the interpreter – as mentioned by Panofsky<sup>48</sup> – must in turn deduce mainly from (historical) written documents.

The magazines' use of illustrations tends to ignore these challenges and follows the general line of a representation of history which claims a 'historicist' and 'positivist' approach to a very 'colourful' historical world and by text and illustration. It supports the magazines' 'disambiguation of historical knowledge': limits of knowledge, different degrees of certainty or research controversies are usually not discussed.<sup>49</sup>

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47 Cf. the report about the EHISTO project 3.1.1 in this volume about the photograph allegedly presenting Gavrilo Princip at his arrest.

48 Cf. Erwin Panofsky: *Studies in iconology. Humanistic themes in the art of the Renaissance*. New York 1972.

49 However, there is a controversial approach in anti-academic affects of a certain group of sensationalist magazines: they promise to reveal 'truths' which the official historical sciences supposedly conceal or keep secret.

One reason for this might be the fact that a ‘good story’ – a vibrant, vivid, exciting, atmospheric and emotionally appealing ‘narrative’ – is mostly at the centre of the magazine articles’ representation of history and is considered as essential for sales success by all responsible journalists we had interviewed. These narratives are in general of the ‘traditional’ type: the events are depicted mainly chronologically and basically concentrating on ‘persons’, ‘acts’ and ‘events’. Moreover, in most cases there is an omniscient narrator who has the sole power of interpretation<sup>50</sup> and – by nature – does not refer to historical sources and secondary literature and in general does not reflect upon the own point of view. In this respect, it seems quite adequate that the articles come without the apparatus which provides evidence of what the statements are based on.

A central requirement for the narrativisation is, as we know, person-alisation. One could bluntly say that what most of the magazines declare as ‘history’ is almost exclusively the depiction of intentionally acting individuals, whereby – again borrowing from historicism – the ‘great men that made history’ set the scene.<sup>51</sup> ‘Personalisation’ in history and political didactics means the biased attribution of responsibility for historical and political changes or the power to effect such changes to individuals, especially to outstanding personalities.

In the narratives of the magazine articles, person-alisation is the central factor for the stimulation of the recipient’s emotional proximity to the temporally distant and factually alien world of the past without which an immersive quality of experience would become quite impossible. Furthermore, the positive or negative identification of the recipient with the key figures is only possible if the depicted motivations and intentions – e.g.

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50 Cf. also Dagmar Stegmüller: Popularisierungsstrategien in Friedrich Christoph Schlossers ‘Weltgeschichte für das deutsche Volk’. In: Kretschmann (note 31), p. 197–210.

51 Interestingly, a study about video games dealing with Early Modern Times concludes that the depiction of Early Modern Times is closer to the 19<sup>th</sup> century historicism than to the academic understanding of this period in the present. Cf. Florian Kerschbaumer/Tobias Winnerling: Postmoderne Visionen des Vor-Modernen. Des 19. Jahrhunderts geisterhaftes Echo. In: Idem (eds.): Frühe Neuzeit im Videospiel. Geschichtswissenschaftliche Perspektiven. Bielefeld 2014, p. 11–26.

ambition, courage, envy, lust for power – stay within the familiar frame of the alleged ‘human continuities’. The depicted ‘stories’ offer a very colourful spectrum regarding space and time, peoples and persons, atmosphere and costume, scenery and anecdote. But regarding the depicted action schemes they tend to have a fairly narrow and familiar set of scenarios and plots, patterns and stereotypes, which means that beyond the historical surface a profound historicisation of the events is largely missing.<sup>52</sup>

The central significance of personalisation for narrative representations of history implies that the boundaries between fact and fiction blur. This is especially true for scenic, often dialogical representations of the action that achieves a level of detail which goes far beyond the information the sources can provide. This is even more true – by nature – for the figure-centred indirect speech and the ‘inner monologue’ which is per se not accessible for historians. These ahistorical elements might remain unnoticed if the recipient is intrigued by the action and appeased with various strategies suggesting authenticity<sup>53</sup> – especially by mentioning historical names, accurate details or experts. Finally, strong personalisation allows the reduction of the historical context and the shortening of the cause analysis and, moreover, usually leads to the overemphasis of psychological assumptions about the character, of intentions and motives of the acting persons. At the same time, it conveys a feeling to the reader of being very close to the events.

Lastly, those topics shall be considered which history magazines preferably cover and which the EHISTO project has analysed in great detail based on the title pages.<sup>54</sup> As the cover features of the magazines are often connected to topics known from school or public historical culture, it is not surprising that a great part of the topics cover, as stated above, national history and the familiar cultural area, whereby the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are overrepresented. Especially in Danish and

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52 John Caughie’s study of the British television drama came in respect to the role of historical dramas to a quite similar result. Cf. John Caughie: *Television drama. Realism, modernism, and British culture*. Oxford et al. 2000. p. 209–215. Cf. the contribution of Stephan Jaeger in this volume.

53 Cf. e.g. Pirker (note 8).

54 Regarding the results of the analysis of German magazines cf. Claudius Springkart’s article in this publication. This article demonstrates the analytical process very well.



Swedish magazines, World War II plays a dominant role and Hitler and the Third Reich are top sellers everywhere. The number of articles about older topics depends on whether certain periods played a crucial role in a country's national history, e.g. as 'golden age' or 'zenith' or the source of national identity. Besides, there are topics which are attractive across nations without necessarily being connected to national history, e.g. the culture of Ancient Egypt, the Vikings, the spread of Islam or the crusades.<sup>55</sup>

In terms of space, in all European magazines the European space of history is clearly dominant and within that the space of the respective national history. It is surprising how little multicultural societies in Europe, the growing mobility of people as well as globalisation are mirrored in the magazine covers.

In terms of topics, historical figures are dominant, often followed by issues related to war; here the importance of the First and Second World War for the magazines becomes apparent. The topics connected to 'myths and mysteries' are not solely but predominantly covered by magazines that prefer a more sensationalist style. These magazines can play a rather strong or marginal role in each country, but they exist everywhere.

The quality of the magazine articles can well be in line with reliable accounts of history, however, there is a tendency towards the spectacular and to depict 'celebrities', whether it is famous persons or well-known events or locations. Invasively approaching the private and advertising with 'sex and crime' or the unveiling of 'mysteries' or thrilling 'secrets', in contrast, characterise only magazines of questionable quality that are not too far from 'tabloids'.

Furthermore, it can be noted that the magazines have a tendency to traditional gender concepts even though this can be more or less strong in different countries and within the countries again in different magazines. Regarding Swedish history magazines, for instance, Monika Vinterek points out that the scheme of 'mighty men and naked women' on cover illustrations is especially striking.<sup>56</sup>

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55 Cf. note 23 (the list of the 'European History Crossroads' (EHC) in European history magazines).

56 Cf. Monika Vinterek's article in this publication.

Regarding the trend of the cover topics to illustrious (and predominantly male) personalities and acts of war, it becomes clear which price is to pay for the ‘good story’ and an ‘entertaining narrative’ as driving force of commercially successful popular history magazines: All those topics which offer little vividness and have a rather analytical than a narrative character – such as the analysis of basic structures and changes in economy and society, culture and politics – get little or no attention. Consequently, non-expert readers can hardly widen their historical consciousness when reading those magazines: unpopular realms of history or unusual topics are left out as well as recent topics of social and political relevance that are not consensual.

Finally, the historicist approach to ‘popularise’ history, which the magazines – and not only those – follow by strongly emphasising personalisation does not meet the requirements of a democratic concept of history that would make the readers understand that history is not merely made ‘bottom-down’, but always by society itself as well. The history that magazines sell to their readers is not their own history as a part of society; instead, they are made spectators who observe an exciting stage performance.

## **5. Popular history magazines from the point of view of history didactics**

Concerning the evaluation of history magazines from the point of view of history didactics or even from a general view it is a common opinion that it is per se positive that history is prevalent in the public: after all, dealing with history is better than not dealing with it. This opinion is understandable, however, there are limits to that. Implicit views on the world and society conveyed by representations of history in mass media affect the historical consciousness and a general understanding of the present in democratic, pluralistic and multi-cultural societies. This is even more true if non-expert recipients feel well informed by the richness of details of the historical world depicted in the magazines’ articles and do not critically reflect upon the underlying structures of selection, representation and interpretation – whether they are not capable to do this or because it would disturb the immersive experience.

One of our main research result is that the accounts of history portrayed by the magazines – under the pressure of commercial success – often

seriously differs from the postulates about basic standards of history education. These include basal characteristics of a science-oriented representation, which are often ignored by the magazines. Important statements are not supported by references to sources or to other investigations. In many cases the articles do not clearly point out what science does not or not yet know or what cannot be proved.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, basic quality standards of history didactics as expressed for instance by the Council of Europe (CoE) – in the face of numerous political, social and cultural tensions in Europe and the world – are often neglected. Here the top priority is the development of a critical understanding of presentations and interpretations history and of the public use made of it. Along with this CoE-concept of history teaching, pupils for example should understand that the past can be approached and represented from different perspectives, that historical events and personalities can be interpreted in different ways, that ideas and views about the past are time-bound and subject to change, that our knowledge and understanding of the past is often limited and that claims about the past may have differing degrees of certainty or validity.<sup>58</sup> The principles of German history didactics follow the same trend and stress the orientation on historical sources, present relevance, and especially multiperspectivity, controversy and the plurality of presenting and dealing with history.<sup>59</sup>

Even if there is a huge difference in quality between the history magazines, it needs to be noted that the concepts presented are often far off this critical understanding of the construction and societal use of history. At the same time they are commercially successful and influential.

But in the end, this can only mean that from the view of history didactics, it is not about disparaging these magazines and ban them from the history classroom; the focus shall rather be on the imparting of those critical competences with which those ‘edutaining’ or ‘histotaining’ popular

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57 Cf. URL: <http://bit.ly/1s2gqYM> (1.8.2014).

58 Cf. for example URL: <http://bit.ly/1pGlQD6> (1.8.2014): Recommendation Rec(2001)15 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on history teaching in twenty-first-century Europe.

59 Cf. the EHISTO-Module Handbook of the Initial Teacher Training, Worksheet 8, p. 40 f. In: URL: <http://bit.ly/ZnS2o9> (1.8.2014).

magazines can be carefully examined and critically evaluated. They can be important learning objects which connect school classes with historical culture outside of school.

Tools created within the EHISTO project give diverse suggestions for the analysis of the magazines.<sup>60</sup> For instance, questions regarding historical sources, the origin and function of illustrations, the roles of person-alisation and of ‘story-telling’, the relation between factual and fictional elements, the question of multi-perspectivity and controversy, the quality of historical explanations and interpretations and especially principles of a democratic understanding of history shall be taken into account. Furthermore, a comparison with texts from schoolbooks can be very revealing concerning the characteristics of each of these two text types: Apropos, it then would turn out that the texts of the schoolbooks – even if they are often not as easily accessible for the students – do not fulfil important standards. Therefore, media skills regarding history didactics can lead to a critical understanding even of school books which many pupils trust blindly.

Not least, national magazines dealing with ‘European History Cross-roads’ have a great potential for the trans-national comparison and the promotion of a European dimension in history classes: Hardly any other popular medium could fulfil this function better.<sup>61</sup> Materials from five countries are at the moment provided on the EHISTO website.<sup>62</sup>

## 6. Prospects for further research

Our primarily comparative and media critical studies from the point of view of history didactics on the international historico-cultural phenomenon of popular history magazines have dealt with selected aspects of the matter which so far have been widely neglected by research. Even if the questions and approaches were necessarily limited the results obtained

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60 Cf. the EHISTO-Analysis Framework, an instrument for the analysis of popular history magazines URL: <http://bit.ly/ZnSx1t> (1.8.2014). Cf. also the EHISTO-Module ‘Handbook of the Initial Teacher Training’, URL: <http://bit.ly/ZnS2o9> (1.8.2014).

61 The magazine articles can be used in diverse and very flexible ways.

62 Cf. URL: <http://bit.ly/1vFI2Rg> (1.8.2014).

indeed show that this is an expandable and illuminating field of research for history didactics and the (comparative) research on national, international, and trans-national history cultures.

In conclusion, some research desiderates which are urgent in the view of history didactics shall be briefly named here. Accordingly, there is a need for further transnational comparative studies on the topics favoured by popular history magazines. Thereby, not only further European states, but also non-European regions should be included.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, a (comparative) analysis of the national ‘profiles’ of the popular history magazines that takes into consideration the full range of a national market is important.<sup>64</sup> This aspect has found little attention in our approach which focused on topics dealt with on a European-wide level (EHC – ‘European History Crossroads’, cf. section 2). However, also conducting research on further EHCs and moreover on internationally important ‘History Crossroads’ is an important step to further explore trans-national history cultures in the area of commercial advertising in print media. Additionally, also the international integration of the market and especially the gender aspect in the concepts of the history presented should be increasingly addressed.

The largest desideratum is the empirical research on reception.<sup>65</sup> We hardly know anything about, for instance, the motives (e.g. socioeconomic status, gender, nationality, age, values) of the various buyer and reader groups, about the use of the magazines (e.g. typical reading situations, the storage period, the average amount of readers of one issue), the question if, and if so, which short, middle or long term growth of knowledge the readers gain, and if or how the ‘positivistic’ and ‘historicist’ history approach presented in the magazines effects the historical consciousness of the readers. A further question that remains open for instance is which media critical competences do the readers have and if they apply them while reading – or if they fully indulge in the immersive experience of entertainment.

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63 Cf. some studies in note 3.

64 Thereby, also the historically ‘disguised’ ‘military magazines’ should be included as well as the market for ‘very-special-interest magazines’.

65 Cf., however, the contribution by Miriam Hannig in this volume.



Moreover, also empirical studies on the use of the magazines as learning objects in history education are especially important to history didactics. The EHISTO project particularly aimed at the development of trans-national, intercultural, and media critical competences in history education. If and to what extent these may be achieved with the developed EHISTO-online modules<sup>66</sup> and also with other materials requires thorough examinations so as to create a basis for optimising the didactic concept.

The amount of possible questions appears vast. The analyses could – to name but a few examples – deal with the function of the ‘popular’ historical magazine knowledge in the public culture of history or with the text-image-ratio in the magazines, with the specific strategies of authentication or also with the narrative structures – not least in comparison with films or other media. In conclusion, merely two further topics shall be mentioned here, because they are of special interest to history didactics. Firstly, schoolbook texts and magazine articles should be compared more systematically in regard to the question whether the journalistic style of the historical presentation contains educationally useful suggestions for the optimisation of schoolbook texts in history books. It is commonly known that for most pupils these are neither stimulating nor easily comprehensible, whereas currently new and promising possibilities for a range of differentiated educational offers are presented to the pupils in the context of e-books with hypertext structures<sup>67</sup>. Secondly, the chances for optimising the magazines as part of the public culture of history in a democratic, pluralistic, and multi-cultural society should be examined. In cooperation with media studies and possibly also specialised journalists potential scopes for the optimisation of the presentation of history should be explored in line with the standards of history didactics which do not jeopardize the demand and the commercial success of the magazines – but perhaps even increase it.

It remains to be hoped that this volume, together with the EHISTO project, contributes to strengthening the history educational discussion of

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66 Cf. the EHISTO-learning objects in: URL: <http://bit.ly/1vFI2Rg> (1.8.2014).

67 Cf. e.g. the Council of Europe’s history-e-book ‘Shared Histories. For a Europe without dividing lines’ (2014): URL: <http://bit.ly/Q5uD5Y> (1.8.2014).

popular history magazines in the initial and further training of history teachers and therewith also to guiding the research interest of history didactics to this significant object of research which can be integrated in various interdisciplinary ways.