Oguljamal Yazliyeva

The thesis investigates the suppressed media environment in the framework of the

authoritarian regime in the case of Turkmenistan. It analyses the main trends of the

transformation of the media discourse from the early 90-s and onwards based on the

political culture established by the ruling elites. The context of political leadership, civil

society actors, and media environment in the post-Soviet period is critically important to

understand the current political situation in Turkmenistan. Therefore, a historical and

situational approach is used to study the autocratic rules and interpret the political culture

in this authoritarian but socially stable state. The empirical data collection and analysis are based on observing the behavior of subjects overtly and covertly. The research comprises the study of rules and political culture set up by the political actors in order to understand the philosophy and behavior of the state leaders in independent Turkmenistan. It allows covering their media control strategies that include total authority over its citizens. Based on such context, the analysis consists of several case studies monitoring the Turkmen official media channels´ content and style, mapping alternative social media networks.

Methodologically, the content analysis focuses on media styles, the language and

propaganda techniques (clichés, slogans, labels, stereotypes), and other tools promoting

personality cult. The study attempts to implement the arts-based research practice using

images, scenes, and sounds of the TV/radio reports and social media content. Finally, formal

interviews and informal dialogues (although conducted on a limited scale due to the hard

accessibility of respondents) enabled to cover the media content´s actual perception.

The research complements the existing scholarly literature in Media Studies about mass

media´s role in an authoritarian setting. From the Area Studies perspective, it also sheds

some light on the regime´s character in isolated Turkmenistan through the media landscape.

The study of the media landscape in post-Soviet Turkmenistan proves that all media

channels are under government control and are subject to censorship. The established

media control and its repressive character play a crucial role in reinforcing the power elite

and the authoritarian political culture with the dominant „personalist“ dictator´s rule in

Turkmenistan. Media workers/ bloggers/journalists have to continue practicing self-

censorship. The local official media content is stamped as propaganda of the state leader´s

cult of personality, which starts from „eccentric“ Saparmurat Niyazov´s power and has been

built up unprecedented theatrical form under Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov´s leadership.

The people´s rights to free media are severely violated. Therefore, despite the ruling powers´

pressure, the local population has to seek alternative news and information using modern

technologies. New media technologies may bring new ways to undermine the authoritarian

regime´s media propaganda and eventually struggle with the system.