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What is Communication History? European Answers I

The Rise of a New Field

From Press History to the History of Journalism

Structures of European Communication History

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European Communication History:

An Introduction

Ed McLuskie, Susanne Kinnebrock, Christian Schwarzenegger

This two-part special issue[1] on "European Communication History" involves authors from a variety of linguistic traditions in a journal usually appearing in German. While *Medien & Zeit* has published in English before, we note that authors find themselves leaving behind their primary linguistic homes. The act is a move beyond borders even when indigenous materials of historical research may defy the linguistic inflection. This is not to say that a decidedly "European history" is embraced by all authors in this volume. Ambivalence in suggesting commonalities across multiple cultures and nationalities has both academic and societal precedence. Moreover, historical research offers its analyses while political and economic circumstances chart directions and erect barriers between cultural groups and nation-states. In the midst of struggles to keep transnational dimensions afloat, harder lines shape EU nations as conservative movements display an ironic transnationalism through diffuse but recognizably cautious orientations vis-à-vis many faces of diversity and economic similarities. Research offers its claims on whether "Europe" can be a baseline category for communication history while European identity confronts pulls from two opposed directions: familiar lands of the past and uncertain globalization going forward. "Europe," "history," and, here, "communication" each lean into contemporary debates as soon as their respective definitions and elaborations appear. "History" refers to indigenous but also mutually defining cultures. "Communication" means struggles for solidarity or the means of transmission and influence, welcome or otherwise. This range of problematic definitions and situations produces replies as this journal asks, "What is European Communication History?"

Add to this question the predicament of the historian locked into the present to reconstruct earlier human experience, perhaps through media content, its channels, or national and regional communication policies. As "facts" of history meet the historian's acts of interpretation per the hermeneutic traditions, that which survives for the historical narrative depends on the narrative as much as the facts to shed light on what to consider "European" and "communication."

Research assembled here nevertheless presses on with the idea that knowledge of communication and media helps assess where societies have been and where they might be going. Armed with historical case studies and theories of history, each author announces decisions about historical records that one can examine. Each author adopts or proposes a position on the question, "Which artifacts qualify to be of communication or of media?" Some address journalism, journalistic traditions, and the lack of them. Others look to growing public experiences with media linked to media competition for public attention, suggesting economic history of media as an important window on European communication history. Others see structural changes in public communication through attention to theoretical work capturing threads from case to case.

Part I begins with cases within borders of many kinds. Geographies and cultures are delineated, to offer frameworks, sometimes as categories that imply a systematic history. Some note concrete trends in historical artifacts, which, as bases for factual claims, offer narratives that shed light on parts of the European-historical record. This first of the two-volume special issue on European

[1] Originally it was intended to have one special issue of the journal edited by Susanne Kinnebrock, Christian Schwarzenegger and Ed McLuskie on behalf of the ECREA Communication History Section. Due to the number of high-quality submissions, a second issue was drafted. Medien & Zeit and the ECREA Section are happy to present these two issues. In total, 15 extended abstracts were submitted to the Call for Papers, which sought European answers to the question, "What is Communication History?" After an editorial screening, 10 spurred invitations to submit full papers, involving the intellectual efforts of authors from 19 different countries. Upon submission, each full paper was then peer reviewed. Reviewers were recruited from Europe and beyond, thus increasing the number of countries involved. Seven papers were then selected for publication. These two special issues are the result of involvement by more than a 30 scholars from within the field of communication history. They made possible this publication outcome. The guest editors, the ECREA Communication History Section and *Medien & Zeit* would like to thank all of them for their excellent work and their contribution to making these two issues a truly European and international venture.

communication history begins with the record, and moves into the 2nd volume for the frameworks, the theories of European history.

The nation and the trans-nation thus receive the historian's treatment as both factual and theoretical. For some, historical research begins to look like attempts to note histories yet to fully emerge in some countries, suggesting an uneven landscape across the European Union with possible importance even today. A European communication history is of course born of diverse nations, while global communications and media systems revolutionize not just Europe, but the entire planet. How did we get here? These two issues cannot offer an answer to such a question, but the papers here attempt to shed some light. Understanding global and regional conflict today may require the work of those communication historians whose comparative work extends beyond national borders, as an important dimension of the question, "What is Europe?" We hope that this special issue encourages others to join the work in the debates on the horizons of communication and media historians in Europe.

Where some see a systematic European history promising and realizable, others insist, then, that surely someone would have demonstrated or at least signaled progress in top-tier international journals.[2] We still await that demonstration. This special issue aims to offer more than a signal that the problem of a European communication/media history can be unpacked. The three articles in this first of two volumes begin that task. They carry, implicitly or explicitly, both metatheoretical and evidence-based claims.

Barriers to a European communication history include what Ribeiro describes as a situation without the historical material available even for national communication histories. Due to the dictatorships on the Iberian Peninsula, a communication historiography that might have revealed the connections between the media and political powers could not develop. The fact that a country's historiography has not yet dealt with media freedom or professional standards profoundly offers a warning that other fields, especially social scientific accounts, might prevail as they do in other countries. Ribeiro suggests that only a communication field unto itself stands the chance of developing a national communication history for Portugal. Otherwise, communication and media history may be misdirected through a-historical tendencies in the social sciences that often capture communication and media analysis from indigenous but sedimented practices of the humanities. Communication historians need to incorporate awareness of an uncritical social scientific analysis of communication histories, so that their narratives of communication history are not simply describing prevailing economic and political power that restrain the writing of media histories. Were national communication histories to follow effects models in the social sciences to write "official" histories or other histories determined by the present, the humanities risk writing textual analyses cut off from society. Neither alternative is desirable for doing communication history — the case of Portugal underscores such concerns. A European communication history would better interrogate, then, the organization of research in relation to national policies for its research foci and content. Spain, according to Ribeiro, offers material in recent communication history, including the record of media freed from government control. This decoupling of state and media also, Ribeiro argues, contributes conditions for communication and media history to flourish. Universities and their research require breaking free of compromised versions of the humanities and the social sciences, by bridging both via an independent field of communication and media history. How a separate field does not repeat the mistakes of other fields or locations for inquiry is a discussion the essay aims to provoke. Ribeiro's claim that allowing communication history to

[2] At the 2011 ICA conference in Boston, Christian Schwarzenegger, Maria Löblich and Susann Trabert presented an analysis of articles on topics of historical communication research that were published in 32 international journals within the last two decades. They aimed to discover whether there was a specifically European way, style or approach of doing communication history to be identified in these journals in comparison to the works done in the USA. Their basic assumption was that scientific journals are to be considered part of the "nervous system" of academic disciplines and that the published articles bundle the current state of research. At the same time, due to peer-reviewing cultures they promise a certain consensus that the articles meet quality standards and are fit to become part of the output of a research community. But they did not discover something distinctively European in the research by European scholars. Although there was some variety in topics as well as in countries involved in the research interests of European or US scholars, yet they approached their interest according to partly mono-cultural international standards. Paradigms, ideas and methodologies that were traced in the journal articles did not display the signature of a European way of historical communication research. The question, "What is European about European communication history?" remained without a clear-cut answer.

other social sciences appears to have its basis in nation-specific, but also European — indeed, the globalization of — academic communication and media research. The problem of communication history, then, appears as the problem of academic-intellectual migrations overriding both national and transnational efforts to create as well as maintain communication histories within Europe.

Broersma's essay agrees that national/cultural history needs a thorough enough national or regional articulation for any meaningful analysis. Even when plenty of material is available to historians, care must be exercised before leaping to the level of European history. His essay links already established journalistic forms to the Dutch "history of national identity-formation." Indigenous journalistic forms, Broersma suggests, reveal national and regional orientations beyond professional practices reflected in media. Media styles of presentation reflect cultural practices in Dutch society. Thus the author suggests that historians link categories of communication and media, on the one hand, to the cultural orientations of the people, on the other. Moving from a reading of media content and forms to a reading of a people is an agenda item this essay presents for additional interrogations of communication history in Europe.

While one, Ribeiro's, is the case of communication history in waiting and at risk of eclipse by other fields, the other, Broersma's, is the case of a robust history illuminating the distinctiveness of culturally localized histories, understood through stylistic analyses. Whether either approach is sufficient to defend for or against a European communication history is largely a matter of borders other than national or regional borders. The case study leaves open the broader question of the nature and possibility of a European communication history.

From perhaps an unexpected direction, Bogen suggests that the basis for a European communication history extends across cultures at least into the 1700s. Bogen uses the case of health communication to describe not only that focus, but also more general structures of European communication history. Bogen sees society-altering shifts throughout transformations in media, the continuity of European melancholy as a theme of media exploitation. Bogen suggests that connecting widespread experience, such as melancholy, to its reflections in media offers an extended case study of experiences of the people across cultures. The analysis also describes media content of the period as something of a marketing campaign to secure loyalties to media outlets, a precursor of sorts to contemporary public relations work designed to enhance profit. While the piece is about the dissemination of information about health, it is also a description of a pathway beyond national and cultural borders. Following melancholy throughout several lands is to follow the history of media that persists in spite of cultural differences. Attention-getting as a media practice, it turns out by this analysis, predates modern communication and media competition for audiences by more than two centuries.

Each case begs questions, however, of an explicit theory of European communication history, largely due to what otherwise are the benefits of close attention to historical cases.

These articles shed various lights on the journal theme of an uncovered European history for communication and media research. Questions linger. How might the pursuit of forms and styles address national and cultural parochialism? What might research practices and organizations reserved for European communication and media history become, if freed from a rigidifying humanities and culture-leveling versions of the social sciences? Why should we think that international journals could be a source for understanding European history in the face of now-globalized, industry-influenced research? How would we imagine a more systematic history that is at the same time critical of culturally insensitive intellectual expansion? "Why history?", however, and "Why European history?" are questions addressed by each article for the study of communication. In an age of present-mindedness, these and other questions point to traceable European identities by focusing on communication as windows on the human experience. Remaining blind spots call out for the continuation of such historical analyses. Meanwhile, concepts, methods, and subject matters of media and communication history may be indistinguishable across borders, intellectually incestuous, or altogether stuck in some location of the past that fails to connect history to the evolution of human societies. Thus even broader questions insert themselves.

The question of a European communication history appears not as a fully open vista, but as itself historically situated. History, too, lives beyond the period of research interests. The range between history as periods if not stages of societal evolution, on the one hand, and moments of ruptures with the past, on the other, stand as a call for theories of communication history that help make sense of the cases historians pursue. In the process, history as the history of human aspiration through communication requires attention to the history of the counterfactual, as Bogen may be suggesting. But as Ribeiro and Broersma appear to suggest, getting to such a conversation among communication historians in Europe may not be so easy.

Europe is the birthplace of the idea that history is the history of domination, a perspective familiar to communication historians. The theme of suppression moves through historical narratives and explanations, recommending the exploration of national and cultural experiences with domination and power at the centers and peripheries of historical work. A European communication and media history that offers such connections recommends — by its arguments, analyses, and choices of focus — ways to do history and ways not to do history. In any event, trans-bordered ways for uncovering European communication history beckons, even in calls to achieve more textured analyses of the local. Together, these articles pose the requirement to diagnose the situation of the age for any region that comes into focus with a call from past to globalized present.

What remains open is less what European communication and media history has and has not been, but what European communication history must become.

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