How States Tighten Control: A Field Theory Perspective on Journalism in Contemporary Crimea

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Abstract

This article contributes to denationalising Bourdieu’s field theory by analysing the relationship between a regional news media field, the state, and transnational influences. The article seeks to answer the question of how a state can impose limits on the autonomy of the news media field during political transition. Field theory is applied to changes that have taken place in Crimean news media since Russia’s annexation of the peninsula in 2014. Drawing on narrative interviews with journalists who worked in Crimea in 2012-2017, expert interviews, and secondary sources, I demonstrate how Crimea’s news media field went from being dominated by varied Ukrainian private news media owners to becoming dominated by the Russian state. I show that states can employ direct measures such as anti-press violence and ownership appropriation of news media outlets in order to increase concentration of state media ownership. In addition, states can reallocate capital in the news media field, disenfranchising some journalists and outlets while favouring others. The adaptive strategies of individual journalists, who, upon losing capital, can sometimes relocate or leave their jobs, also changes the composition of news media fields. Departing from a common view of social spaces as bounded within nation-states, I examine how the news media field of Crimea has been shaped by both transnational influences, and by the direct imposition of Russian state power through a reconstitution of national borders.

Keywords

Sociology of journalism, news media, media, field theory, Russia, Ukraine

Introduction

In early March 2014, Crimeans’ access to Ukrainian cable television was blocked and Ukrainian channels were replaced by Russian federal channels. As the Russian state consolidated its power on the peninsula in 2014 and 2015, six of the most influential local media outlets on the peninsula relocated from Crimea to Kyiv, and four of the most influential media outlets closed down. A plethora of new pro-Russian media outlets have opened across the peninsula and have become influential sources of knowledge about Crimea both for Crimeans and for news consumers outside the region.

How do states go about imposing limits on the autonomy of news media fields? In this article, I use Bourdieu’s field theory to show that states employ direct measures such as violence and ownership appropriation of news media outlets, and states can also redistribute capital, disenfranchising some journalists and outlets while favouring others. Adaptive strategies of individual journalists also change the composition of news media fields.

Examining efforts of the Russian state to consolidate power over Crimean media allows me to build on Bourdieu’s field theory in two ways: first, I explore the relationship of the news media field and the state; second, I contribute to literature on transnationalising Bourdieu’s concept of the field (Dezalay 2004; Russell 2007; Fligstein 2008; Sklair 2001; Savage and Silva 2013; Bühlmann, David, Mach 2013; Buchholz 2016). My contribution is twofold: while explicitly analysing the role of the state in shaping a news media field, I also consider transnational influences on news media fields despite enduring state power. The case examined in this study involves one state taking over the news media field of a region of another state, which allows me to interrogate how the occupying state reshapes a news media field and imposes new dominant discourses.

The first section of the article introduces its analytical framework, based on a bourdieusian conceptualization of the state as a monopoly on legitimate physical and symbolic violence and the ability to construct social reality through naming, classifying, and representing. The second section provides an overview of the main changes in Crimea’s media field in 2012-2017, based on an analysis of media rankings, expert interviews, and 36 narrative interviews with news media professionals who have worked in Crimean media between 2012 and 2017 for a period of at least three years.

Analytical framework

This article focuses on the ‘news media field’ in Crimea, drawing on data about journalistic work and news media production. Instead of focusing on news media fields in nationally-bound spaces (as done by Marlière 1998; Richeri 2011; Benson 2013, among others), I analyse an evolving news media field that used to be part of one state, but was taken over by another state that imposed new order on the field and worked to overcome other transnational influences. To do this, I employ field analysis (following Bourdieu 1999, 2014, 1996, 1995; Couldry 2003, Savage and Silva 2013).

This study fills a gap in emerging literature on contemporary Crimea by tracing changes that took place in the news media field since Crimea became part of Russia in 2014. Emerging literature on Crimea has focused on analyzing Russian official discourses about Crimea and Ukraine, concentrating on the media and official statements and speeches. In this vein, John Biersack and Shannon O’Lear have analyzed official Russian government narratives in the context of Russia’s greater geopolitical concerns (Biersack and O’Lear 2014). Mikhail Suslov analyzed Russian state attempts to mobilise ‘grassroots’ support of Russian policies in Ukraine and Crimea to show how the Russian state’s ‘digital geopolitics’ policies seek to empower grassroots discussions online, but end up inhibiting them (Suslov 2015). Yuri Teper has analyzed official Russian identity discourse in the light of the annexation of Crimea, arguing that the events of 2014 led to the Kremlin’s reinvention of itself as a nationalist player that employs ethno-centric rhetoric (Teper 2015). Such studies focus on the content analysis or discourse analysis of media and various online discussions. This study seeks to address the layout of and power configurations within the media field in Crimea more generally (focusing in part on media production), thus filling the gap in the literature on contemporary Crimea and the shifting media and power landscapes in the region. Instead of focusing explicitly on the media as a reflection of certain power discourses or narratives, I explore how states can reshape a news media field by redistributing economic and cultural capital within the field, and make the field more vertically autonomous (i.e. autonomous from other transnational influences).

Rodney Benson highlights a problem with Bourdieu’s concept of fields when used in research on media, namely the problem of defining the state in the field model (Benson 1999). I attempt to resolve this by elaborating on the relationship between the state and the news media field through an examination of how a state imposes its power over journalists, and how journalists react and adapt. While I locate the news media field in relation to the state, I also empirically interrogate the possibility of transnational influences on the news media field that cut across national borders.

In his definition of the state, elaborated most extensively in the work *On the State* (2014), Bourdieu broadens Weber’s definition of the state as the monopoly of legitimate violence to include the ‘monopoly of legitimate physical *and symbolic* violence’ (original emphasis, Bourdieu 2014: 4), as a meta-field which wields a ‘power over powers’ (Bourdieu 2014: 197) and which has the ability to produce instruments of construction of social reality through classifying, naming and re-naming (Bourdieu 2014: 9, 166, 67). Central to Bourdieu’s understanding of the state is the theatricalization of the state and the production of its symbolic effects through the staging of the official (Bourdieu 2014: 26), which mirrors Joel Migdal’s conceptualisation of the state as ‘a field of power upheld by the threat of violence and shaped by (1) the image of a coherent controlling organization in a territory, which is a representation of the people bounded by that territory and (2) the actual practices of its multiple parts’ (Migdal 2009: 16). Both Bourdieu and Migdal emphasize the importance of representations in addition to state practices and the materiality of the state, an important point to be made in a context of territorial contestation between the Russian state and the Ukrainian state in 2014 in relation to the Crimean peninsula. Not only was Russia seeking to enact state practices in the region to establish de-facto control, but the Russian state also had to produce new representations of Crimea as a part of Russian territory. The aspect of representation made it crucial for the state to use news media in order to enact its power.

Bourdieu speaks of a ‘coup d’etat from which the state was born’ as attesting to ‘an extraordinary symbolic act of force, which consisted in getting universally accepted, within the limits of a certain territorial jurisdiction that is constructed by way of the construction of this dominant point of view’ (Bourdieu 2014: 68-69), and the route to attaining such universal acceptance is riddled with tasks to impose a dominant discourse throughout social life. While taken-for-granted discourse that has been accepted as coherent is termed ‘doxa’ by Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1999: 166), discourse that ‘involves a challenge and possible resistance’ is termed ‘orthodox discourse’ (Schinkel 2015: 226). If doxa is entirely unquestioned, orthodoxy is rather an ‘official way of speaking and thinking the world… which delimits the universe of possible discourse… in relation to heterodoxy, which involves challenge’ (Schinkel 2015: 226). While in his assessment of Bourdieu’s *On the State* Willem Schinkel argues that the state could be more consistently seen as a principle of doxa instead of orthodoxy (Schinkel 2015: 226), I would argue that the case of Russia claiming Crimea in the years after 2014 is an empirical case of a state constructing orthodoxy. This is because there exist discourses that challenge Russia’s control of the peninsula (from the side of Ukraine, from journalists who based in Kyiv, from other international and transnational actors), which constitute a heterodoxy that counters the orthodox discourse of Crimea being Russian. Thus the idea of Crimea being part of Russia is an orthodox discourse of the Russian state, challenged by some actors on the international arena (as most of the international community does not recognise Crimea as a part of the Russian Federation) and by other actors such as marginalized journalists (who I will discuss in the sections below). This study shows how the Russian state imposes its orthodoxy on the journalistic field, and how actors in the journalist field react to this imposition.

I address the imposition of state power in Crimea through an empirical analysis of how the state redistributes economic and cultural capital among journalists. According to Bourdieu, the state constitutes its ‘power above powers’ by accumulating and concentrating capital (Bourdieu 2014: 197). Economic and cultural capital are two fundamental principles of differentiation that produce the structure of social space (Bourdieu 1996: 5); these forms of capital are forms of power within the field (Bourdieu 1996: 265). The state, then, is concerned first and foremost with the distribution of capital and valuation of forms of capital across social space (Bourdieu 2014: 99). According to Benson and Neveu, in the news media field (or journalistic field) economic capital is expressed by news media rankings or by funding of news outlets, while cultural capital can be comprised of professional awards, for example (Benson and Neveu 2005: 4). The ‘Findings’ section below is based largely on how the Russian state cuts off some journalists from certain forms of capital, and endows others with increasing capital.

In their work on fields, Benson (1999) and Bourdieu (1998) speak of social spaces as bound by nation-states. Departing from this tradition, I will speak of a regional social space that is caught between two national social spaces that overlap due to their (mostly) common linguistic space (much of the news produced in Ukraine is also in Russian, and many Crimeans understand Ukrainian and can be consumers of Ukrainian-language news produced by Ukrainian-based organizations today). Thus, instead of drawing cross-national comparisons like those Benson (1999) suggests, I draw a comparison between one period in Crimea’s history (when social fields were dominated by Ukrainian structures) and another (when Crimea’s social fields merged with Russia’s). In order to understand Crimea’s regional social space as influenced by transnational forces that include different national social spaces, I use Larissa Buchholz’s idea of the ‘multi-scalar architecture’ of fields, which includes relationships horizontally between different fields such as the news media field and fields of power of different states, and relationships vertically between fields within states and the global field (Buchholz 2016: 52).

Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of the state has been critiqued for its reliance on the highly centralized French state model, which depicts a powerful state as having the ‘final say’ (Schinkel 2015: 229). This leaves studies which draw from Bourdieu’s conceptualisation open to critiques of methodological nationalism (Savage and Silva 2013: 121). While my study in part pushes back against an entirely state-centric view and argues for a transnationalization of field theory, one the major actors I focus on is the Russian state, which is indeed highly centralized, not least when it comes to control over Russian media (Nazarov 2018: 259-261; Zvereva 2012: 10). In this way, while I empirically interrogate the influences of actors beyond the Russian state in the social space of Crimea, I am also arguing for the recognition that some states are highly centralized and very powerful, and I incorporate both of these trends into my analysis of a news media field. Thus I show that a news media field can simultaneously come under both transnational influences (which can strengthen and wane with time), and the imposition of a single centralised state.

There are two potential limitations to deploying a transnationalized version of field theory in an analysis of contemporary Crimea. Firstly, the ‘transnational’ dimensions of field dynamics in Crimea at first glance stem from one state’s takeover of another state’s territory (i.e. Russia taking over part of Ukraine; this event is narrated in Russian official discourse as “Crimea’s reunification with Russia”). The second limitation lies in the fact that Bourdieu, when speaking of acts of the state, referred to how the state (political actors, sate elites, the state bureaucracy, agents of the state) uses law and other regulatory powers to impose its political power, while the Crimean case is one of a state’s direct occupation of a territory. The first limitation can be overcome by a deeper reading of the situation in contemporary Crimea: while one state indeed took over the territory of another state and consolidated its power over that territory, this involved the state’s struggle to wrench the region’s media field from one social space (Ukrainian), integrate it into another social space (Russian), and limit the influences of other transnational information flows (for example, from US- or EU- funded media outlets). This struggle took place against some resistance emanating from not only the Ukrainian state, but also from other international actors such as American or European funding bodies that used to finance Crimean media before 2014 (I discuss this in the section on funding below). This struggle and the continued existence of media outlets that have relocated to Kyiv that continue report critical news on Crimea today can be fruitfully analysed through a lens that recognizes the existence of international and transnational actors who work at the intersection of different nation-states. Moreover, it can be argued that Russia’s takeover of Crimea was also made possible in 2014 in part by transnational links between this Ukrainian territory and the Russian state through Russian federal state-owned media (which were popular among the Crimean population before 2014) and other cultural ties and influences. The second limitation (Bourdieu’s account of state actions as bureaucratic actions as opposed to occupation and takeover) can be mitigated by simply attempting to extend field theory to the analysis what happens after an occupation is launched by a state, and to a situation in which that state consolidates its power: when one state occupies or takes over the territory of another state, a new ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘doxa’ must be put in place to normalise and legitimise the action. The formation of the ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘doxa’ can occur both in the case of state action within its own territory (as Bourdieu discusses it) and in the case of takeover of another territory, as both situations constitute a state crackdown over various fields in the social space. In this way, this study extends field theory both to a situation of multiple state influences on one regional field, and to a situation of one state’s takeover of and power consolidation over another state’s territory.

This article maps changes in a regional news media field, and explains how the Russian state began to dominate and shape the regional Crimean news media field. I base my analysis partly on ownership of media, emphasising that the increase in the concentration of media ownership in the hands of the Russian state is a manifestation of increasing power of the Russian state (Murdock 1994), explaining how this comes about, and recounting how local journalists react to and narrate the changes.

Not all media are examined here, but specifically news media. I use the term ‘news media field’ instead of ‘journalistic field’ in order the reflect the complex relationships and tasks news workers carry out today on the job, beyond what is traditionally understood as the ‘journalism’ role. Thus I view ‘news media field’ to be broader than the term ‘journalistic field’ in terms of the types of media workers it includes, but to be more focused on news in particular, which is important for this article due to news media’s explicit relationship with and depictions of politics. In my approach, news media includes traditional organized forms like television news, newspapers, radio, and online news websites. Social media lies beyond the scope of this study.

This study is based on data gathered during fieldwork in Moscow, Kyiv, and in cities across Crimea in 2016-2017, which includes media rankings, expert interviews, and 36 narrative interviews with news media professionals who have worked in Crimean media between 2012 and 2017 for a period of at least three years. The initials of interviewees quoted have been anonymised. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Sociology, University of Cambridge, and study participants have signed consent forms.

Findings and analysis: Redistribution of capital among local journalists and media outlets

This section offers an overview of how the Russian state redistributed different forms of capital available to local journalists in Crimea after the annexation of the peninsula in order to secure state power over the news media field, and how local journalists reacted to these changes. I highlight the following mechanisms of capital redistribution and discuss how local journalists adapted to each:

1. Ownership over the media (and, by extension, the distribution of economic capital among journalists) became concentrated in the hands of the Russian state;
2. The state and state agents deployed physical violence against journalists;
3. Foreign funders were delegitimised by the state (thereby limiting the type of economic capital available for media projects).
4. The state began to reward reproduction of a dominant orthodox discourse (granting cultural capital and economic capital to certain journalists through awards and honours);
5. The Russian state changed patterns of how journalists access information and sources for their reporting (capital specific to the news media field was either granted to journalists or cut off from them).

Each mechanism is elaborated upon in the sections that follow.

Increasing concentration of state ownership over the media

This section highlights the main changes that took place in Crimean media ownership (and, by extension, in the distribution of state-issued economic capital) since 2014. This includes a movement away from a differentiated media environment with a large fraction of private media ownership towards an environment with greater control over the media on the part of the Russian state; and a movement away from private ownership (i.e. influence from the economic field). As shown in Table I and Figure I, the Crimean media field changed drastically between 2012 and 2017. Few media sources from the period prior to 2014 remained at the top of media professionals’ radars in the post-2014 period under Russia. While in 2012-2013, there were six main media owners (five private owners, and the state), in 2016-2017 the media landscape became dominated by just 4 main owners: the state (owning five of the main outlets directly, and controlling another two operationally), and three private owners (two of which own state-controlled media outlets, and one of which has an editorial position supportive of the Russian state).

**[TABLE I HERE]**

The data in Table I and Figure I are drawn from interviews conducted among news media professionals in Crimea in June-July 2016 and in January-March 2017. The interviews included a question about what the interviewees consider to have been the ‘most influential’ news sources in Crimea in 2012-2013, and a question about what they consider to be the ‘most influential’ news sources in Crimea in 2016-2017. Their answers included both the most-cited news sources and the most-viewed news sources among audiences. Four of the news media professionals interviewed had experience in consulting advertising agencies about distribution of advertisements in the media sphere. I cross-referenced the media professionals’ responses, and the news sources mentioned by a minimum of 6 interviewees were included in Table I. The ownership structure of each of the highly ranked outlets was then checked in the Russian database SPARK-Interfax and on the database of Ukraine’s Ministry of Justice, which contain information about funding and shares. This information helped to generate the graph shown in Figure I, which is based on data from Table I.

**[FIGURE I HERE]**

Due to the differing ways in which news rankings are organized in Russia and in Ukraine, it is impossible to compare Crimean news outlet citation indices in 2012-2013 with citation indices from 2016-2017. It is also not possible to compare news consumption among Crimeans in 2012-2013 with consumption in 2016-2017 for lack of comparable data. Surveying journalists about the news outlets they deem ‘most influential’ is one way to solve this dilemma. Moreover, it is a useful strategy because journalists are familiar with the local press, and because they partake in what Bourdieu calls ‘the circular circulation of information’, quoting other news outlets and competing with them for being the first to publish information (Bourdieu 1998: 23)

However, surveying journalists does not directly reveal patterns of news consumption or patterns of news outlet citation. In order to understand whether the journalists surveyed listed generally popular and generally citable new outlets, the data from Table I was triangulated with data that was available, namely two sources: a) a ranking of ‘most influential’ Crimean news sources for September 17-23 2012, conducted by the Ukrainian ‘Regional Program *Obshchestvennoe mnenie’* (2012: 64), based on influence as measured by a survey about news media consumption among the economically active population of Crimea; and b) a ranking of ‘most influential’ Crimean news sources for July-September 2016 and July-September 2017, conducted by the Russian media ranking organization ‘*Medialogiya,*’ based on influence as measured by citation index. These two sources cannot be compared with each other, as the former is based on audience consumption, while the latter is based on citations.

Nonetheless, comparing the data with news sources named by journalists in the survey conducted here shows a full overlap with the data for 2012-2013, and a significant overlap with the data for 2016-2017. All the seven news sources for 2012-2013 from Table I were also ranked among the most popular news sources in Crimea by Ukrainian ‘Regional Program *Obshchestvennoe mnenie’* in 2012. Six of the nine news outlets listed in Table I for 2016-2017 correspond with the most-cited news sources ranked by the Russian company *‘Medialogiya’* for July-September 2016 and July-September 2017. This implies that news consumption, news citation, and perceptions of influential news outlets among local journalists have a significant degree of overlap, indicating that the outlets listed in Table I are indeed generally significant local news sources in Crimea.

Crimea has gone from less concentrated ownership in the media field to more concentrated ownership. In 2012-2013, the seven most influential media outlets in Crimea were owned by six main owners: five of the media outlets belonged to five different individual enterpreneurs, and two of the outlets belonged to the state (one to the government at the regional level, one to the central government in Kyiv). In 2016-2017 under Russia, the media became dominated by four main owners. The state controls seven of the eight most influential outlets, and of those seven, five are state-owned, while two are privately owned yet state-controlled (the category ‘state-controlled’ is discussed in greater detail below). Four of those seven outlets are controlled at the regional level and three are controlled by the federal government in Moscow (Ukrainian Ministry of Justice; SPARK-Interfax; expert interview with a former director general of a state-run Russian news agency). Most of the other news sources that remained ‘influential’ across both periods changed ownership from the Ukrainian state in the pre-2014 period to the Russian state in the post-2014 period.

Ukrainian state-owned sources *GTRK Krym* (television) and *Krymskoe informatsionnoe agentstvo* (information agency) were taken over by the Russian state after Russia established its de-facto control over Crimea. *GTRK Krym* was then divided into two state channels, *Krym 24* and *Pervyi Krymskii telekanal*. The news agency *Krymskoe informatsionnoe agentstvo* halted its work in 2014 and was launched again under new ownership in the spring of 2016, with a new chief editor and new journalists, becoming one of the ‘new entrants’ in the media field.

Violence against journalists

Three journalists interviewed for this study mentioned fears for their physical safety in connection with professional activities. Importantly, the sample analysed here excludes most journalists who relocated to Kyiv after 2014, who had greater fears for their safety than those who remained on the peninsula (interviews with those who relocated from Crimea will be included in my further work on this topic).

Russian authorities have also prosecuted a journalist in court. In September 2017 after a court case initiated in April 2016, Crimean Journalist Mykola Semena was convicted by Russian authorities of separatism for denouncing Russia’s annexation of Crimea in his 2015 article for the news outlet *Krym.Realii*, a part of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. He was given a 2.5-year suspended sentence and a ban on journalistic and public activity for the coming three years. Interviewees also claimed that many of the journalists who left Crimea fled from threats of physical violence, and the apartments of five of their journalist colleagues had been searched by the Russian authorities for weapons and for evidence that they had written articles supporting the return of Crimea to Ukraine.

In addition to the court case, in 2016 the Federal Financial Monitoring Service of the Russian Federation, which monitors compliance with Russia’s anti-extremism and anti-terrorism legislation, updated its ‘list of terrorists and extremists’ to include two Crimean journalists (among a total of over 6000 people).[[1]](#footnote-1) The list included Mykola Semena, mentioned above, as well as Anna Andrievskaya of the Centre for Journalistic Investigations, a grant-funded investigative journalism outlet based in Crimea until 2014. Including the names of journalists among terrorists shows the high degree of securitisation of the media by the Russian state; an agent in the news media field is deemed by the state as an existential threat. The fact that only Crimean journalists were included in the list indicates that Crimea the Russian government focuses especially on Crimea in its securitisation practices.

Delegitimizing non-Russian, international funding of media

In pre-annexation Crimea, the local news media field was characterised by the possibility for some news sources to be funded by foreign grant-making organizations. Foreign organisations like USAID offered alternative stocks of capital to journalists, beyond those offered by the Ukrainian state and Ukrainian private business owners, bringing Crimean journalists into the global news media field by engaging them in topics that the grant-makers were ready to fund (interviews with R.A. and A.I.). Due to a series of laws passed in Russia in 2014-2017 that limit foreign funding of NGOs and media, this global capital stock was cut off from local journalists in Russian-controlled Crimea. Several influential media headquarters moved from Crimea to Kyiv following the political changes that took place on the peninsula in 2014 at least in part because they were unable to otherwise secure funding and were becoming marginalized by rapidly losing economic and cultural capital in the Crimean news media field. By moving to Kyiv, these marginalized journalists could challenge the newly forming Crimean news media field from the ‘outside’, while the local Crimean media field became more vertically autonomous both from Ukrainian media and from international funding.

Since 2014, foreign grants have been delegitimized both in Russian official discourse, and among many study participants who continue to work in journalism in Crimea. Journalists I interviewed in Crimea spoke negatively of journalists they referred to as ‘grant-eaters’ (*grantoedy*), a term used to denigrate journalists who would receive foreign grants for their media activities (this term has been used across the post-Soviet space, in Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and in Ukraine: see, for example, Skibo 2017; Ishkanian 2016, 116; Phillips 2008, 70;). The journalists I interviewed who remained in Crimea in the post-2014 period engage in ‘othering’ the ‘grant-eaters’, claiming they were paid to advance a pro-Western agenda.

In answer to my question about how the media landscape of Crimea changed in comparison to the pre-2014 period, 12 of the journalists I interviewed claimed that a major change that took was the disappearance of ‘grant-eaters’ from the landscape. The chief editor of a top-ranking local information agency in the post-2014 period said that before 2014, ‘grant money played its role [in Crimea], American [money]…’ which financed investigative journalism projects, and that in their absence, ‘now we don’t have that. Life has become calmer, frankly.’ The other journalists who mentioned foreign grants would associate media professionals who received grants with a ‘pro-Western’, anti-Russian political stance and reporting agenda. J.J., a journalist who currently works in Crimea and who worked for a Russian state-funded TV channel before 2014, notes:

*‘Earlier, a large segment of the [media] market was taken up by so-called ‘grant-eaters’ ­– those who received grants from international organisations to conduct pro-European and pro-Ukrainian policies here. And moreover, a huge number of people were hired to talk about disenfranchised Crimean Tatars and other such things – those who worked against making Crimea Russian and worked for integrating it into Europe. There were many opportunities for this. And then, later, those who worked in this information specialisation, and whose soul was in it, left mostly for Kyiv.’ –* J.J., journalist at state-owned regional TV channel

In this quote, J.J. describes grant-receiving organisations leaving Crimea after 2014, associates the grants with an anti-Russian critical agenda, and speaks of a divide between the grant agenda and the non-grant agenda. To J.J., the divide is partly determined by ethnic belonging:

*‘Crimean Tatars were in coalition with Ukrainian nationalists, Western grant-eaters, who usually sat in the same buildings and shared office chairs, got by through getting different resources together, but always coordinated their slander efforts and would decide whom to target together... That’s why right now they are pouring dirt over Crimea, some of them from Kyiv from nationalistic outlets of Ukraine, others on ATR [a privately owned Crimean Tatar channel now based in Kyiv.].’ –* J.J., journalist at state-owned regional TV channel

Similarly, the journalist M.B., who used to work for a state-owned newspaper under Ukraine, and worked for a top-ranking state-owned Crimean information agency under Russia at the time of interview, uses the word ‘they’ to allude to both the ‘grant-eaters’ and their funders. He claims that foreign funders were ‘butting in with all their Western trickery’, and argues that the grant-funded journalists were not doing their work due to their values or ideological preferences, but rather for money: ‘They write whatever they get paid to write. Back then [before 2014] they were paid by the Poles, Canadians, and the USA’.

M.B. also recalled that foreign funding involved travel to international journalism seminars. The process of Crimean journalists obtaining foreign funding and traveling to meet other journalists from other countries could be interpreted as a process of a transnational journalistic sub-group developing ‘its own meeting places, networks and recruiting channels, which are very likely to feed back into and thereby transform’ the local media field (Bühlmann, David, Mach, 2013: 213). Yet this internationalised group and ‘Western’ grant-making organisations are not trusted by journalists like J.J. and M.B; M.B. contends that ‘Western’ grants constitute a propaganda effort that reprograms the minds of audiences:

‘*Frankly, I have to say I did not find these seminars interesting. They’re aimed at neuro-linguistic programming, but that whole scheme was just too simple for me: ‘You have to repeat things, you have to use cyclical forms, influence the subcortex.’ They taught stuff that was just obvious to me from the very start… They were teaching us that we had to write like this. And in the end, you got the Euromaidan, because people got certain things written into their subcortex.* – M.B., journalist at top-ranking state-owned Crimean information agency under Russia

Indeed, as the study participants argued, a major change in the media environment of Crimea became the relocation of many influential media headquarters from Crimea to Kyiv following the political changes that took place on the peninsula in 2014. In total, by 2017 there were six news outlets based in Kyiv that cover Crimean news and that employ journalists who left the peninsula after 2014. The physical relocation of news offices has brought about an exodus of about 70 journalists from Crimea to Kyiv (expert interview with journalist who resettled to Kyiv U.U., expert interview with Kyiv-based journalist L.L. who reported on and helped with resettlement of Crimeans to Kyiv).

After relocating to Kyiv, the news outlets mentioned here continued to cover events in Crimea from their Kyiv headquarters. Their journalists, however, have trouble obtaining access to sources and information in Crimea (interview with A.A.). In a situation where these relocated news outlets do not have in-person access to sources and are based outside the region, their capital and influence fall, and thus the landscape of knowledge production about the region shifts to those who are reporting from the region. This could also partly explain why the outlets that have relocated have disappeared from rankings based on citations; another important explanation is the Russian government’s efforts to block access to some of the websites of the Kyiv-based outlets from within Crimea (the websites are still accessible via VPN, but this makes it difficult to track the number of views that come from Crimea specifically). It is difficult to discern whether former audiences of the news sources that have relocated continued to obtain their information from these news sources after their relocation; yet interviews and observation indicate that the journalists who stayed in Crimea are aware of these outlets’ critical stance towards the Russian political sphere. The newsroom of the multilingual Russian state-funded Crimean Tatar channel *Millet* featured a television screen that aired the Kyiv-based anti-Russian Crimean Tatar channel *ATR*, and during observation sessions at Millet, news producers would watch *ATR* news reports. Thus the journalists of Millet, a new entrant in the Crimean media sphere in the post-2014 period, take into account the news reported on the critical Kyiv-based channel *ATR*, which partly has the same target audience as Millet. While the news reports may seem entrenched in national and even nationalistic discourse, they actually engage with one another and *Millet* produces news reports that indirectly respond to *ATR*. These processes point to the need for us to analyse the intersections of different nation-states in one social space, stressing the ‘national’ sources of news produced in a ‘transnational’ space.

Rewards for reproduction of orthodox discourse

Recent studies show that the Russian state has actively used media to disseminate an orthodox (or dominant and defined by the state as ‘correct’) discourse about Russia’s involvement in Ukraine and the broader geopolitical context throughout 2014 and thereafter. Studies show that the state’s consolidated messages have been dominant in Russian media in this period, and that the orthodox discourses include a vilification of ‘the West’ and Ukraine and a turn to Russian ethno-nationalism and neo-imperialism. The media efforts in 2014 and thereafter are part of a ‘popular geopolitics’ (Tuathail 1999), an image of geopolitical contestation disseminated in the media and in cultural production more broadly. In the case of the annexation of Crimea, popular geopolitics in the media was part of ‘considerable ideological labor in renaming, rethinking, and re-feeling of this territory’ of Crimea (Suslov 2014, 588).

According to media and communications studies, Russian news relies heavily on statements made by top government officials and Kremlin-friendly experts, which turns the media into one of the mouthpieces for state discourses. As Bourdieu puts it, ‘states state… They make ‘statements’,’ and in the Russian case these statements are delivered through the media (Bourdieu 2014: 11). Russian president Vladimir Putin is the primary newsmaker and the main source of political messages that are then explained by the media (Teper 2015, 380). Studies show that official identity discourse among top government officials and in state-controlled media has shifted ‘from the state to the nation’ in 2014-2015, entering a stage of ‘official acclamation of national ethnicization trends launched during his [Putin’s] third presidential term’ which replaces ‘Putin’s earlier largely statist, and for the most part non-ethnic, rhetoric in the 2000s’ (Teper 2015, 379). While in 2016-2018 ethnonationalist themes were once again slightly toned down in official discourse, the media and official discourse still offered a ‘strong differentiation between Russians and Ukrainians’ in 2014 and thereafter, with many news channels airing a large number of reports on events in Ukraine in the news and focusing on the new acting Ukrainian government (Teper 2015, 391) as puppets of a ‘Western’-backed coup (Biersack and O’Lear 2014, 248). The reports focus on neo-Nazis and far-right extremists threatening to commit or committing violence ‘against ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers in Ukraine’ (Biersack and O’Lear 2014, 249) and describing the post-2014 government in Kyiv as a ‘’fascist junta’ that threatened Russians’ (Biersack and O’Lear 2014, 249). In this way, studies have shown that ethnic differentiation between Russians and Ukrainians, the nationalistic image of the new Kyiv-based government and the fascist threat in Ukraine, and the image of Russians as victims of ethno-nationalist violence have dominated the statements of Russian politicians and media reports since 2014.

Crimean news outlets, dominated by Russian state ownership after 2014, fell into line with the dominant discourses aired on major national state-owned channels. The Russian state bureaucracy has rewarded local news outlets for reproducing orthodox discourse by granting them media licenses and Russian documentation that allows them to distribute the news (some outlets encountered problems, others registered relatively more easily), and by allowing them to retain control over editorial policy. The only privately owned newspaper that retains control over its editorial policy seemingly without operational intervention from the Russian government after 2014 is the newspaper *Krymskaya pravda*, owned by its 13 editorial board members in shares (SPARK-Interfax). This newspaper was ranked as influential across both periods and is pro-Russian, having supported Russia’s annexation of the peninsula in 2014. Its editorial policy in both 2012-2013 and 2016-2017 can be described as pro-Russian ethno-nationalist. The chief editor describes the pre-2014 period following the breakup of the Soviet Union as a period during which the newspaper ‘fought the Ukrainian state all those 25 years. Because we don’t recognize Ukrainian statehood, we don’t recognize the Ukrainian language, we don’t recognize any of it. For us, Russia is our homeland. We want to be in Russia. We wanted it, and we won it. Our dream came true’. The chief editor describes the editorial policy of the paper in the following manner: ‘*Krymskaya pravda* is an openly pro-Russian newspaper. For us, Russia is our homeland, not a foreign country. This was the most important thing. We are in open opposition to the Ukrainian state’. Thus, the only non-state-controlled privately owned influential news outlet in Crimea in 2016-2017 is aligned with the Russian state’s dominant (orthodox) discourses.

Reproduction of the dominant discourse was also rewarded by Putin when he awarded 300 Russian journalists prestigious medals, among them ‘Order of Service to the Fatherland’ medals, for their coverage of Crimea’s ascension to Russia. The award was an act of the state bestowing symbolic, cultural capital upon journalists. The list of journalists and the text of the executive order were not made public, but the Russian daily business newspaper *Vedomosti* spoke with an anonymous source who had seen the text of the executive order. According the source, the order bestowed medals upon 300 media professionals ‘for high professionalism and objectivity in their coverage of the events in the Republic of Crimea’.[[2]](#footnote-2) About one-third of the 300 awarded journalists were from the state media holding *VGTRK,* another 60 were from the state-owned *Pervyi kanal* which has nationwide reach*,* and ‘a few dozen’ from state-owned *NTV* with nationwide reach*, RT* (formerly Russia Today), and pro-Kremlin *Life News[[3]](#footnote-3)*. The awards are not only symbolic, but also have an economic component: for example, the ‘Order of Service to the Fatherland’ medal adds an additional 330 to 41 percent to one’s basic state pension monthly, and any other state medal also allows one to receive additional state benefits.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Changing how journalists access sources and information

The journalists who remained and continue to work in Crimea have begun to draw predominantly on state-owned outlets in the post-2014 period. This means that no matter what outlet they work for, they are likely to orient their work towards events that are covered by state-owned media. This can also be explained by the fact that state-owned media outlets have easiest access to sources of information like state officials, and thus their reports are more reliable for other journalists to quote. The same group of professionals that claims only state-controlled media outlets are influential in 2016 drew on media outlets with a wide variety of owners prior to 2014, which underscores the trend of state consolidation of the media sphere in Crimea today.

The chief editor of *Kryminform,* which tops citation charts,describes ‘total openness… and much more information and events than is needed’ on politics. ‘You have to go to everything, but we don’t have enough people. Some ministries are already upset with us for not covering their events,’ he claimed. This shows that the government has supported *Kryminform* with accessas a new entrant in the field, therefore the agency has not had trouble competing with old players. The offices of *Kryminform* are located in the same building as Crimea’s Ministry of Information, as well as all other news outlets funded by the regional government. According to journalist R.A., Crimea’s Ministry of Information funded *Kryminform’s* new press conference hall in 2016 and uses it for its own press conferences, and the outlet was launched with the support of Russian state-owned information agency *TASS* in 2014. For these reasons I have classified *Kryminform* as an operationally state-controlled outlet.

New-entrant news agencies swiftly gained capital in the field by having privileged access to official sources, while their competitors among the previously successful outlets suffered from limited access, as well as from violence and threats of violence. State actors, having granted economic and cultural capital to these favoured new entrants, use media meta-capital to accumulate their own political capital through becoming the ‘dominant news sources and agenda setters for the news’ (Davis and Seymore 2010: 743).

Conclusions and implications

In this article, I used data from fieldwork in Crimea, Kyiv, and Moscow to show that a news media field can lose autonomy due to the imposition of state power, while simultaneously being connected to some transnational actors. This study contributes efforts to denationalise field theory, and extends field theory to a situation where one state took over part of a territory of another state. In this way, the national borders often taken for granted in studies employing field theory have been empirically challenged. I have shown that a news media field can have a ‘multi-scalar architecture’ which includes interdependencies at global and national levels, so that agents pursue multiple strategies of obtaining higher positions both on the national level and on the global level (Buchholz 2016: 52). In Crimea, the pre-2014 Crimean media field and the post-2014 Crimean media field are not only connected to the Ukrainian and Russian fields of power respectively, but are also connected to each other and to a global media field, thus the relative autonomy of a field is not only horizontal in relation to other fields in the national social space, but it can also be vertical in relation to other national fields or the global field.

Transnational links between journalists who have worked in Crimea before and after Russia’s annexation of the peninsula highlight the complex inter-field dynamics both horizontally (between the news media field and the field of power) and vertically (between the news media fields of different states and the global news media field). While the news media field of Crimea has become more vertically autonomous from the global field in the post-2014 period, it retains some links with the Ukrainian news media field via exiled journalists who report on Crimea from afar. The journalists who left Crimea and relocated to Kyiv, in turn, are vertically linked to global news media fields through their work with Western grant-making organisations and Western news media outlets, which offer transnationally relevant stocks of capital to the outlets through funding and training (like USAID grants). The news media field of Crimea under de-facto Russian control sometimes offers a refraction of Ukrainian and global news discourses, but their relevant stocks of capital are defined mostly by the Russian state.

Further steps in the study of how states exercise power over medial fields can include the analysis of how particular groups of journalists were marginalized in Crimea after 2014, and how some of these marginalized groups began to challenge the system. A closer look at the strategies employed by journalists who left Crimea and moved to Kyiv, in contrast with journalists who stayed, would shed light on how fields are reconstituted during rapid political change and state crackdown, and how transnational communities of journalists can emerge.

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