

Global Professionalism - Local Professional Identities: Journalistic Professionalism in Contemporary Russia

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This paper explores the interpretation and adaptation of journalistic professionalism in Russia. By analysing professionalism(s) through journalists' own articulation of their practices, it discusses myths, versions of cultural contexts and legitimations of journalists' social position and social trust-building. Furthermore, it challenges the idea of a 'global model of professionalism', by illuminating historical traditions and philosophical patterns, which influenced the development of journalism as a professional practice.

When writing this paper I was not even two years into my PhD and have just started my field-research. Since then, I have developed a more focussed approach to my study, a more theoretically underpinned methodology and a more buttressed system of argumentation. Nonetheless, I still hold on to the main idea of this paper – local differences matter.

Key words: journalism, professional identities, global practices, Russia

Journalistic professionalism is becoming universalised in terms of standardisation of professional ethos as well as the formation of supranational journalistic communities. A predominantly Anglo-American professional value system has been translated into a cross-nationally accepted nodal point of guidance, codex and professional discourse. However professional identities are formed within national contexts, being influenced by local cultures and myths, political ideologies and legislations. Professionalism, as a concept, is not immune to interpretations and adjustments to local or national environments, where journalistic professionalism is compared not only with international colleagues, but also with professionals in other professions. One journalist interviewed by Svetlana Pasti, a fellow researcher interested in the formation of journalistic professionalism in Russia stated: 'a journalist is not from another planet, he takes bribes just like a doctor or a pedagogue' (in Rosenholzh, Nordenstreng and Trubina 2010:4). Academic debates about the meaning of the term professionalism and whether journalists should be considered professionals are ongoing. Definitions of the term vary from being identified through professional doctrines, to particularities of professional knowledge or professional appearance (in Splichal and Sparks 1994). In this study, professionalism is used as a term applied by the research participants in their professional self-identification, rather than imposing a definition on the research subjects. Furthermore, this article is going to scrutinise the relationship between national professional culture and political history, global professionalism and local context, personal professional motivations and ideology in contemporary Russia.

This study is an analysis of self-reflection of journalists on the professional transition undertaken in a wider context of the changing identities in Russia - national, international, political, geographical, social, cultural and others. By analysing accounts from the Russian history of journalism in combination with the "newly" introduced cross-national professional standards, this research investigates the changing and antagonistic discursive landscape of the Russian journalistic community. The governing argument of this article is based on a thesis that the discourse of journalistic professionalism has become universalised under global influences; however the self-identification as professional journalists remains subject to national cultural (professional) memory and institutional path-dependency. The argument will be discussed with reference to self-reflective interviews with newspaper journalists in Moscow and Nizhny Novgorod collected in early 2011¹.

Theoretical and methodological orientation

Rooted in post-structuralist and post-Marxist thinking, and resting upon the works and concepts of Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci, the discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe 'rejects the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices' (2001:107). This is not to suggest that reality or the 'world external to thought' does not exist; however, for the purpose of this study, it implements a variety of 'assertions that they [discourses] could constitute' (2001:108). In other words, how is empirical reality expressed through chosen antagonism and articulations? Applying Foucault's rejection of positivism and arguing for the discursive formations of history, political order and knowledge, Laclau's and Mouffe's discourse theory suggests a different epistemological position for understanding journalistic professionalism, challenging and enriching traditional studies embedded in the disciplines of sociology, cultural studies and political-economy.

¹ The four interviews presented in this article were collected using Skype software from London.

At the same time discourse theory allows us to grasp the plurality of discursive processes in professional self-identification, which are contingent and yet expressed through *hegemonic* articulation. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue that articulation is a dynamic process, whereby hegemonic discourses (including discourses about journalistic professionalism) are re-articulated through political or moral narratives (Howarth 2000) and are consolidated by the domination of discursive *nodal point*. Borrowed from Lacan's terminology, *point de capion* (a nodal point or master signifier) 'involves the notion of a particular element assuming a 'universal' structuring function within a certain discursive field' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: xi). The concept of a nodal point, in the case of this study, refers to the unification of professional discourses, which are identified in literature on the normatives of journalistic roles as well as being expressed in empirical data collected so far. Nodal points help to identify the hierarchical dynamic structure of antagonism(s) providing an analytical toolbox for studying journalistic professionalism (Dobson 2003; Carpenter 2005; Sutherland 2005). The methodological-conceptual analytical toolbox for the purpose of this study includes hegemony, nodal points, antagonism, articulation and memes.

Different from the Gramscian notion of hegemony, as a period of stability of discursive meanings, Laclau's and Mouffe's understanding of hegemony is positive in the sense that it describes the vibrant articulation of prevailing discourse (Sutherland 2005). These dynamics are articulated through antagonism. Even though the term is used in its singular form, Laclau and Mouffe (2001) acknowledge that antagonism exists in a multiplicity of forms, frequently in opposition to each other. What the notion of social antagonism adds to the understanding of professional identity, is the impossibility of total homogenisation, since the discourse of professionalism is never fixed. This suggests that professionalism, as a discursive concept, is time dependent, thus has to be placed within a time (and place) specific context. The formations of discursive articulations are historically non-linear, meaning that the past can re-appear in the present through discursive articulations (Splichal 2002). Thus the origins of discursive elements can be (not always) traced in history. Cultural memory will be employed for the purpose of tracing professional identity forming events, myths and stories; placing professional identities of contemporary Russian journalists not only in the existing milieu, but also into the mythical.

Discursive antagonism is a 'negotiation of a given order' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001:126). Potential elements are selected from the field of discursive antagonisms and become 'privileged signifiers' (Carpentier 2005:2000) otherwise known as nodal points or dominant discourses. In that sense, the discourse theory is similar to the theory of memetics, or cultural genetics as it is otherwise known (Epstein 2008). Memetics is applied in analysing the role of language in constructing identities and social realities, by identifying memes that transmit the cultural knowledge through words. Memes are seen as units of information, which are in competition with each other for domination. This competition of discursive elements or memes happens in the hierarchical structure of 'mega, grand and micro discourses' (Sutherland 2005). The micro discourses, expressed through journalists own narratives, are representations of professional hegemonies that reflect the culture of doing journalism.

Application of the discourse theory is particularly interesting in analysing transitional societies with changing patterns of social, political and other relations. Laclau and Mouffe argue '[t]hat the more unstable the social relations [are], the less successful will be any definite system of differences and the more the points of antagonism will proliferate' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001:131). Thus there is less coherence in self-identification in the transitional professional identity of post-Communist journalists than in the established media-professional systems. Nonetheless the nodal points and the articulation of professional hegemony reflects globalised professional discourses about journalists relation to the work practices, roles and professional ethics. What do I mean by global professionalism?

Anglo-American model of journalism, which informs Anglo-professionalism (Dodson 2009), is characterised by objectivity as its key definer (Shudson 1987) and became ‘the only universal model’ of journalism (Mancini 2005:78). What Paolo Mancini (2005) implies by this proposition is not that this model of professionalism is becoming universally applied, but that it is becoming universally known. However, scholars, including Mancini, also suggest that the national variations have developed as a result of historical differences in the formation of journalism and media organisations (Siebert et al 1978; Hallin and Mancini 2004).

The universalised model of professionalism has developed as a result of the early press emancipation from the direct involvement of the state and the consequence of evolving market economy (Curran and Seaton 2003) in multi-party states. Anglo-American tradition is embedded in the democratic discourse of the separation of powers, referring to mass media through the myth of the Fourth Estate and is identified through its watchdog function. Philosophically developed in the period of the Enlightenment and defined in the late 19th century America, this model advocates for a pluralist political theory, suggesting autonomous media’s position between conflicting social interest groups. In this tradition, the role of journalists is factually-based reporting, in contrast for example to the Marxist-Leninist propagandist model of social agitation (De Smaele 1999).

Nonetheless, one young interviewed journalist and a fellow academic researcher cogitated on the matter of the universal model of journalism and on the practical existence of a model of journalism as such:

Indeed, the American model teaches to separate, provide facts without emotion, without any civic positions, without ideology. Then yes, in this sense the Russian model does differ. We were taught at the University somehow to live into the event, to feel it with your heart, even though it might sound very vile...Meaning that he [journalist] has to be sensitive, somehow to understand that he is writing about real people. And all these events that are happening in the society, they are not some sort of abstract events, but can have tangible consequences. Meaning that we were thought to approach [an event] with the feeling, not really to emotionalise in the text, or to use some sorts of loud epithets, no. But to understand your responsibility for your every word and really to hold a civic position...In this case yes, there is a difference from American journalism...In reality the clash of these two positions exists now in our mass media and the education system as well. But even the division itself, American, Russian it is also relatively inaccurate and rough. Most frequently, as I assume, we meet a synthesis...Journalists knowing about some sorts of foreign-Western tendencies, at the same time, combine these some sort of rules...I don’t know if we can talk about some sort of European model of journalists..., but surely French journalism is different from American...In every country there might appear a precise feature of that country. (Antonova 2011)²

What is interesting in this quotation is not only the understanding of the theoretical separation between nationally described models of journalisms, but also from the discourse analysis point of view, the use of words ‘our’ and ‘foreign’. The notion of ‘Otherness’ was popularised in cultural studies in the works of Stuart Hall (1990:1997) and Edward Said (2003) in relation to constructing ethnic identities through race and apartheid. However ‘other’ is a new, yet useful, concept in understanding professional identities of media workers. Associations or dissociations with others becomes a practical tool when analysing texts of self-identification through self-

² All names of the research participants were changed.

reflection. This tool can be used in two ways: as an analytical instrument of relations within the work environment, as well as for identifying nodal points detached from unsympathetic elements in the field of discursive formations.

In the case of the above professional articulation, the identity is created in relation to the 'Other'. This theoretical 'Other' exists as an articulation, which forms an antagonistic relationship with the 'Us/Our'. It is becoming internalised into what is perceived as 'Our' national professional community, evident in changing traditions of mass media and the education of journalists in Russia. The idea of Western as the 'Other' in discourses defining Russian national narrative were popularised by Russian litterateurs in the 18th and 19th centuries. Many of these writers were engaged with intelligentsia political groups and acted as journalists 'of the views' in philosophical debates about Russia's political development (Amber 1972).

Nonetheless, the processes of professional globalisation are happening, as the new memes are being circulated and adopted by groups or individuals. In this pool of articulations, the dominant antagonism is present between the American model and the local model of journalism. Thus what Mancini (2005) referred to as the universal model, is actually a universal model of antagonisms. The professional universality in this case is the recognition of process, professional antagonisms and the re-formation of professional nodal points. Similar antagonisms were evident in three other interviews. For example Oksana Chizh told a story of her encounter with this antagonism between the Russian and American models:

Like I was at the 'Moscow Times' recently and people would tell me, like the editor would call me and say 'look, this is the American journalism model, we don't do that here.' Like you can't write about yourself. Like Russians do that and we don't do that. And I was like 'I didn't know that. Nobody tell me'. (Chizh 2011)

Moreover, it was well noted by Lena Antonova that the division lines are inaccurate or do not exist at all. However, what is interesting in an analysis of professional identities by applying discourse analysis, is that the synthesis of professionalisms is hard to verbally explain; therefore, the self-identification happens in relation to the 'Other'. What is significant, is the preference of the 'Other' - in this case, the American model. This choice of preference suggests the domination of Anglo-American model in the field of discursive articulations of journalistic professionalisms³. Furthermore, it has to be acknowledged the existence of a rich body of literature, arguing that autonomy and objectivity are no more than marketing strategies of the Western media system. Thus it has to be stressed that what is considered as the Anglo-American professionalism, are the mythical nodal points, which are discursive rather than existent.

Professional identity in transition

The new identity of the Russian media and media workers began to be defined through liberal democratic laws and newly introduced capitalist economic system, after the implementation of *glasnost*⁴ policies and the fall of the Soviet Communist system. The new 1993 Russian

³ Even though later in the interview Antonova mentioned countries like China, she acknowledged having limited and more mythical than actual knowledge about journalisms in other than national and Anglo-American traditions.

⁴ *Glasnost*, as defined by McNair using Sharon's term as 'information revolution' (1991:53) encapsulates the new information policy under three 'headings: criticism [and self criticism], access and socialist pluralism' (1991:54).

Constitution, similar to the American First Amendment, proclaims that ‘everyone has the right to seek, receive, pass on, produce, and disseminate information freely by any legal means’ (in Foster 1996:246). However, the Russian interpretation of these values of freedom was characterised by collective, not individual rights, and, as Frances H. Foster highlights, it was based on the ‘insistence on the utilitarian value of information for democracy’ (1996:245).

The transition from Communism to a desired liberal democracy, for Russian journalism, on the one hand, meant an introduction of greater freedom and transparency guaranteed by the constitution, opened up business ownership opportunities and allowed for the new genres of journalism to emerge. On the other hand, a large population, lacking in financial and cultural capitalistic capital, found it difficult to adapt to the drastic economic change and to establish independent media institutions. The Russian people became ensnared into a transitional mental state of backwards progression from a great empire to a developing country (Rantanen 2002); meaning that private and national struggles of identity formation continued, reflecting both positive cultural memory and a myth of a desirable liberal society.

A change in any legal system and political discourses does not automatically imply a change in people’s attitudes and mentalities. Slavoj Žižek (2006) argues that every legal order has to rely on a complex system of informal rules. These informal social rules inform a society on how to relate to the legal rules, to know what is prohibited and what can be violated. According to Žižek the chaotic early transitional period in Russia, was a result of a disintegration of these unwritten or implicit rules. In that scenario, the organised crime functioned as a provider of knowledge about the new social order. ‘The stabilisation in the last year under the Putin reign,’ Žižek (2006) argues ‘mostly announce precisely to some kind of newly established transparency of these unwritten rules’. Žižek continues by adding: ‘It’s not that now there is really more legality, it’s simply that people are getting accustomed to new implicit rules.’

To give an example of how the unwritten social rules can constitute to the formation of professional identity, one young journalist in Pasti’s (2010) study when asked to deliberate on the concept of journalistic professionalism commented:

Professionalism and corruption are connected. Money is paid to professionals. Professionalism is when you are bought by money. This is, when somebody is ready to pay you do this and that. They want to use your professionalism for their own aims. They do not turn to just anybody but to the professional who competently organises the black PR campaigns, who is competently able to raze a character and his business to the ground. (2010:66)

Clientalism and other ‘non-professional’ practices have been recognised by researchers as one of identities of Russian journalism (Roudakova 2008). Illegal practices: voluntary and involuntary political-elite parallelism, normalisation of hidden advertising and black market activities, became a form of journalistic professionalism not in its idealised form, but an identity of journalistic practices, which have developed into a cultural myth defining professional journalists in Russia (Pasti 2010). As a group, Russian journalists are not unique to be identified by these practices. Doctors, judges, pedagogues, every profession has its black market price value depending on individual’s professional status. This black market and corruption identity is connected to the myth of Russian disorder and extraordinary powers attributed to ‘Russian chaos’ (Ledeneva 2001:1). Alena Ledeneva argues that one of the factors determining the prevalence of these unwritten rules is the ‘future-oriented’ transition of the legal rules and their incongruity (2001:10). None of the four interviewed journalists found it professionally damaging to be paid “unofficially”; however they emphasised that external money should not be accepted for violating professional ideals and civic wrong-doing.

Another intention of the above quotation was to exemplify one of the possible identifications of journalistic professionalisms. The argument that emerges from this example is that the concept of professionalism has to be analysed from the point of view and articulations of journalists themselves, rather than being assumed from the academic literature. However, in academic studies transitional professional identities of journalists are inevitably compared to the normative Anglo-American tradition. On the one hand, this is a consequence of the Westernisation of professional discourse being an identifier of journalistic professionalism and, on the other hand, the academic traditions supported by the rich body of literature. Nonetheless, empirical studies illustrate that the model of journalistic professionalism, or the formal rules, also has to rely on informal social rules in order to function and be socially recognised.

In the empirical data collected for this study, the notion of journalistic professionalism was described as a physical capacity to work in difficult environments or as an, impossible to fully explain, gut feeling. None of the interviewed journalists were able to define professionalism as a term, which could become a collective professional doctrine. Rather, they explained professionalism as a personal-individual quality. The point evolving from this argument is that in contemporary transitional Russian society, which has a long history of rejecting Western ideas, Anglo-professionalism as an identity of “doing culture” was not adopted in Russia. Instead, professionalism is associated with the state of “being”. Nonetheless, despite being philosophically sceptical towards professional nodal points such as objectivity and autonomy, Russian journalists do not reject these principles and argue that these principles are applied in “doing journalism”. However, they do not self-identify as professionals through these professional values. In other words the Anglo-American model of professionalism does not define professional journalism in Russia. Rather, professionalism, as a definable concept or model that gives journalists their collective identity, (Witsche and Nygren 2009) remains underdeveloped.

This can be explained by the lack of clear political and social ideology in contemporary Russia. The biggest difference between Russian and Western journalists is the lost identity of the national media system, not in the physical sense, but as a point of reference. After the collapse of the Communist ideology, a new narrative that would unify political and social Russian identity and development paths failed to form. When analysing the Russian media, this condition is best described by DeSmaele who argues that:

The post-communist Russian model... seems to lack coherence. There is private ownership but also heavy state control. There is a ban on censorship but also pressure on journalists to write or not to write about certain things. There is decentralization but also a highly centralised state television. There are Western-style journalists who present the facts, but there are also those who are mere publicist. What should such system be called? Is there a model at all? And why is the Russian media system as it is? (2010:41)

In total DeSmaele (2010) identifies 13 definitions of the Russian political system, all of which can be submerged using a term not from an academic but from a social discourse – *dermocratic* (shitocracy)⁵. Why this relationship between the state, media system and journalism is important, is because the state gives ‘credence’ to professional ideology (Lin 2010: 176). The dominant logic of political ideology positions the state in its official relation to mass media and its civic responsibilities (Goldsmiths Media Group 2000). A combination of national identity and

⁵ From the Russian word *dermo* meaning shit

common legal system consequently informs the social expectations and requirements of the journalists and suggests an official political role they are to play in a particular country.

Due to the lack of a coherent ideology, as well as a lack of clarity in institutional and civic relationships, political and civic transition became a professional identity in itself. Journalists actively or passively are placing themselves in the particular contexts of political and civic processes that are understood to be processes shaping something new. 'I believe that the processes that are happening now, they lead to change...But probably to the one that is only possible for Russia', deliberated Julia Petrova, an interviewed journalist from Nizhniy Novgorod. This argument, yet again, is presented with a strong emphasis on the national narrative and nationally developing paths of transition.

Maxim Pavlov, a journalist from a local newspaper in a town outside Moscow argued about the transitional processes in Russia from a similar position to Zizek's ideological paradigm.

When the new Russian era was just beginning, yes, in 2000, when Vladimir Putin came to power, yes, people had an understanding that possibly our country is in need of certain consolidation of this existing present climate. This means, the rolling up of certain part of the freedoms. But at that time people in principle did not understand what can it end up as...It is actively being articulated that there is no civic society in Russia, however among journalists, even those working on a local level, yes, there is an understanding that in reality the civic society does exist. If in the future the political and historical situation will continue in the same furrow, then this civic society in some way will shape itself, so that the contemporary authorities will have to listen to it. (Pavlov 2011)

Debates about Russia's transition and the breakdown of civic society were intensified in 2011 after the *Council of Civil Society, Institutions and Human Rights* introduced a new scheme of de-Sovietisation to public debates. Politicians, political scientists, human rights activists and historians involved in the television debates about the scheme emphasised the importance of the Communist memory (positive and negative) on the formation of the contemporary situation in Russia. This has been characterised by political path-dependency, a lack of civic society and common national ideology.

Interviewed journalists highlighted their professional responsibilities towards building a better collective future for the country. Some of the participants argued for the importance of media workers' involvement in these processes; others identified themselves as mere reporters. However, transition, rather than democracy, is an idea that functions as is the nodal point for political-professional self-identification of Russian journalism. It also helps in making sense of the changed social-political order in which journalists operate.

In analysing the empirical data, transition is a re-emerging theme in the articulations about national instability, organisational changes and economy or professional duties and expectations. The significance of this finding is dual: on the one hand being captured in the temporality of things can lead to instability becoming a habit or an excuse for professional misconduct or negligence; yet on the other hand, transition is a dynamic time when no nodal hegemony is formed. Thus monitoring activities and aspirations of journalists is important in understanding the sedimentation and hagemonisation of possible paths for future developments.

An impact of globalisation; such as cultural imperialism, hegemonisation of professional practices of media institutions and the exchange of professional values is evident in the (re)-establishment of journalism in Russia. Media institutions become subject to capitalist economic dependency (Vartanova and Smirnov 2010), the post-Perestroika media law resembles Western standards (Foster 1996), the media content is formed by both nationally and non-nationally produced programmes (Hutchings and Roulyova 2009), and the journalistic professional rhetoric of identification is developing in-line with relative autonomy (Pasti 2005). At the same time, it is impossible to tell which impacts are direct results of the globalisation process and which are of domestic origin. What is, nonetheless, tangible is the media policy, or the discursive relationship, which is internalised by the introduction of democratic models of relations between mass communication channels and the state.

Following established democratic traditions, Russian journalists began to publicly self-identify through the internationalised nodal points of professional autonomy and social-democratic responsibility in accordance with Anglo-Americanised professional vocabulary (even if translated into native language). *Четвертая Власть* (The Fourth Power)⁶ was a name of the television programme on the REN-TV, a national television channel, launched in the 90s. Today, *Четвертая Власть* (4vsar.ru) is also the name of an online Russian newspaper as well as, interestingly, a Moscow based PR agency, launched in 2000 by a group of newspaper journalists (4vlast.ru).

The official Codex of Professional Ethics of Russian Journalists (1994) published by the Russian Union of Journalists, among others, proposes the following governing professional conditions: incorruptibility, truthfulness of published material, separation of facts from opinions and incompatibility of engaging in journalistic practices together with working for political parties, governments and legislative or judicial offices. In contrast, Lenin's principle guidelines for media-workers were: partiality in line with the Communist Party, linkage with the People, truthfulness and openness (McNair 1991). This example is an illustration of the hegemonisation of the nodal points articulated through the principles of "democracy" such as the separation of powers, independence from direct and indirect manipulation, as well as the separation between the identity of a journalist from the identity of the People, central to the Marxist-Leninist model.

However, there exists an opinion that the separation of powers failed to be established between the political and mass communication elite. The renowned and controversial speech was given by Leonid Parfenov⁷ (November 2010) at the first Vladislav Listyev's⁸ television awards ceremony to an audience of television elite⁹, as Oleg Kashin¹⁰, another Moscow journalist, was recovering in hospital after an assassination attempt in November 2010. Parfenov visited Kashin in the hospital a few hours before the ceremony and referred to the incident in the beginning of the speech. Later in the speech he continued:

⁶ *The Fourth Estate and the Fourth Power translates into Russian as Четвертая Власть.*

⁷ Leonid Parfenov is a Russian news presenter, journalists, editor and an author of TV shows.

⁸ Vladislav Listyev was a Russian journalist. Shortly after becoming a head of the ORT television station in 1995 he was shot dead outside his apartment. Nor Listev's killers nor the motives were found. One of the versions was connected to Listev's decision to cease all advertising on ORT.

⁹ All except one heads of the national television stations, elite television journalists and presenters.

¹⁰ Oleg Kashin is a Russian journalist and political activist. The violence against Kashin is believed to be connected to his article on the building of highway through Khimki Forest, which evoked aggression from a pro-Kremlin youth activist group United Russia.

Behind every politically significant broadcast there are guessable intentions and objectives of the authority; its mood, its relations, its friends and foes... Constitutionally a correspondent is thus not a journalist altogether, but an officeholder following the logic of duty and obedience... Our television is more intricately disturbing, it enthralls, entertains, and amuses, but it can overwhelmingly be seen as public-political institution. (Parfenov 2010)

The speech itself was criticised by Parfenov's colleagues, for not saying anything new or unknown. However national television news channels chose not to broadcast the speech or dedicated minimal attention to it. Other journalists praised Parfenov for his courage, concentrating not only on the speech itself, but on the place and time that the speech was given. Nonetheless this speech created a forum for public discussions about the present political and business climate in Russia, Communist institutional path-dependency and the undemocratic performance of mass media.

A similar mood was shared by interviewed journalists. In the collected empirical data, the Soviet institutional path-dependency was also articulated through journalists' personal encounters with governmental organisations as information sources, as well as some traditions within media outlets. Oksana (2011), a journalist who entered into journalism in the early 1990s, said:

In RIA¹¹ Novosti...in the Government media there are certain things like if you are mentioning you know Putin or Medvedev..., there are special people who are like if you are quoting will be checking the quotes to make sure that this is what they really said.

This quotation is only one of a number of examples representing the traditional (pre) - Soviet relationship between the mass media and the government. And even if the professional identities of Russian journalists are now being constructed through the discourse of power separation and journalists being independent agents with civic responsibilities, the articulated conditions are understood as national traditions/culture dependent. These evidences of political path-dependency are effectively described by Maxim Pavlov, concerning the relationship between the mass media and political institutions as information sources. Maxim Pavlov declared that:

There is no more difficult task for contemporary...journalist...in Russia, [than to access commentary from the authorities]... My colleagues working in the local television station were on an apprenticeship in Germany...One of my fellow journalists said that 'I was surprised how open the correlation in Western Europe was from the authorities towards the mass media'... Because a public official in the Western and probably in the Central Europe, yes?, he has a slightly different understanding of his official duties and why did he come to power [achieved his/her leading position] in general...And for them obviously an account about his actions.. is a some sort of a promotion, PR. At ours [in Russia] this is essentially not understood by anybody. (Pavlov 2011)

This story was told in the context of a discussion about journalists being a connecting link between conflicting social groups focussing on two categories: the People and authorities. Acting as a link is problematic due to a complex network of relationships and informal pre-democratisation era rules, not of journalism but of media-politicians and media-business

¹¹ RIA Novosti is one of the biggest governmental news agencies in Russia.

relationships. Self-identification as an autonomously thinking body is hegemonised in the professional discourse of Russian journalists; however the national antagonisms are articulated through acknowledging the differences between the identities of political figures in established democracies in comparison to what is considered to be an identity of the political authorities in Russia. What is interesting in this quotation is that this journalist chose to self-identify through telling an antagonistic story of cross-national comparison. As demonstrated above, the theme of cross-national comparisons was evident in other interviews, predominantly articulated through an idea of political antagonisms between democratic media-politics relationship and the present situation in Russia.

In this example, the self-identity is also constructed through an illustration of how the role of the mass media, including the work of journalists, is perceived by other public institutions. Thus the professional self-identity depends not only on the norms and models, but on the recognition of a professional community by other social groups and organisations. This recognition happens on the national as well as the international dimension, through the comparison between the experienced and the mythical hegemonic professional discourse of the American-European political systems. The term mythical in this case implies the mediated knowledge about the West, as none of the journalists have had any experience of working in media organisations outside Russia and few have visited Europe or the US.

Professional Identity and the Nation

A sense of national belonging was identified as an important feature for Russian journalists, who found professional satisfaction in being involved in the formation of the nation; which as discussed above has lost its ideology, civic society and unified people-state identity. Lena Antonova passionately expressed her views suggesting that:

Possibly journalists and that informational realm that they create, it maybe really helps for the society not to break into separate segments...helps to connect people with each other...Meaning that this sphere of information is created, in which all people are submerged, all population of one country, Russia...Journalism somehow helps people to come closer to each other. Take Russia as an example, it is a big country. At ours it is said, that people in Moscow do not even imagine how people in Siberia live... Who said that Siberia exists, I did not see it...The same in Siberian cities. They say 'Moscow, it is far away. Does it exist at all? We have our own problems'. So maybe it is journalism that helps to overcome these distances, between time and space. Helps with self-understanding of a country as a whole. (Antonova 2011)

Journalism as a profession is at least in its ideal form linked with the notion of collective solidarity towards the people, unionised into a group called the nation. The relationship between journalistic, professional and national identities is linked by the conventions of news production. National or 'our' news subordinates professional practices to collective national interests and loyalty, at the same time diminishing professional values, applied to production and interpretation of national news by journalists. In other words, 'the journalist's domestic viewpoint is inseparable from his or her professional norms and considerations' (Nossek 2004:346). Moreover, national identity is a discursive myth reinforced by journalists themselves; be it sports, politics, culture or other. Therefore journalists work within clear lines of national identities, alliances and enemies, which are political myths assisting in making sense of the world. Through constant exposure to

mass media, as their professional instances, journalists are at the same time heavy receivers as well as creators of national identity discourse.

A nation is a discursive idea; however, national identity cannot exist without a national political community, which 'in turn implies at least some common institutions and a single code of rights and duties for all the members of the community [including journalists]' (Smith 1991:9). A lack of political community, codes of civic and professional duties de-stabilises political identity and vice-versa – a rickety political identity leaves professional communities without a pivot of identification (Tret'iakov 2007). Having weak professional nodal points accepted by the professional community generates a professional (and national) anarchy. Professions and professionalism(s) cannot exist in anarchical structures, given that they have to be recognised by the public as a group as having a particular social role and purpose. Thus, in order to consolidate a process of journalistic professionalisation, a strong sense of both professional and social political community is needed.

Oksana Chizh argued that this sense of national community or an idea of Russianness is over-emphasised in Russia. For her, this was a professional problem influencing her decision to leave the country¹².

Well, just like many large countries, it mostly cares about itself and things that going on inside first of all. And I guess there is a bridge of, you know, a lot of international coverage has to do with imperialism. Or residual imperialism, such as, you know, Russia's role in the world. And... who Russia is in the relation to these other places... Aaa, I mean it's a big country. There are a lot of problems. And ninety nine percent of what people care about obviously has to do with, you know, what they. I guess, I don't know... And also in Russia there is not so much demand for what I would really like to write. Because I write, I like to write ... about world development. You know, I like to write about things, I don't know North Korea, Palestine. International stuff. Which is not a lot of, in Russia is not really the main habit of journalism. It's not very popular. Not too many people want to know about it. (Chizh 2011)

What these two examples represent is the importance of an idea of a nation and nationalism in constructing professional identities. The formation of a social community, so called "Russianness", has to be attributed not to the state, but to Russian artists, writers, poets and philosophers, many of whom were also journalists, at least in the Russian Enlightenment period sense of the term. Being alienated from politics, great Russian thinkers and writers, who dedicated their lifetimes to grasping the thought of the nation, created a national community of values and myths (Figs 2002). Being a mythical discursive idea of a common nation, this thought of Russianness, with a distinct mentality and social logic, so precisely described in works of literature, cocoons the understanding of Russian culture today. Regrettably, there are no studies directly linking discursive ideas of national identity with the identity of journalists. However, the social patriotic duty of unifying the nation, yet again becomes a professional responsibility of the mass media and some Russian journalists in the period of transition.

Being aware of the conflicts in the elite circles for the control and domination of the mass media, media workers and audiences have continued to take a critical approach to news and political content developed in the later period of the Communist regime. In studies of media audiences in Russia, this scepticism is described as a principle of media literacy of the population

¹² Oksana Chizh was living in Moscow at the time when the interview took place, however later she left Russia not for the first time

(Mickiewicz 2000: Oates 2006). Russian audiences are 'exceptionally media-literate' (Mickiewicz 2000:15) and have a different 'media logic' (Oates 2006) from the audiences in established democracies. They, in general, distrust any form of official news sources and journalists as a whole, and deny a possibility of free and objective media existence as such. It has been observed by researchers studying Russia's cultural transition that even words like trust, democracy, freedom and other cannot just be directly translated into English, as they carry a different meaning. For example, Ellen Mickiewicz (2009:128) noted that her focus groups respondents when saying that they trusted the Channel One really meant 'indifference', in a negative sense of the term. Similarly three of the four interviewed journalists were very quick in saying that they felt professionally free; however, later told stories about fears for physical well being and learned on the job taboo topics in news. Chizh, being a journalist in an English language newspaper in Moscow, speculated:

Now, if you write for an English language media in Russian, nobody cares what you write. They want you to write you know shit about Putin and Medvedev and what not, because this is what creates a perception of the freedom of the media in Russia. So, you know, I can write on the front page of the Moscow News, Medvedev is shit even more and Putin lies about everything. And that's gonna work very very well, because the governments is gonna say 'cool!', look, we have the free media...They will go and we will see that there is no freedom of the press. Now, Russians don't speak English generally and nobody reads this except the experts...Nobody is gonna criticise or pressurise them what so ever.

There are a lot of themes that can be identified from this quotation. Nonetheless, the decision to place it with the argument of national identity was made on the grounds of looking at national identity as mediation. The idea taken from this speculation is: we know that freedom of speech does not exist, yet it does exist in the process of articulation of this idea. It is also interesting that Oksana recognises that it is mediated to nobody, that there is no audience for this mediation. As illustrated above, there are more visible channels of mediation, such as television. However, interviewed journalists recognise that the proportion of the audience reliant on these channels is relatively small.

The media logic, institutional difference and untouchable topics have a strong influence on the identity and practice of contemporary journalism in Russia. Referring to the existing situation of television control, Parfenov (2010) in the same speech mentioned above uttered: 'and federal television channels of the country are telling about different Russias'. Interview participants had a similar view to Parfenov and recognised the importance of writing about the alternative realities to the dominant national narrative.

Authorities and that part of the press, which serves this part of the society...is a relatively narrow area in Russia's life...And that person who gets the news from the television news belongs to also a relatively thin layer of people...And it can be said that these people are the real Russia, yes? if watching television and reading particular newspaper. But in reality life is a lot wider. And there are people who are not interested in politics, but they are doing important things...Form these informal institutions, connections between each other. (Petrova 2011)

Informing the forming society about the 'Other' side of Russia as an opposition to the 'Real' Russia portrayed on national television, about the informal institutions and people who are not dominant in state controlled media, was identified as a professional purpose for Julia (a journalists from a liberal national newspaper). Similar goals were articulated by other journalists

working at national as well as local levels. At the local level, professional and organisational objectives were also defined through being a media outlet dedicated to audience responses and public concerns, rather than hegemonisation of distrusted dominant political narrative. Returning to the notion of objectivity, objective reporting was described through the duality of juxtaposing dominant national narrative, or the narrative of Kremlin's media, with other narratives present in the social domain.

Concluding remarks

In this paper, early findings from PhD research on the topic of post-Communist identities of Russian journalists, have been presented and discussed through themes, relating journalistic professional identities to such notions as: the nation, cultural memory and path-dependency. The argument was not constructed for the purpose of negating the standardisation and globalisation of a journalistic professional ethos. On the contrary, using tools from Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, it was argued that professional identification is closely linked to the processes associated with cultural globalisation. Nonetheless, globalisation should be understood as a process in which journalists are becoming more familiar with professional work and doctrines in other countries, and not purely as a progression towards homogenisation.

Methodologically framed in discourse theory, this study set out to identify professional antagonisms, which have been articulated in the literature, as well as the empirical data. The analysis of self-reflection on professionalisation of journalism in Russia demonstrated that the creation of professional identity is dependent on both the national context as well as discursive myths about the Other. Discursive myths were further explored through such ideas as civic society, nation, memory and social recognition.

Moving beyond the sociological interest in the institutional norms, behaviour and structures, where journalists are frequently seen as powerless agents, this study contributes to the understanding of journalists as self-reliant and self-motivated individuals. The questions that this study addressed, thus, are: how are journalists making sense of their professional environment and what are the nodal point they use in self-identifying as a professional body with social responsibilities. In the present climate, which was already defined as transition, the knowledge about journalism, professional identification and responsibilities is needed in order to monitor the movement of power relationships, since journalism in any media system is seen as a binder between the governmental power structures and society. They are aware of articulations and antagonisms of the social and political discourses and assist in the construction of the nodal points of social/national/political identities.

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Marija Lobanova, born in 1984 in St. Petersburg, Russia. At the age of 5, my family moved to Lithuania. A year later, the Soviet Union began to fall apart, right by my house, right by my school next to the TV tower, in Lithuanian capital Vilnius. Maybe it was these few days, which are entrenched into my childhood memory that led me into this research topic, combining (post-) Communism and the media. At the age of 19, I moved to London. I studies media studies at the University of East London and Goldsmith University. And this idea, that there is something missing, something unsaid in the literature I was reading, about us, about homosovieticus, became my stalker. So here I am, trying to fill-in this little gap.

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