

EXPLORING MORAL FUNDAMENTALISM IN TABLOID JOURNALISM

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A decrease in referential journalism and an increase in storyness, growing visualisation and breaking down the distinction between the news, construction of mediated public events, feature stories and promotional discourse are moving further and further into the mainstream of journalistic representation. At the backdrop of the debates going on in contemporary sociology, I would like to argue that the standards for evaluating political implications of the symbolic environment, which are rooted in classical modernity, cannot be applied to the evaluation of contemporary symbolic production, including media texts and journalism. Critical evaluation of new journalistic practices should recognise the need to transform the standards applied to media texts in high-modernity. Visualisation, the soft news agenda, humanisation and narrativisation shouldn't be considered any longer as the opposite of emancipatory discourse typically considered to be embodied in the journalistic transfer of politically significant information. However, new journalistic practices cannot be evaluated according to ahistorical standards in the face of changed sensibility in high modern societies and changed boundaries between the social and the political.

According to the debates taking place in non-mainstream sociology, the relationship between the individual and society is basically changed: old sociality is evaporating. This article suggests reconstructing the notion of emancipatory journalistic discourse by using contemporary sociological theorising to discuss the effects of fictionalisation, visualisation, humanisation and self-referentiality in contemporary journalism. In other words, the social changes are and should be summarised by new cultural devices. I would like to argue that the evaluation of the new symbolic representations should be considered at the backdrop of the sociological reflection of contemporary society.

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My own principal interest here is popular journalism which I consider at first a general term for journalism where the **transfer of information** is of secondary importance in communicating the “reality.” The **poetic form** with which the “reality” is communicated is of primary importance to the meaning transmitted and, in many cases, to the self-identity of this journalism. This does not mean that some forms of popular journalism could not be referential. Let’s take, for example, the tabloid daily papers that refer to reality in their news reports. Their self-conception and self-legitimation are based on a supposed referential account of the world even though it is fictionalised — written in a story mode. My notion of popular journalism includes tabloid journalism but also contemporary feature journalism found in specialised magazines, trend magazines, feature television, in a word, “new New Journalism.” The discursive community fostered by the latter is basically different from the community fostered by “populist” journalism (daily or weekly tabloid journalism) and so are its political implications. I will try to provide here a framework within which the relationship between individual and community, fostered textually by tabloid journalism, can be understood. Further, my intention is to make some conclusions on the political implications of its discursive community.

Although we should be aware of the economic interests involved in selfreferentiality, visualisation, storyness, etc., I would like to argue that the accounts of popular journalism that believe to trace the political implications of new trends in journalism by reflecting only its economical motivation inevitably fail to explain the politics of popular journalism because they cannot address the question of **how the meaning is created in each particular journalistic text, and how it can get fixed and, in the long run, naturalised.**

Selfreferentiality, consumer aesthetics and promotional rhetoric of trend or feature magazines, for example, are commercial undertakings, but their politics is to be traced and analysed with reference to identity construction through consumption. Consumption, conceptualised as a symbolic activity, plays an important role as means of “identitarian existence.” Taste-makers function and rhetorics of advertising should be therefore discussed with reference to the identities having lost their self-evident quality and being, in high modernity, increasingly at stake for discursive controversy. Accordingly, it should be approached within the debate over new forms of identity building and collective integration in contemporary society. Rather than talking about the demise of the public man via new trends in journalism, and thus equating its “non-political” agenda or e.g. growing visualisation of the content with its non-emancipatory effects, these new forms should be examined first according to **the type of collective integration (relationship of the individual with the community)** they promote. Or, to put it differently, **the simulated society these forms textually invent** should be explored. Second, the moral vision each particular journalistic discourse tends to promote should be judged at the backdrop of the reflection of changed formations and sensibilities in high-modernity.

Sociality Created Textually

A central assumption of our discussion is the existence of an integral link between the **narrative** and the **social**.¹ Narrativity (or even story mode) has a central position in popular accounts of “real” events. Contemporary trends in selfreferential feature journalism and construction of events and personalities demand narrativisation—

there is no referent in the outside world to hold it in objectivistic discourse. I am therefore particularly concerned with the role of narrative in the representational machinery of popular journalism. Many times the narrativisation itself constructs the subject of the news report, not the “real” event or issue. **Media narratives construct a separate social reality.** Metaphorically speaking, narrativisation of the real world creates a world of its own. Further, the moral meaning is inevitably present in any narrative account of the “real” events and issues. In Hayden White’s words: “The demand for closure ... in the story...is a demand for moral meaning.” (1987, 24). This demand arises out of a desire to have “reality” display the coherence and integrity of an image of reality that can only be imagined with subjects as social types, beginnings, middles and ends that enable us to see “the end in every beginning.” This implies that each narrative account of the world **promotes a specific kind of notion of citizenship, collective integration and moral vision of the world.**

The point is not, however, that we should be looking for the “basic story” or “real story,” “deep structure” or absolute “truth” behind the constructed world. The central dilemma is not how close “the telling” transmits “the told” or how close the story comes to the reality, but about the **properties of the world created by “the telling,”** about the **discursive universe** created by the narrativisation of the reality. Even news are stories about reality, not reality itself. They are cultural constructions and each specific narrativisation excludes other possible narrativisations. The dimensions of the world constructed by these stories are important, since the constructed reality further contributes to the constitution of the reality of the public or to the public voice. It contributes to the constitution of the community “built upon members sharing the same stories” (Dahlgren 1992, 15). The construction of meaning takes place in socio-political context and plays a role in the construction of that context.

According to the assumption that there is an integral link between the narrative and the social, the social integration and the form of citizenship popular storytelling journalism promotes should be discussed at the backdrop of contemporary sociality. Hence, it should be viewed within the context of discussion of the cultural logic of contemporary society. The following aspects of contemporary sociality are of central importance for our discussion: **new ways of identity formation** — individual identity is increasingly at the stake for discursive controversy; **detraditionalised morality and selfhood** — the decline of the belief in pre-given order of things (e.g., Heelas 1996); **the individualisation of the society** — individualised personal identities formed by autonomous identity formation (Beck, 1992, 1995); **new collectivities replacing old collective integration** (particularly the class conflict taken over by the conflict over the means of “identitarian existence” as the basic antagonism in contemporary world).² In late modernity, access to means of self-actualisation becomes itself one of the dominant focuses of class divisions and the distribution of inequalities more generally. These changes in the world are inevitably summarised by new cultural devices and should therefore be theorised and evaluated in the context of a new perception of the boundaries between political and social. Accounts of popular journalism that equate its “non-political” news agenda with the demise of the political public are based on a narrow conception of politics, which refers to “processes of decision-making within the governmental sphere of the state” (Giddens 1991, 226). Contrarily, according to Laclau, a broad conception of politics “sees as political any modes of decision-making which are concerned with settling debates or conflicts where opposing interests or values clash” (quoted in Mumby 1993, 7).³

This brief description of high modern sociality may be closer to the radical thesis in sociological theory than to the more moderate thesis of coexistence of tradition and detraditionalisation in contemporary societies. Some of the above-mentioned social phenomena may thus represent not more than social trends. But when speaking about the new trends in popular journalism, we find it necessary to develop not only the sense for existing reality, but equally the sense for possible reality. Social trends (the shift of authority in identity politics from “without” to “within,” new formation of collective solidarity beyond class solidarity, collapse of traditional moral collectivities, individualisation of society, etc.) should be taken into consideration when we are trying to evaluate the emancipatory potential or marginalising effect of each particular journalistic representation.

The main questions that should be addressed in this context are: How does the organisation of the storytelling promote a specific moral or discursive vision? What kind of social integration does this specific narrativisation promote? What kind of account of reality promotes ideological distortion, misrepresentation and exclusion? What defines an emancipatory journalistic narrative that would reflect, promote and articulate social changes in high modernity? What are the textual conditions for emancipatory journalistic communication and for achieving an expressive citizenship as the relationship of the citizens to the society? Our aim is therefore always, in the last instance, when discussing textuality, looking first, for its social context (“the reality,” the outside world) and second for the type of sociality the text narratively invents. In this way the political dimensions of journalism texts can be understood and evaluated according to their emancipatory or discriminating nature, not at the backdrop of orthodox ahistorical legitimate standards but in the contexts of contemporary social changes concerning the relationship of the individual with the society.

How Real Is the Fictious?

Before turning to the analysis of the narrative structure of the tabloid’s texts and considering the possible social and political consequences of the symbolic naturalisation, marginalisation of identities (be they ethnic, gender, sexual, cultural, etc.) through narrativisation of events and issues, let’s take a closer look at the epistemological background on which our examination is based. This is an important point since it will explain the relationship between the narrative and the social in the context of this paper.

The implied premise of our discussion is that communication should be understood as “not directed toward the extension of messages in space but the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs” (Carey 1989). Journalism in its quality, popular or populist version is treated here as a part of mediated culture and as one of the nodal points of the struggle over meaning. Media culture in general and journalism as part of it represent a public space and a battle zone of conflicting discourses that negotiate and compete over meanings, agendas, definitions, interpretations. Each privileging of some meanings, agendas, interpretations over the others is socially and politically significant. There are numerous examples of the social significance of the meanings, which get “fixed” in the public space, or, to put it differently, numerous examples of the reality of the fictious.

Following the constructivist epistemology gaining foot even in social sciences, it is hardly sustainable to treat the image (representations) and reality (society) as two separated entities. The statement that reality is constructed means that the facts are considered as the results of a consensus over what should be accepted as a fact and that "objective" representations of social events and issues are considered socially originated. Exactly because the journalistic discourse is representative discourse (it legitimates itself as representing reality) the representation of the real or the representation of the factual through journalistic practices need to be questioned.⁴ The epistemological perspective that considers representation as the production enables us to approach the problem of fictionality in journalism and the role of narrativisation in representing reality without celebrating the emancipatory impact of factual and objective journalistic practices. It can enable us to overcome moral indignation over the contemporary increase of selfreferentiality and "storyness" in textual representations of infotainment journalism and indicate the possibility of a different kind of journalistic discourse for a different kind of sociality at the backdrop of changed formations.

Fictionality and narrativity are therefore, according to constructionism in social sciences, an implicit aspect of social life. Fictionalisation of reality through narrativisation is the constituent part of the self-understanding of the individual and of the society. It is an instrument of cultural imagination. Similarly, Brown (1987) looks at society as a symbolically structured text and discusses "society as a narrative text, and narrative fiction as a social text," in order to discover the rhetorical nature of social experience. Metaphorically speaking, society is a factual text and factual or fictional narratives are social texts.

The consequences of constructionism for sociology and media studies based on social sciences epistemology are far reaching. Language and discursive rhetoric (not the classical notion of rhetoric that refers to the structure of argumentative operations) are the objects and means of sociological examination. Texts (family conversation, symbolic language of fashion, consumption, media representations, etc.) are part of such examination. In gender studies, for example, there is a widespread awareness that women, the family, or the institution of motherhood cannot be fully analysed without considering the representations of women, mothers or family along with the examination of motherhood, gender and family as institutional settings. Motherhood is at the same time the institutional setting (factual text) and discourse (social text), to be examined through analysis of the interrelationship between institution and representation. Motherhood as institution implies the legal framework and social aspects of motherhood: motherhood as economic institution, a social arrangement of gender relations, dominant form of family structure in each epoch, women employment policy, industrialisation, urbanisation, tradition, etc. These are structural aspects that affect the historical or real mother. Motherhood as social discourse, on the other hand, implies different and always contradicting images of mothers, existing in public space, and the experiences of doing motherhood in situated performances. These images and performances represent a social text. Motherhood as a normative category is therefore reproduced and produced as well by institutions as by discourses influencing each other. Discourses legitimate and privilege certain meanings and images of motherhood as normative and certain power relations. In contemporary societies, the majority of images (representations as social process of presenting motherhood) is circulating in popular culture: advertising, fiction, political discourse and pop culture in

general and, last but not least, in journalism. Similarly, family has to be considered not only as an institution but as a social discourse (e.g., in media representations or in the process of “doing family” through the family rhetoric). Representations of the family have an impact on the “real” family. The “real” family is not a pre-given entity that can be studied without taking into consideration its representations in a variety of cultural forms (advertising, journalism, fiction, curriculum, law, etc.). This holds as well for femininity, masculinity, otherness, normality, ethnicity or the public. Chaney defines the later as a rhetorical figure “both as a mode of address and as a form of social being.” (1993, 127,124) The public voice, therefore, according to Chaney, refers first to the presupposed collective experience of the audience (a form of social being) and second to the manner of address (as textually constructed). The ways the public (audience) is addressed in journalistic discourse is constitutive of the public (audience) as a space for collective identity.

The above-explained epistemological move is essential for developing a critical theorising of the hegemony at work in contemporary popular culture in general and in popular journalism in specific. Examining and understanding the social reality and the interpenetration of the institution and agency in semiotic society is thus hardly possible without taking into account the textual or symbolic side or “the reality.” The fictional is “real.” This does not mean that society does not exist as a real social entity. But it suggests that society cannot be considered anymore as fixed, self-defined totality to be analysed and captured by appropriate models. Society is, of course, not reduced to text. However, it is experienced through mediation of symbols and is therefore of textual origin.

Simulated Communitarism of the Populist Journalism

The leitmotif of the narrative analysis of the tabloid stories at the backdrop of the assumptions presented above, is the relationship between the society and the individual citizen fostered by this type of public discourse, the imaginary image of the communion represented by the popular journalism. And, consequently, the “political implications of the symbolic community” (Dahlgren 1992, 17; emphases added), which this particular journalism may foster. Individualisation, integration and citizenship should be nodal terms in the discussion around the politics of popular journalism.

There are at least two reasons to choose tabloid journalism as a case study of non-emancipatory journalistic discourse that invents traditions in detraditionalised society, constructs traditional moral communities in the era of “neo-tribes” (M. Maffesoli) and, consequently, reproduces and generates marginalised and privileged/normal identities and practices. First, infotainment journalism in general and the tabloid press in particular have a special place in the struggle over meaning in each particular society. On one hand, populist infotainment claims to be a representative discourse (it legitimates itself as representing or transmitting reality, i.e., being informational), whereas on the other, it uses fictional narrative devices to represent “real” events or issue — it “infotains” by the narrativisation or storyness. Or, as Hartley has put it: “What is really surprising, perhaps, is that the global social pervasion of journalism in the second half of the twentieth century is using the time-honoured method of visionary storytelling to popularise its epistemological opposite: the ideology of militant nineteenth century scientific modernism” (Hartley 1992, 143). Infotainment journalism is, according to its self-definition, a transparent expression of real events, re-

flecting rather than representing or even constructing or generating the “real” world. The main referent of this type of journalistic discourse is the “absolute truth,” “basic story” and “real” world existing in just one form. Although it constructs the “real” world by its representational forms, it addresses its audience as recipients of factual information. This ambiguity, the opposition between its discursive construction of the “real” world by its fictitious representational practices on the one hand, and its self-legitimation as being the mirror reflection of the “real” world on the other, generates the effect of naturalisation or the hegemonic effect of the tabloid journalism.

Second, the tension between the social world created by popular journalism and the “real” world emerges from the fact that in high-modern societies the community cannot be taken for granted, nor can the relationship between the social and individual identity. The social and individual identity are interconnected but not identical any more. And, by extension, each individual inevitably belongs to a plurality of communities (communities of descent, professional communities, milieus, taste cultures ...). Individuals’ identity is no longer externally defined, through belonging to the community where self-interpretation implies the interpretation of the collective self. Contrary to communities in pre-modern traditional societies, the communities in contemporary world to a great extent lose their self-evident quality and are formed by individual acts of self-identification. An individual’s identity is increasingly internally defined, through the practice of self-identification. Identifications must be supplied by individuals by themselves.

It is important to note here, however, that individualisation or freedom from traditional constraints doesn’t mean only autonomy and emancipation. The social situation of the individual is not independent of social formations. The contemporary individualism is institutionalised — the individual situation is dependent on institutional constraints that foster individualisation. In such circumstances, the community has to be recreated, the taken for grantedness must be cultivated or constructed. Even the traditional identities of descent and national identities as their modern secularised versions are not prior to construction — descent itself is a constructed category. The membership in neo-tribes is therefore a matter of individual choice or, more adequately, a matter of being forced to choose. Even when traditional belongings are demonstrated, they often represent a reaction against individualism, its risks, contingencies and indeterminacies of meaning. “The age of contingency” is also the “age of community” and should be theorised at the backdrop of the parallel processes of detraditionalisation and re-traditionalisation going on in the contemporary world.

In this sense, culture, including media culture, is by Eder (1992) understood as “the means of identitarian existence.” The decisive element of his theory of contemporary class relationship is based on the criterion of the control of the means of an “identitarian” social existence. Journalism, as every form of (popular) culture, fosters collective identities by creating communities sharing the same stories and same rhetoric.⁵ These individual and collective identities are the result of ongoing process of discursive construction of communities.

Tabloid infotainment therefore creates community as any other symbolic activity, but paradoxically identities promoted by the popular press are inscribed, rather than being at stake for discursive controversy as an object of permanent construction and reconstruction. By extension the populist journalism (in this case popular tabloids) can be defined as communitarian journalism — the discourses it transmits through

the storytelling devices are about the shared moral values and practices within the community (mostly ethnic community in our case). The solidarity it promotes is the solidarity of traditional belongings. The community fostered by populist discourses is a community without mobility and numerous forms of interconnectedness of contemporary life. It ignores the internal differentiation and constant reconfiguration of the symbolic communities. Popular industrialised storytelling, understood here as discursive practice, controls public culture, generates and reproduces reality: marginalised on the one hand and normal or privileged identities and practices on the other. It celebrates the ideal of sameness and traditional belongings against the ideal of difference and heterogeneity.

Hand in hand with the problems concerning the identities, integration and communities constructed by the popular journalism goes the problem of the nature of citizenship fostered by tabloid journalism. Integration of contemporary societies (how individuals become integrated) and the notion of citizenship (defined in terms of political and civil rights) are central problems in theorising about contemporary shifts in the relationship of the individual with the society. The conception of citizenship assumed by the tabloid textualisation and fictionalisation of real events and issues is communitarian citizenship — being a citizen means belonging to a historically developed community. Individuals are formed by the community and individual identity derives from belonging to ethnic community. Citizenship is tied to national identity. Individuality is derived from it and determined in terms of it.

Collective identities are supposed to be given unproblematically and naturally in the populist social world, although in high modern societies, “the only consensus likely to stand a chance of success is the acceptance of the heterogeneity of dissensions. ... Survival in the world of contingency and diversity is possible only if each difference recognizes another difference as the necessary condition of the preservation of its own” (Bauman 1991, 251, 256). In this opposition lies the hegemonic effect of the populist discourse. The political implications of the populist narrative are to be found therefore in **the contradiction emerging from the fostering the traditional - national single-subject model of community in the detraditionalised world**, where community has to be reflexively created and where identity is not given naturally and matter-of-factly, but is at stake for continuous discursive negotiation.

The implication of this argument is that it is not primarily the soft news agenda of the populist discourse that is non-emancipatory, but **the communion narrative — the discursive creation of citizenship as communitarian citizenship and traditional moral community that can be taken for granted** as a conservative internal contradiction. According to Bauman (1991, 251), it is exactly this kind of search for community that becomes a major obstacle to its formation. The notion of citizenship and the integration fostered by each particular discourse has political implications — if old certainties are proclaimed in popular representations, this affects the meanings of “normality” in private and public spaces, in everyday life and politics. It affects the concepts of the future of the relationship of the individual with the society.

The Dramatisation of Reality and the Construction of Moral Vision

This argument demands an illustration of the ways the audience could be addressed in populist journalistic discourse in order to constitute nonnegotiable com-

munitarian collective identity. Through the **aesthetisation** (or, more narrowly, dramatisation through narrativisation) of the “real” events or issues in journalism, reality is interpreted and made political.

Storytelling is one of the most important features of popular journalism. Identification with the popular story and its formulaic cosmology is the principal gratification for readers. The way in which the story is told implies the interpretation and further **evaluation** of the event or condition reported. Narrative is here understood in terms of strategies and conventions that organise the text. Without the narrativisation of the “reality” the audience cannot understand the actions of others and is not able to endow these actions with meaning. Standard narrative discourse produces the order of events (it produces the story) and adapts new situations to the old definitions — it puts the events and actors into the existing categories and offers formulaic understanding of the social world and the moral evaluation of the outside world. The story is therefore produced by the discourse. Sarah Kozloff argues (1986, 45) that theoretically every narrative can be divided into two parts: the “story” (what happens to whom) and the “discourse” (how the story is told). The conventional organisation of events and issues in mainstream journalism reproduces the well-known structure that conditions the reading. Formulaic reporting limits possible interpretations and establishes the framework within which the story will be understood and interpreted. As such, the narrative may be seen not only as a tool to convey content but as much as a **tool for accomplishing community and authority** (Zelizer in Mumby 1993). It plays a central role in promoting a preferred discursive vision.

I shall consider how traditionalised community and authority are accomplished through the ways an event is narratively reconstructed, regarding only **the use of documentary data** in the report, **the social types and characters** (who stand for Good and Bad, Foreign and Domestic ... in the story) and the **relationships** between the social types constructed by the story. Social types and their relationship and the use of documentary facts enable us to discover the **moral order reconstructed by the story**, since in each account or reality through narrativisation, morality or a “moralising impulse” is present.

It should be noted, however, that in the discursive vision constructed by narrativisation in the popular press, the **visual elements of dramatisation** or **mise en scène** (photography, orthography, typography) play a role equal to any other narrative element or **mise en mots**. The (melo)dramatisation in the popular press and the discursive vision it creates is to a great degree established through its visual form. The typographic and orthographic features of the report play no less an important role than the formal aspects of the content — it can contribute to the personalisation, binary oppositions within the story, authentication of the moral vision etc. (see Balibar and Macherey 1980). Together with the central narrative, the visual dimension of the narrative establishes the framework within which reading can be practised. Visualisation should therefore be considered as the part of the narration contributing to the preferred discursive vision. The principles of the graphic design (the combination of the words and photography, typography) are even more important when the central story is based on the notion of the professional ideal of objectivity of journalistic reporting. In that case, the **mise en mots** usually uses descriptive reporting and the linear flow of time to produce the realistic effect. In those circumstances, melodramatisation through visual devices deserves special attention. The use of photography and typographic devices reminds us of the standardised iconography of emotions found in the “tab-

leau" of the classical melodrama in the theatre.⁶ Typography and photography introduce emotion into the journalistic text and contribute to the interpretation of the event through visual devices.

There is a consensus among cultural critics that we are witnessing "the visual turn" in the sphere of public culture.⁷ This is specially evident in the popular press (but also on television, in which images, sounds, and words flow into one another) where the interaction of the verbal and the visual representation is most obvious. It is constitutive for its representation as such. It is interesting, however, that, contrary to the populist journalism, the feature press (especially the so-called trend magazines), uses photographs not as proof of the authenticity of the words, but as the self-sufficient narratives without simulating a reference to the real. Photographs of stylised celebrities in their designed homes (e.g., Madonna in her designed Miami home in the issue of *The Face* magazine), have nothing to do with reality. They do not hide their storyness/constructness: it is not the real Madonna whom we are able to see and what the audience is expected to see, but the visualised story itself and the concept of style constructed and "structure of feeling" promoted. Consequently, that means that not a formal but a cultural relationship exists between the visualisation and the words: in referential journalism, we believe what we see because referential journalism as a form of knowledge has used visualisation as the means of authenticating the words.

The Use of Documentary Data in the Story

One of the most important elements of narrative reconstruction of events in the tabloid press is, paradoxically, the **use of documentary facts** in the text. Facts are usually used to authenticate the discursive vision and to lend the credibility to the formulaic plot. The story's credibility and authenticity are therefore based on the use of documentary details. The story authenticates itself by presenting to the audience the selected information that supports the story and its discursive vision and gives the impression of realism to the story. As such, the facts can actualise different discourses and can function as a central discursive factor in the storytelling. The manipulation of the documentary data affects what kind of discourse will be activated through the narrative. Two normal uses or abuses of documentary facts in the popular discourse are moving the documentary data from a central to a marginal position in the narrative structure or, vice versa, moving peripheral information to a central position. The selective use of information is, together with authentication by visualisation, one of the central means of the so called "process of narrative authentication" (Bennet and Edelman 1986, 169). The selected details lend credibility to the known formulaic plot and ensure the preferred interpretation of the story. Or, to put it differently, they activate the preferred discursive and moral vision.

Narration is therefore rendered credible by the **manipulation of documentary details**. We are given only an implicit, not fully recounted, outline of the story. This type of story does not tell us that foreigners are lazy and less culturally competent. Such an explicit statement would contradict the generally accepted normative discourse based on the notion of "equality of being" and would be too open to criticism and counter arguments. But the popular stories suggest this by referring to the life conditions of foreigners, to rates of criminality or to their social "parasitism." This narrative tactic presupposes that the audience is familiar with the standard plot and will find its gratification and fulfilment in the process of reading through completing the story for themselves. In this process, the selected documentary details become the facts.

A good example of the **not fully recounted outline** of the story is the editorial “The Guilt” in a Slovenian weekly tabloid *Jana*. The editorial is based on the visit of the journalist to a Bosnian refugee camp. Entering the camp’s communal living room, the journalist meets a few men playing cards, smoking and drinking coffee together with children who are playing there “in a mist of cigarette smoke.” The author starts to lament about the behaviour of the Bosnian war refugees in Slovenia: “I was really angry in this moment over those refugees who live much better than some Slovenes. ... I caught myself thinking about how I expect from them to be a little more co-operative... I suddenly took offence at their cigarettes, their coffee, their jokes. ... It struck me for a tiny moment: they left their child here in a draft; he’ll need medical assistance tomorrow, and medicines. ... They should recognise the role we have. We, host country, Slovenia.” The writer presupposes a consensus about the role of the “guests” in a foreign country and the way they should behave and express gratitude to the host country. The title “The Guilt” refers to the guilt “we, Slovenes” feel when unintentionally flooded with the above thoughts. It is exactly this unnecessary guilt, according to the editorial, that feeds the refugees and make their existence possible. The author cannot make an explicit statement about the laziness of the refugees, their social parasitism, irresponsible parenthood and cultural incompetence. The narration is open-ended, with implied conclusions. It is to the reader to make exactly the same conclusions at the backdrop of the standard, well-known plot based on the consensus of the foreigners and the supposed high quality of their life at the expense of ethnic Slovenes. Completing a well-known plot lends authenticity to the selected documentary facts, which in turn warrant the standard interpretation. The guilt is unnecessary because the ungrateful refugees do not deserve it. Readers have just a short step to make to complete the story’s outline — the Slovene chauvinism (“anger”) is therefore understandable, natural, legitimate and justified. The article narratively offers readers an entitlement to chauvinism.

To illustrate the effect of the **selective use and misuse** of documentary data on the meaning mobilised through the narrative, let’s take a closer look into the organisation of storytelling by inspecting one of the many standard stories in Slovene daily tabloid *Slovenske Novice* (Slovene News). The title of the article is “Life for the Flat.” The story is about a legal dispute between two families. The fathers of both families work in the same company and both families would like to get a bigger flat offered by the company to its employees. The story explains the dispute between the first employee (defined primarily through his ethnic identity; he is ethnic Slovene) and second father and employee (citizen of Slovenia of non-Slovene origin). Although in the legal dispute the fact of ethnic identity has no legal significance, the information on ethnicity of the two involved families represents the central dualism in the story and the central engine of the plot. Ethnicity is a central discursive factor in our story. The discrimination is rationalised by establishing the ethnicity as a central source of the conflict, although the information on the ethnicity is obviously of marginal importance for the legal dispute. Other aspects of the problem — documentary data on the legal history of the conflict, which would be necessary to understand it at all — are either briefly mentioned or absent.

The preferred reading of the above story, achieved through the manipulation of the factual data would be, that inventive and quarrelsome foreigners (“Enver ... complained to the Constitutional court and the judgement was passed in his favour”),

who are in fact intruders into “the land of promise” (“There was a habit in the past that “brothers and sisters” from the south came to Slovenia”), are taking away the council flats that would otherwise be given to socially underprivileged ethnic Slovenes.

Further manipulation of the factual data enables readers to identify with one of the sides in the conflict. The presentation of the feelings of the Slovene family because of the supposed injustice, is very detailed: “The fear, mistrust and the feeling of being outwitted inhabits the previously calm family, such as the Bagolas. Once so calm, Jože became tense, sixteen-year old Anita became an introverted teenager who does not understand the shame done to the family. Seventeen-year old Robi lost all hopes for the future.” No documentary data is offered on the non-Slovene family, and no information is given on possible emotional consequences of the conflict on the family members of the non-Slovene family. Even more, the family structure of the non-Slovene family remains unknown to the readers. The only information about the non-Slovene family is information on its ethnic origin: “Enver Bahtiri came to Slovenia from Kosovo and his wife from Serbia.”

Social Types in Narratives

Formulaic narratives transform the personalities into social types or stereotypes. For the analysis of the meaning activated by the narration is of highest importance who are the persons in the stories and how are they named or labelled. The labelling of the actors signifies individual’s position in the story and therefore contributes to the constitution of the social world that is created by the story. The group that is to be constructed as central in the social world of the story is categorised into social types and the peripheral groups into stereotypes. Social types are those who belong to the society, whereas stereotypes are those who are “the others.” Individuals are — like data in the formulaic narrative — picked up among the standard selection of personalities (characters, social types, stereotypes) offered by standard narration. Stereotypes are defined as representation and categorisation of personalities according to their social function. The stereotypical representation and categorisation are capable of condensing a great deal of complex information on actors and numerous connotations. The positioning of individual agents within the story at the backdrop of the socially constructed schemata make these agents understandable and known within the social world, constructed by the story. The effectiveness of the stereotyping depends on the consensus this labelling invokes. The construction of consensus makes concepts about persons seem like they would be naturally shared by all members of society independently of one another. Stereotypes express a general consensus about a specific social group. But this kind of consent is illusion — stereotypes actually express a certain definition of reality and the “relative power of groups in that society to define themselves as central and the rest as peripheral or outcast” (Dyer 1993, 15).⁸

In the story “A Life for a Flat,” the narrator creates a classical dualism between good and bad using the labelling based on ethnic origin — domestic as good against foreign as bad. The individual actors are reduced into four types: The outwitted, humiliated native Slovene (humiliated patriot); the crooked, twisted “Southern” (the crooked foreigner); authorities and managerial elite (corrupted politics); and a good “pro-people” and pro-Slovene politician (rescuer or deliverer): “The only one who gives her some hope, says Majda, is Janez Podobnik from the Slovene People’s Party.” The use of a limited number of social types contributes to the overall narrative con-

struction of the discursive vision and moral order of the story. Because of the highly standardised narration, typically found in the tabloid press, (but also in popular fiction genres) Vladimir Propp's reduction of agents of action to seven **personae dramatis** in the folk tales — is useful for the analysis of the discursive vision of the contemporary tabloid stories. The use of a limited number of social types contributes to the overall narrative construction of the discursive vision and moral order of the story.

Through the transformation of persons into social types **the personal** becomes an explanatory framework for the understanding of the social order and representation of it as consensual, transparent and natural. Individual experience is supposedly the only possible way to understand social phenomena. A human interest approach, however, is far from being discriminating and hegemonising in itself (it is usually used in much more creative and emancipatory discourse of feature journalism). By focusing on individual experience and emotional states of "victims" by narratively creating insiders and outsiders, promoting traditional integration and fixed moral order, populist texts **repress the politicisation** of those experiences and **discussion over the links of the individual experience to the structural conditions**. The issues and events are narratively decontextualised — social problems or housing problems, for example, are narratively **reconstructed or rearticulated as problems of ethnicity/morality**.⁹

Conclusion

Dramatisation employed in the popular press can mobilise different discourses. We can trace the characteristics of the social world shaped by dramatisation (in our case principally by storytelling) through the analysis of relations between different constituent parts of the narrative. Moral vision is mobilised through the elements of narrative structure. The above-described constituent parts of the narrative (use and misuse of documentary facts and the social types created by the story and their sphere of influence) are central to the narrative discourse or a discursive vision mobilised by the journalistic text. They contribute to the overall melodramatic iconography of the story. Melodramatic discourse in popular journalism renders the cultural into the natural or the historically constructed into the eternally given.

There is no doubt that all communication (including different media genres) involves a moral dimension and that notions of good and bad are still relevant in late modernity. However, a **difference between thematisation of morals and moralising** should be established. The later communicatively evaluates actions or actors (see Luckmann 1996, 82). The morality constructed by the tabloid press is a moral fundamentalism — moral consensus based on belonging to the ethnic community is assumed, without looking after evidence for that assumption. The gratification of the media audience is limited to the act of revelation, from revelations of the private sphere of common people in extraordinary situations, public personalities and stars, to the revelation of supposed political corruption or adultery. All revelations are identical from the point of view of ideological effect. They don't lead us to a discussion over the links to the structural settings and ways to transform them.

Identities and cultural imaginations offered by popular culture are constitutive components of reality via their control over the means of identity creation and are therefore relevant for any social action. The ideological effect of cultural representations lies therefore in their capacity to offer for selection some identities, while excluding or marginalising others. For this reason, each conflict that deals with exclusion

from “the means of identitarian social existence” has a political significance. The symbolic marginalisation of different identities has as its material consequence the legitimisation of “real” social marginalisation.

The battles over the interpretation and construction of meaning always take place in the political context and are never totally arbitrary. In a contemporary situation, that means that where the marginalisation of some social identities cannot be a legitimate public discourse any more, delegitimation of some practices and identities are increasingly articulated through the poetics of journalism texts and not manifest in its content. Or, in other words, hierarchical domination in contemporary society largely is replaced by symbolic domination. In spite of this being a universal problem in high-modern societies or “semiotic societies,” the battles over the interpretation are most excessive in so-called countries in transition. The future of emancipatory politics in “countries in transition” and the future of life-politics depend on who will win the battle over the meaning in each particular issue concerning emancipatory and life-politics and, consequently, over the definition of citizenship as the relationship between citizen and society.

The answer to the question, “What is a journalistic discourse that would be acceptable as a metaphor of our times?” lies therefore in the answer to the question, “What kind of integration is possible and emancipatory in contemporary society?” And accordingly, what kind of journalistic discourse recognises “another difference as the necessary condition of the preservation of its own”? What kind of journalism is based on knowledge that “agreement is not predetermined and is not guaranteed in advance, that it has nothing but our argument to stand on”? Not a plurality of discourses would be the right answer, but the discourse that would, without abandoning the thematisation of morals, recognise the plurality of authorities. Populist narrative discourse particularly tends to be closed and to “arrest the flow of differences” (Mumby 1993, 6). It constructs the centre and produces the order of events, adapts new situations to existing definitions of the outside world, places the events and actors in existing categories and offers understanding and moral evaluation of the outside reality.

Notes:

1. One of the best examples of the examination of the relationship between the narrative and the social and political is Dennis Mumby's (ed.), *Narrative and Social Control - Critical Perspectives* (1993). Scholars coming from very different backgrounds (sociology of the family, discourse analysis, communication studies, gender studies, anthropology, political science, etc.) are examining in their particular ways the relationship between “the kinds of knowledge claims that we can make in a particular society and the quality of that society.”
2. According to K. Eder (1993) in post-industrial society the relationship between class and politics necessarily changes. The middle classes are related to each other no longer by objective conditions of existence, but by their collective practices to define a mode of social existence.
3. Emancipatory politics concerns, according to Giddens (1991, 209-232) the politics of chances, and life-politics concerns the politics of lifestyle and presumes a certain level of emancipation from the tradition and hierarchical domination. Emancipation presumes life-political transformation. Accounts of popular journalism that equate its “non-political” news agenda with the demise of the political public are based on narrow conception of politics that refer to “processes of decision-making within the governmental sphere of the state...” .
4. D. Chaney sees the normality as the real subject matter of journalism and not reality, which is used as a reference to the subjects of new reports. Similarly, is J. Hartley defining journalists as the “central agents in the reproduction of order” (1002: 141).

5. The members of a "discursive community" share a configuration of knowledge, beliefs, values and communicative strategies. For a further explanation of the notion of discursive community see Linda Hutcheon's, *Irony's Edge* (1995: 89-116).
6. See Peter Brooks 1985 and 1992. Melodrama is, according to Brooks, highly emotional and ethical drama based on the manichaeistic struggle of good and evil in a world determined by the most fundamental psychic relations and cosmic ethical forces. Gripsrud (1992) understands melodramatisation as intensified expressive and excessive iconography of the standard formulaic narration with the universal moral claims expressed through the story.
7. Mitchell suggests that the anxiety, "the need to defend 'our speech' against 'the visual' is a sure sign that a pictorial turn is taking place" (1994, 13). According to him, the difference between the culture of reading and the culture of spectatorship — usually associated with the differences between mass and elite culture — has implications for the very forms that sociability and subjectivity take, for the kinds of individuals and institutions formed by a culture.
8. He also argues that stereotypes carry within their very representation an implicit narrative, a narrative pattern about women, foreigners, gays, etc.
9. I should note, however, that not only social types or personalities present in the story are worth taking into consideration, but also the "absence" and "presence" of social groups and identities within the narrative. The mere fact of absence, for example, is equally important in establishing the dualistic narrative logic of "us against them." According to Hartley (1989, 117), "meaning in news-discourse is not only determined by what is there, but also by what is absent, not selected, discursively repressed."

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