



The Coverage and Reception of
the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict



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Framing the Past, Shaping the Present: The Weaponization of Historical Narratives in News on the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict?

Ecaterina Ilis

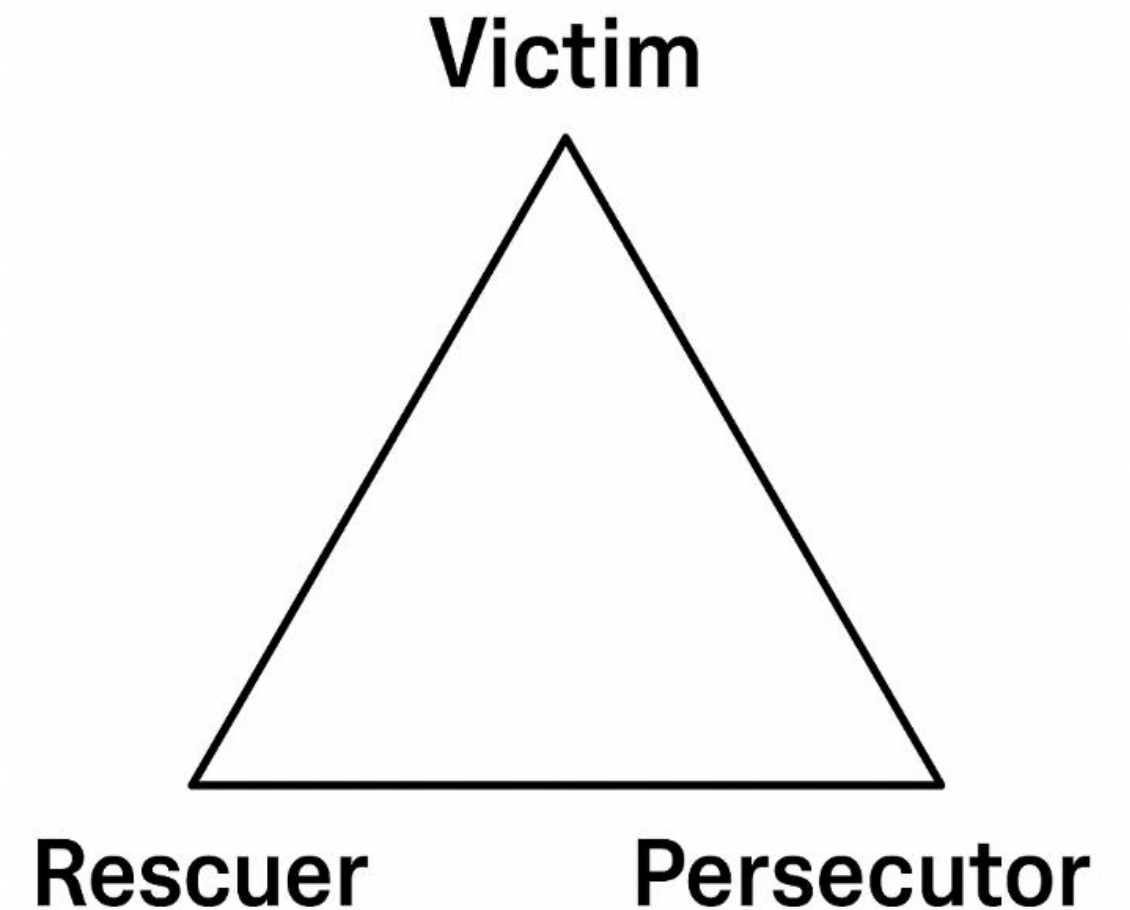
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When the Drama Triangle goes global

The Drama Triangle (Karpman, 1968): victim - persecutor - rescuer dynamic manipulated on the world stage.

- Russia claimed the role of rescuer, defending history, culture, even “truth”—while actively invading.
- Ukraine was framed as a victim, sometimes stripped of agency in Western narratives.
- Western countries rushed in as rescuers, often relying on simplified historical analogies to justify their position.



History in wartime: memory, a strategic tool

Why it matters

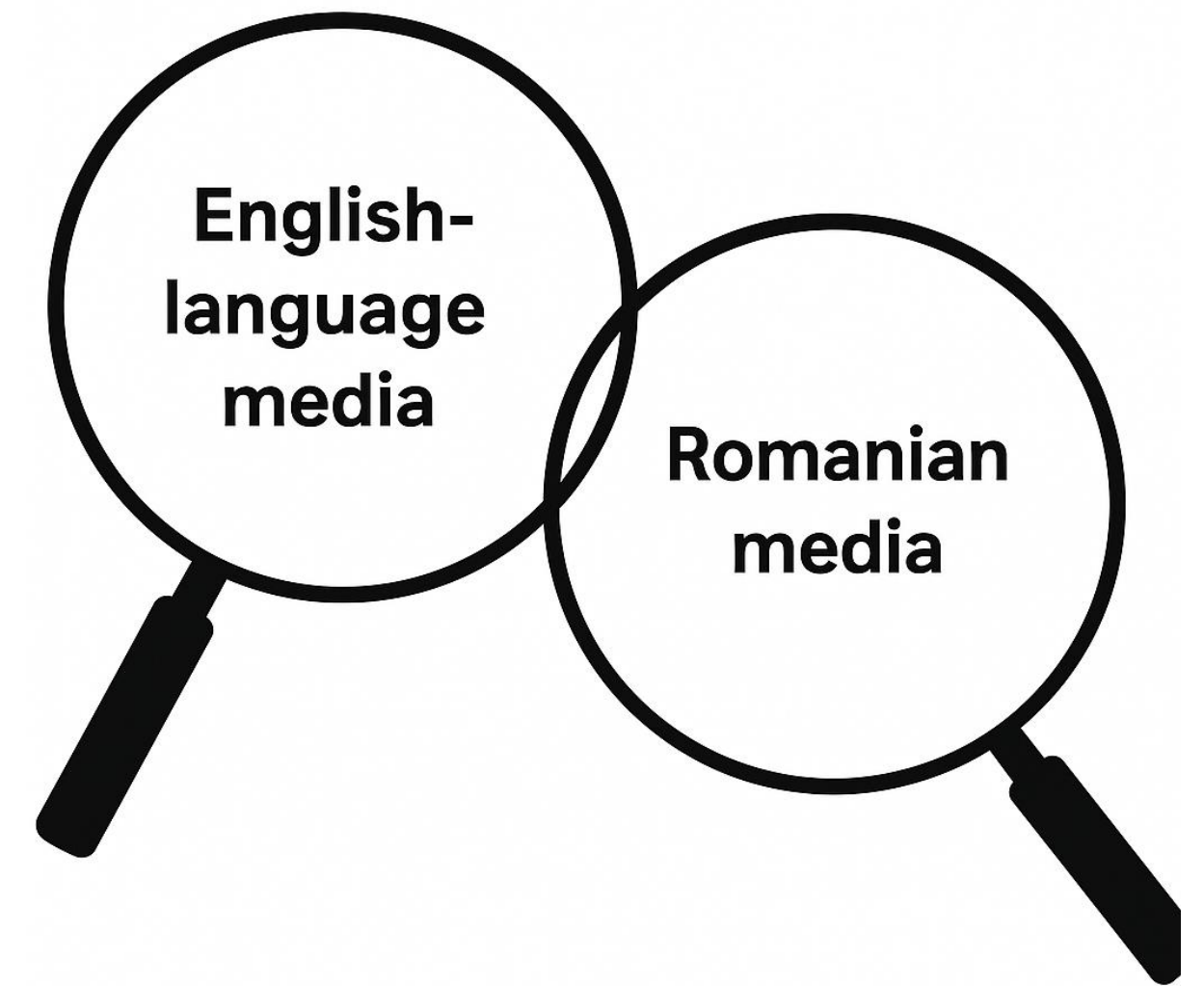
- Memory shapes national identity (Wertsch, 2002)
- History becomes a narrative weapon (Mälksoo, 2009)
- Frames how wars are understood and justified (Entman, 1993)

Spotlight: Romanian vs. English-Language Media

- English media: Often strategic and moral
- Romania: Post-Soviet, West-facing, but memory-divided


Research questions

1. How do Romanian and English-language media use discursive strategies to frame the conflict through history?
2. Which historical events, figures, and *topoi* are invoked to construct moral judgments and geopolitical alignments?
3. How do cultural and linguistic contexts influence these narratives?



Theoretical framework



- The study uses the Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) to examine how media use language to frame the past.
 - Focus on five key strategies:
 - Nomination
 - Predication
 - Argumentation
 - Perspectivization
 - Intensification/Mitigation
 - These strategies help reveal how media construct ideological positions, assign moral roles, and shape collective memory.
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Methodology: Corpus & Sampling

- **Data source – CORECON corpus** (126,000 EN, 1,993 RO articles)
- Custom keyword schema based on post-Soviet identity politics (Mälksoo, 2009), memory regimes (Subotić, 2019), and the discursive mobilization of traumatic pasts (Snyder, 2010).
- **R Studio for:**
 - **Keyword filtering** (more than 40 keywords): → 375 English and 14 Romanian articles retained
 - **Stratified random sampling** - For each validated Romanian keyword, up to 3 matching English articles
- **Manual validation to remove false positives**
- **Final corpus:** 11 Romanian-language articles, 16 English-language articles

Analysis

- Qualitative coding using the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)
- Focus on 6 dimensions:
 - Discursive strategies
 - Argumentative topoi
 - Actor representations
 - Historical framing
 - Linguistic features
 - Ideological functions

Results

Four thematic clusters:

- Victimization & genocide memory
- Heroization and national identity construction
- Delegitimation and blame allocation
- Recontextualization and strategic framing



Victimization and genocide memory

- **Key discursive patterns:**
 - Topoi: victimhood, historical injustice, existential threat
 - Strategies: moral legitimation, emotive amplification.
- **English-language media:**
 - Holodomor framed as a genocide → reinforces Ukraine's moral authority
 - Mix of legal caution (e.g., UK statements) and symbolic solidarity (e.g., EU parliaments)



HOLODOMOR

Victimization and genocide memory



- **Romanian-language media:**
 - Emphasis on external validation (e.g. German Parliament)
 - Zelensky's message amplifies emotional solidarity
 - Romania aligns with Europe by amplifying victimhood through Western lenses
- **Takeaway:**
 - Historical trauma (Holodomor) becomes a rhetorical tool to frame Ukraine's legitimacy—legal caution in the West, symbolic affirmation in Romania.

Heroization & national identity construction

- **Main topoi:**
 - History as a teacher
 - Resistance
 - Cultural authenticity
- **English-language media:**
 - Stalingrad analogy: WWII symbolism used to justify resistance
 - Bandera: Heroized as a national symbol, but contested internationally
 - Tension between national pride and global image



Heroization & national identity construction

- **Romanian media:**
 - Mazepa: Elevated through shared regional heritage
 - Bandera: Framed through Polish criticism — caution, not celebration
 - Preference for cultural narratives over militarized heroism
- **Takeaway:**
 - Heroization serves national identity building but is shaped by memory politics, regional sensitivities, and geopolitical positioning.


Delegitimation and blame allocation

- **Main topoi:**
 - External threat
 - Historical revisionism
 - Moral inversion
- **English-language media:**
 - Putin likened to Stalin/Hitler: Deportations, filtration camps, Holocaust analogies
 - "Denazification" reframed as propaganda to justify aggression
 - Fractured narratives: e.g., Rand Paul on NATO provocation → contested blame



Delegitimation and blame allocation



- **Romanian media:**
 - Historical erasure: Putin denies Ukrainian nationhood
 - Stalinist comparisons: Penal units = “cannon fodder”
 - Denazification dropped in ceasefire talks → shown as empty rhetoric
 - **Takeaway:**
 - Delegitimation is built through exposing revisionism, false victimhood, and authoritarian echoes — framing Russia as a manipulator of historical truth and a threat to democratic norms.
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Recontextualization and strategic framing

- **Main topoi:**
 - Imperial legacy
 - Epistemic revisionism
 - Manipulation through nostalgia
- **English-language media:**
 - Soviet symbols return: Lenin statues, red flags in occupied cities → framed as ideological regression (The Guardian, 2023)
 - "Anti-Russia" framing: Putin reframes Ukrainian independence as civilizational betrayal

Recontextualization and strategic framing

- **Romanian media:**
 - Stalin's great-grandson (Jugashvili) denounces Putin's war as illegal & undemocratic (Adevărul, 2023)
 - Imperial nostalgia reversed: Russia seen as hollow revival of authoritarianism
 - Irony & ambiguity: Jugashvili rejects Putin but defends Stalin → highlights memory tensions in post-Soviet space
- **Takeaway:**
 - History is not just remembered, but strategically reframed—used to construct legitimacy, mask aggression, and shape identity narratives through selective nostalgia and symbolic revival.

Comparative insights & Conclusion

- **History is not background, but a rhetorical resource used to frame identity and justify geopolitical aims.**

English-language media

- Frames Ukraine as a democratic victim and moral resistor.
- Aligns historical grievances with global liberal norms (e.g., Holodomor = genocide).
- Uses binaries: democracy vs. authoritarianism.

Romanian media

- Reflects ambivalence: aligns with Western values but navigates regional memory sensitivities.
- Bandera = hero and liability.
- Frames shaped by semi-peripheral identity and post-communist memory tensions.

References



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Thank you! 😊



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 grants.ulbsibiu.ro/corecon

Ecaterina Iliș

 ecaterina.ilis@ulbsibiu.ro

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