Mediated Spies

Cold War Espionage Affairs in European Newspapers

Paul Bjerke

Abstract
This article explores how 13 mainstream newspapers in five countries (Norway, Sweden, BRD, DDR and UK) covered the first week of three high-profile spy affairs in the late Cold War: Arne Treholt (Norway), Geoffrey Prime (UK) and Günter Guillaume (BRD).

The Eastern European newspapers followed in their governments’ footsteps and prolonged the politics of silence. In the West, newspapers framed the espionage using an issue-specific cultural frame, the traitor. Stories are spiced up by irrelevant and false facts, inspired by the spy stories in the fiction media. The traitor frame is constructed in two variations: the single spy betraying his country and the government forsaking its people by being “soft on the Soviets” or “careless about security”. The study indicates no significant differences in coverage between the four Western countries or between the three espionage affairs.

Keywords: espionage, Cold War, newspapers, framing, Treholt, Guillaume

Introduction
News and fiction about spies, intelligence and espionage were central aspects of the Cold War, and contributed elements to the overall Cold War conflict framing in the media. Spies were popular in literature, art, film, politics, and in the news media and journalism also. Press coverage of spies and espionage affairs is therefore comprehensive, but fragmentary, incomplete and confusing – and sometimes absolutely wrong. Spy stories were not new to the media during the Cold War period; they had formed a well-known news media genre since the early days of the mass media, especially since the dawn of the American yellow press. What was new during the Cold War was that the antagonists were the same over a very long period. The consequences were that the media had very few framing categories to select from when telling the stories.

Coverage and construction of spies and espionage stories were important in the construction of the Cold War frame in the late 1940s and early 50s when Senator Joseph McCarthy claimed that 205 Foreign Department employees “have been named as members of the Communist party and members of a spy ring” (Rovere 1959:123ff). And Julius and Ethel Rosenberg’s conspiracy to commit espionage, which led to their conviction and execution for treason in 1953, “played a crucial explanatory and justifying role in the formulation of the Cold War” (Carmichael 1993:xii).
Research findings show that news reporting on these kinds of espionage affairs helped to establish the concept of the “internal enemy” (van Dijk et al. 2013:417; Robin 2001) and the Cold War as “Something People Can Understand” (Carruthers 2009). Such findings support Robert Entman’s claim that the period of the Cold War was characterized by a dominant paradigm (or meta-frame) that organized normal elite thinking, media coverage and public response to foreign and defence policy: “Virtually any problematic situation that arose in the world could be, and was, assimilated to the Cold War paradigm” (Entman 2004:95).

In an in-depth analysis of media espionage coverage in Sweden, however, Marie Cronquist (2004) finds that while the spies in the 1950s were framed according to the Cold War paradigm, this changed in the 1960s. When Colonel Stig Wennerstrøm was exposed as a Soviet spy by his house cleaner in 1963, the affair was framed in the mainstream Swedish press as class struggle or more precisely, as a confrontation between the social democratic “folkhem”, the Swedish model of a public welfare state, and the upper-class Colonel Wennerstrøm.

This article uses three espionage affairs from the late Cold War era as cases to discuss whether espionage coverage in Europe in the late Cold War was framed according to the Cold War paradigm, as Entman claims, or as “class struggle”, like the Wennerstrøm case in neutral Sweden in 1963.

My three research questions are:

R1: Which frames can be found in the texts in mainstream media in six different European newspapers’ coverage of espionage affairs?

R2: Do these frames link to the “Cold War” paradigm or to a “class struggle” paradigm?

R3: Are there differences between the three cases and the five countries in the material with regard to the frames to be found?

The spies: Guillaume, Prime and Treholt

The espionage cases in the study are Günter Guillaume (BRD, 1974), Geoffrey Prime (UK, 1982) and Arne Treholt (Norway, 1984). Formally, they are three different cases which have been chosen for the following reasons:

• They represent espionage in the later years of the Cold War. They are all post-Wennerstrøm affairs which occurred in different periods of the Cold War: Guillaume in the détente era, Prime and Treholt in the last era of confrontation.

• They were all important espionage affairs and subject to broad public attention, both at the time of disclosure and later.

• The spies worked in three different European countries.

Günter Guillaume arrived in BRD as an East German “refugee” in the turbulence of the Hungary Crisis in 1956. In reality, he was an officer in the DDR Army who was sent to the western part of Germany to conduct espionage. Guillaume immediately joined...
the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and demonstrated a strong organizational talent. He made a career in the party and in 1970 was appointed as personal secretary to Chancellor Willy Brandt. His task was mainly to organize Brandt’s contacts with the SPD (which Brandt at the time chaired). Through the years as Brandt’s secretary, Guillaume had no regular access to classified documents. He was, however, able to read (and take pictures of) documents that were passed to Brandt, and he was of course able to give his masters a great deal of information about German politics in the decisive years of Brandt’s Ost-Politik. Unfortunately for Brandt, it turned out that Guillaume was handling classified documents after the suspicions of his espionage had been revealed to the government and the SPD leaders.

Guillaume was arrested in April 1974. He immediately admitted that he was a DDR officer. It transpired that the DDR agent had not only organized Brandt’s contacts with the SPD party – he had also organized Brandt’s visits to prostitutes. And it was also disclosed that the counter-intelligence services and the SPD-FDP government had done a very poor job in covering up his roles. Facing a potential personal scandal, a coalition breakdown and a dramatic loss of voters, Brandt chose to resign on 7 May 1974 when the opposition was sharpening its knives and the media hunt was in the starting blocks. Guillaume was given a 13-year prison sentence (Guillaume 1990; Drath 2005; Schreiber 2005).

Geoffrey Prime was a linguist who served in the British Royal Air Force. When he was stationed in Kenya, Prime was shocked by the poverty of the Africans and the racism of European settlers, and what he perceived was the exploitation of Kenya by the British colonial authorities (Aldrich 2011). In Kenya, Prime began to listen to Communist radio broadcasts and started reading the Soviet Weekly magazine. Prime was later transferred to Berlin and on his own initiative recruited as a KGB spy in 1968. When his service in the RAF ended, Prime was appointed to a position at the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) in Cheltenham, a joint British-US-Canadian-Australian intelligence and security organization responsible for providing signal intelligence. In his GCHQ years, Prime was able to read and photograph classified documents and hand them over to the KGB. Prime resigned from his post at GCHQ in 1977, but still did some work for his old employers. Prime handed over his final information to the Soviets in November 1981.

Six months later, Prime was interviewed by the police because of a paedophile affair; he had attacked a 14-year-old girl. The same night Prime admitted to his wife both the attack and his 15 years of espionage. She eventually informed the police. Prime was arrested and interrogated for a long time before he confessed. In mid-July, the arrest was leaked to the press, and on 11 November 1982 Prime was sentenced to 35 years’ imprisonment for the espionage (Cole 1999; Prime & Watson 1984; Aldrich 2011).

Arne Treholt was a renowned journalist, politician and civil servant in Norway. He belonged to the leftist faction of the Norwegian Social Democratic Party (Arbeiderpartiet). In the mid-60s Treholt was part of a European struggle against the junta in Greece and started a long-lasting period of cooperation with Jens Evensen who was later Norway’s chief negotiator with the European Union and who in 1974 was appointed Minister of Trade. Treholt was Evensen’s Secretary of State. During the years 1982–1983 he studied at the Norwegian Armed Forces Joint Staff College. Through the years, Arne Treholt took part in the public debate on Norwegian foreign and security policies. He advocated
a Nordic nuclear-free zone, a proposition that was seen as Soviet propaganda among the leaders of his party.

From 1977 onwards, the Norwegian secret police suspected a mole in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Treholt was one of the suspects, and after several years under surveillance, he was arrested in January 1984 on his way to a clandestine meeting in Vienna with Gennadi Titov, a leading KGB officer. The arrest was a political sensation. After his trial a year later, Treholt was sent to prison for 20 years (Haugestad 2004; Vale 2009).

The newspapers and the sample
The study concentrates solely on the mainstream printed press. The coverage of the issues was different in the niche media (Carmichael 1993; Fonn 2015), but as my interest is whether news media contributed to the Cold War paradigm in public opinion, the mainstream media that reaches the majority of the population is most relevant.

The study includes three Norwegian, two Swedish, five German (two BRD, three DDR) and three UK newspapers. I have chosen the Norwegian social democratic broadsheet Arbeiderbladet (Worker’s Daily), the conservative Aftenposten (Evening Post) and the conservative tabloid Verdens Gang (The World Today) (VG). The liberal broadsheet Dagens Nyheter (The News of Today) and a left-leaning tabloid Aftenbladet (Evening News) represent the Swedish press. The selected BRD papers are the conservative tabloid Bild Zeitung (Illustrated News) and the two liberal weeklies Der Spiegel (The Mirror) and Die Welt (The World). From the DDR, the Communist party’s main newspaper Neues Deutschland (New Germany), the largest regional newspaper Berliner Zeitung (Berlin News) and Die Neue Zeit (The New Times) have been selected. The last three newspapers in the study are from the United Kingdom, the conservative tabloid Daily Express and the liberal broadsheet The Guardian including its Sunday twin The Observer.

The text sample is all the articles that were printed in the newspapers in the first week after the arrest. A few articles from other periods are included in the analyses to illuminate some points. There are several reasons for this sampling. One is economy, I had to limit the number of articles. I chose to analyse the first week (instead of other weeks) because the first week is of special interest. First, in espionage affairs, the secret services often keep their secrets. This allows room for public dissemination of false rumours, misunderstandings, strategic and non-strategic leaks from insiders. I presume that when journalists have to write articles based on a very limited amount of facts, they make more salient the other elements of the frame. For example, the “central organizing idea” (see below) may be easier to locate in a text in the first week when the verified facts are few.

Secondly, research (e.g. Halloran et al. 1970) has shown that the early media framing of an incident tends to establish a frame that lasts through the evolving event. Or, as Jim Kuypers (2009) writes: “Once the framing process is initiated ... the established frame guides both audience and journalist thinking” (Kuypers 2009:185).

On the other hand, the possibility to generalize from this kind of small, qualitative study is usually limited. The frames may change, too, when the events develop and more facts are available to journalists. This happened when it was discovered that the Oslo terrorist in 2011 was a white, Christian Norwegian (Grydeland 2012). Taking this into account, nevertheless, the study may contribute to the knowledge of espionage news texts.
Framing the Cold War

Framing theory and methods are a tool to discover the news media’s role in distributing cultural narratives and shaping public opinion and policymakers’ decisions in the Cold War.

This is not the place to scrutinize in detail the different schools of framing studies (Goffman 1974; Entman 1993; Van Gorp 2007; Entman et al. 2009; Matthes 2009; Borah 2011; Brueggemann 2014; Scheufler & Iyengar 2014). In this article I will take my point of departure in Robert Entman’s much-cited definition of framing: “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatments recommendation” (Entman 1993:52).

This definition has been used by scholars of different traditions; however, I prefer a sociological position that “posits that the relation between news frames and audience frames is based on collective processes of negotiation over meaning, rather than on individual exposure to news frames” (Vliegenthart & van Zoonen 2011:111). I find this way of thinking most relevant to the study of Cold War news frames, and I find it fruitful to relate this sociological version of frame analysis to historical-cultural analysis like that by Carruthers (2009) and Cronquist (2004) because of their related use of concepts like “cultural values”.

The two historians use concepts like “something people can understand”, “cultural values” and “mindset”. Cronquist says:

In a Cold War mindset, the Spy stands out as a key symbol that incorporates cultural values and the fantasies of daily life, the Spy with a capital S was a “man in the middle” a point of everyday orientation through which a contemporary bipolar world was visualised. Cultural images of the Spy were constructed by a set of Cold War dichotomies, good and evil, black and white, legal and illegal, hidden and revealed, freedom and oppression, security and insecurity. (Cronquist, 2004:371).

These kinds of values and dichotomies bear a clear resemblance to what some framing theory researchers call the central organizing idea of a frame. This concept adds culture and meaning to Entman’s definition. To Gamson and Modigliani, a frame is, for example, a “central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning” to events related to an issue. The organizing idea is the core of a “frame package” which also contains various policy positions as well as a set of “symbolic devices” (Gamson & Modigliani 1987:143). Van Gorp (2007) claims that the manifest framing devices and the manifest or latent reasoning devices in a frame “are held together under the heading of a central organizing theme – that is, the actual frame [my italics], which provides the frame package with a coherent structure”. Baden (2010) supports the idea that “frames give meaning by following some central organizing idea” and adds that “not any set of selected beliefs constitutes a frame: There needs to be some kind of semantic coherence that renders the set meaningful” (Baden 2010: 23). And finally, to give meaning to a larger audience, this central organizing idea must resonate with mental structures that are widespread in society. As Scheufler & Iyengar (2012) put it: “If the relevant schema does not exist at all among audience members, framing effects are unlikely to occur”. The central organizing idea must be both culturally available and applicable (Baden 2010). This pivotal idea will therefore be the element in a frame that most strongly connects a text to an overarching paradigm.
I have therefore operationalized Entman’s definition according to Van Gorp (2007, 2010), based on an understanding of a media frame as “composed of three parts (…): the manifest framing devices, the manifest or latent reasoning devices, and an implicit cultural phenomenon (my italics) that displays the package as a whole” (Van Gorp 2007: 64). The media frame is established through the choice of manifest framing devices such as sources and salient facts and the choice of the “implicit cultural phenomenon”, the “central organizing theme” (ibid.) that binds together the selected sources and factual elements in a piece of journalism and thereby helps to convey manifest and latent reasoning devices as “causal interpretation and moral evaluation” (from Entman’s definition) of the events that are communicated. Among the “cultural phenomena” that may serve as “central organizing theme” are, according to Van Gorp, the archetype, a mythical figure, a value or a narrative.

One of the most common organizing themes is to assign the media story’s participants to a familiar type-gallery, often based on centuries-old myth and narrative structures where “heroes”, “bullies”, “witches” “victims” – or “traitors” – play a central role.

When searching for the frames, I will follow Tankard who identifies frames from, for example, titles, ingresses, photographs, captions, lead articles, selection of sources and citations, logos and statistics (Tankard 2001: 101) and use a revised version of Van Gorp’s (2010) schema for identifying issue-specific frames through the following terms: problem definition, source of the problem, responsibility, solution, moral basis, cultural motive, metaphor/stereotype and visual image.

In the following parts of the article I will identify the frames in the sampled news texts.

The national frame

Most news media are national, and foreign news are often framed “in tune with the national government” (Dimitrova et al. 2005). How about espionage stories? An important finding is revealed in Table 1:

**Table 1. News articles and paragraphs in the first week after the arrest by newspaper and spy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Treholt</th>
<th>Prime</th>
<th>Guillaume</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VG</td>
<td>72/56</td>
<td>4/0</td>
<td>3/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aftenposten</td>
<td>51/37</td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td>9/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arbeiderbladet</td>
<td>63/31</td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td>4/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aftonbladet</td>
<td>10/0</td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td>2/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dagens Nyheter</td>
<td>8/1</td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td>6/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die Zeit</td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>10/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Der Spiegel</td>
<td>2/0</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>12/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neues Deutschland</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>1/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neue Zeit</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berliner Zeitung</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Express</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>5/0</td>
<td>4/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Guardian</td>
<td>4/1</td>
<td>10/0</td>
<td>6/1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As we can see, an important difference in the coverage follows the Iron Curtain itself. I have done electronic searches in the digital archives of Neues Deutschland, Neue Zeit and Berlin Zeitung on relevant search strings such as the spies’ names, espionage, spy, spi*, Oslo etc. and found only one article discussing Treholt, Prime or Guillaume in the period of this study.

From Table 1 we can also see that the scope of the coverage of the affairs in the Western newspapers was dependent on the nationality of the spy. The differences were most prevalent in the Norwegian press. The tabloid VG printed 72 articles in one week on the national spy Treholt, but only four and three on the foreign spies. The Guardian printed ten articles on Prime, six on Guillaume and four about Treholt in the first week after their arrests. The Daily Express printed only one paragraph on Treholt (the same size and on the same page as one on Caroline Kennedy’s weight loss).

It was not only in scope that the coverage was national. The espionage affairs were mainly framed as national, domestic affairs. VG’s largest article concerning Geoffrey Prime had the headline “Norwegian intelligence compromised?” The day after Guillaume’s espionage was revealed, two Norwegian newspapers told their readers that “German spy was in Hamar”, a small Norwegian municipality where Brandt had his holiday cabin. Guillaume’s holiday trip added a local, national flavour to the German story.

Die Zeit did not report on the Prime affair before the verdict in November. It then started the report with an anti-British hint: “With beautiful regularity, the British discover agents of foreign powers in the midst of their espionage and counter-espionage organizations” (my transl.).

The national frame as such does not link the espionage cases to either a “Cold War” or a “class struggle” paradigm.

The human interest frame

The Western media constructed the espionage cases as melodramas: Brandt’s “fall had fizzled out in a tear-jerking melodrama”, Viola Drath (2005) wrote in her Brandt biography.

It was probably neither the espionage itself nor the wrongdoing of the counter espionage that forced Brandt to resign. It was fear of blackmail – in a kind of alliance between the spy, Brandt’s political enemies and his main press enemy, Bild Zeitung – that made Brandt leave office. He feared that a constant stream of facts revealing his affairs with women (and whisky) and the moral condemnation would ruin both his private life and the party’s chances of winning the next general election.

All the three espionage affairs in this study were “sexed up” in the press. Naturally, the tabloids were most eager to pick up (or make up) the spicy details from the story and make them most salient in their coverage. The broadsheet papers were only a few steps behind, however. For example, a few days after Guillaume was exposed, Bild Zeitung told its readers that “Bahrs Secretärin Gelibte des Spions (The Spy Loved Bahr’s Secretary)” and the Daily Express headlined with “A Spy’s Secret Love”. The Guardian printed the same story – in one column on page 3.

Egon Bahr was one of Brandt’s closest political allies, and the Springer-owned Bild did not like either of them, or their Ost-politik. According to Bahr’s police statement, “Guillaume had intimate relations with Bahr’s second secretary who assured Bahr,
however, that Guillaume never asked her for information” (my transl.)

Both Bild Zeitung and Norwegian VG had a front page top story about the “Female Spy in Love with Brandt”, a story from the early 1950s about Susanne Sievers (“Die Rote Atombombe”) who at that time was a DDR agent. Her job was to spy on Willy Brandt. But she allegedly fell in love with him instead. They started an affair which ended when Sievert was jailed in the DDR, charged with being a Western agent. Parts of the affair had been reported in the press when it happened, and Sievert later wrote a book about the incidents. The story had strictly speaking nothing to do with the Guillaume affair.

In every spy case the press made allusions to James Bond, George Smiley or other fictional characters. When Guillaume was arrested, Norwegian VG presented him as “the little, colourless man in Brandt’s proximity” who “is no agent type at all. He could not fit into agent movies or novels” (my transl.). Referring to his own experience during his vetting, a Guardian journalist confessed that the interviewer from MI5 “could not have looked less like James Bond. He was small, deferential and almost apologetic”.

All the newspapers printed information in the first weeks that later proved to be false. The Daily Express referred to “MPs who believe the police killer Barry Pourdom… may be linked to the spy scandal surrounding the Government’s communication centre”. It was not. Bild Zeitung indicated a “spy ring” around Günther Guillaume. There was none. The Observer claimed that Guillaume was a double agent who in earlier days spied for the BRD Social Democratic Ost. He was not.

In Norway, it was the Social Democratic Party’s main newspaper Arbeiderbladet that – with no disclosed sources – published a rumour that Treholt had a “secret child behind the Iron Curtain” and the KGB’s threats to the child were allegedly the reason for his espionage. The child did not exist.

The front page headlines of both The Guardian and the Daily Express the day Treholt’s trial started in Norway referred to an alleged sex story: “Norwegian Diplomat Took To Spying after Moscow Orgy” and “Sex Orgy Diplomat Blackmailed into Spying”. According to Treholt and his lawyer, Treholt made up the story as part of a “confession syndrome” (Haugestad 2004: 60) after the arrest. The story has never been corroborated by independent sources and was not a part of the later verdict, but it is a classic feature in spy novels.

The Swedish tabloid Aftonbladet’s headline after the arrest of Treholt was “The Spy Victim of His Gaming Debt”. Treholt did not have any gambling debt. Another story about his wife, the TV celebrity Kari Storækre (“The End of His Wife’s TV Career”) was also false.

In the last week of January 1984, when Norwegian spy Arne Treholt was the big media story in both Norway and Sweden, the Daily Express had one notice on him, while it had a front page story on the long-lasting allegation that Roger Hollis, the former director of British counter-espionage service MI5, was a Russian spy. This is one of the stories that Adam Curtis refers to as nonsense in a harsh critique of espionage journalism (Curtis 2013).

The common feature of all these erroneous stories is that they resemble well-known themes and features from popular spy culture. The fantasy world of espionage fights its way back to journalism; which often ends up with the telling of human interest stories.
mixed up with erroneous “facts” that fit in. The human interest frame links the factual spy stories to the fictional spy stories; and the borders between reality and fiction become blurred, partly because very little factual information is available.

The human interest frame as such does not link the espionage cases to either a “Cold War” or a “class struggle” paradigm. However, this frame is a prerequisite for the issue-specific traitor frame.

The strategy frame

One of the most commonly used frames in mainstream political journalism is the strategy frame, where political questions are transformed into questions of competition, strategies and tactics (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000). The journalists avoid discussing the issue itself and instead turn to discuss the (party) political outcomes of the crises, e.g. like this:

*After the most important spy scandal in the history of the Federal Republic, the Social Democrats are facing a loss of voters (...) Now, they fear that the affair may revive the old prejudice, that the SPD is unreliable and not suited to conduct government business. (my transl.)*21

*The Guardian*, too, a newspaper that only printed a small teaser on its front page the day after the arrest, referred to the German debate in its first day report: the Government attempted to present the “affair as a triumph of the counter-espionage work”.22 However, the opposition “did not view the case in this way. They have demanded that the Government should make a statement to Parliament.”23

*The Guardian* printed one more article concerning the espionage facts in the first week, and then turned to the political consequences. The article, “Taint of Spy Case Rubs off on to the Brandt Regime”,24 referred to an opinion poll that gave the SPD only 30 per cent of the votes, down from 39 per cent a month earlier. *The Guardian* referred to the opposition accusing the SPD “of having belittled the Communist threat so much that they had weakened the resistance of the security services”. It “cannot be trusted with the task of safeguarding the security of the State”.25 According to the newspaper, there were 15,000 spies in Bundesrepublik Deutschland (BRD) (West Germany) at the time, and there were constant disclosures. However, the Guillaume affair was of a different character; “indeed a feat”26 to have penetrated the Chancellor’s office. The liberal UK newspaper quoted opposition sources’ personal attacks on the responsible minister, Ehmke, who “neglected the security interest”.

The strategy frame, like the human interest frame, does not link the espionage cases to either the “Cold War” or the “class struggle” paradigm.

The “media are not to be trusted” frame

As shown above, on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain, the espionage was not made salient at all – with one exception. This exception was an article printed in *Neues Deutschland* in early May 1974, and the theme was Günter Guillaume. It was probably too difficult for *Neues Deutschland* to uphold its absolute silence on this matter because it was so intensely mediated in BRD and most of the East German citizens could (illegally) receive BRD’s main television channels (Havens et al. 2013).
Hence, *Neues Deutschland* made an exception to its rule and published a relatively long editorial on the Guillaume affair, in the form of media criticism:

One who is forced, for professional reasons, to read the press in the Federal Republic, is amazed about the “level” of the journalists of the “most free country in the world” at this time. The whole press follows the theatrical thunder of the Springer Press and the officially prescribed outrage. (my transl.).

The main point of the *Neues Deutschland* article was that the opposition and the right-wing Springer Press had started a witch-hunt where the victim was the Federal Government itself. Guillaume was allowed to remain in the Chancellor’s office for a year – under suspicion of treachery – while the government and the secret services tried to uncover an “agent ring”. In April 1974 they arrested five people, however, after a week, there was “nothing left” of the alleged “ring”.

This is in a way true. Guillaume, suspected as a spy, was left untouched at the Chancellor’s office for a year. Nothing like an agent ring was ever revealed – and we still do not know what kind of damage his espionage did to the BRD’s security interests.

When Brandt resigned in May, *Neue Zeit* argued that the reason for this “Schritt” was the evolving economic crisis and the increasing unemployment in BRD. The Guillaume affair was strongly downplayed: “Several domestic and foreign correspondents here in Bonn point out that the Guillaume affair is no more than a pretext for the resignation of Willy Brandt” (my transl.).

In their coverage of Brandt’s resignation, the DDR papers consistently referred to the “Guillaume Fall” as only a triggering factor, but they never described what this “Fall” actually was. The frame in the only DDR article in the first-week period is “The media are not to be trusted”. The important cultural theme, here, the core in the central organizing idea, is “class struggle” against Willy Brandt and other politicians who preferred peace.

### Table 2. The construction of a frame in DDR coverage of espionage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media are not to be trusted</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Problem definition</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Source of the problem:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibility</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Solution</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Moral basis</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural motive</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Metaphor/stereotype</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Visual image</strong></td>
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### The “traitor” frame

**The spy**

All the western newspapers in all the cases provide the *story of the traitor*, persons who let their people down for money and/or women. The day after Prime’s verdict, the *Daily Express* front page cried out “38 Years for the Master Spy Who Betrayed His Wife and the Country. THE ARCH TRAITOR”. A spy who also is a paedophile cheating on his
wife is definitely a good journalistic story. The article revealed, however, absolutely no factual information about Prime’s espionage. The traitor frame was constructed mainly by *indications* of what the spies may have destroyed and what damage their activities may have done to their countries.

Spying is often connected to persons with a weak character of some kind. In the British press Geoffrey Prime was framed as a friendless misfit, a sexual abuser, a loner and a loser who for some strange reason found meaning in life through espionage. *The Guardian* wrote, citing his lawyer, that “Prime was always a sexual and social misfit. Alone. Unhappy, pathetic, tripping to a psychiatrist at certain crucial points.” On the other hand, Prime was married twice and had a bright career at GCHQ in Cheltenham, so the real picture must have been multidimensional, which also is the conclusion in the two books about him (Prime & Watson 1984; Cole 1999).

*Die Zeit*’s picture of Treholt was of the successful career man with “a 200-square metre apartment behind the Royal Palace”: “The KGB spy lived the life of a well-situated, upper-class citizen; married to the beautiful TV journalist Kari Storækre. He had a child and a Saab 900 Turbo in the private parking lot.” This was the only element of “class struggle” framing I found in the Western media texts.

Guillaume was framed as a rather strange figure. He was a strict DDR officer, “no agent type at all” – the clever organizer and a man who at the same time “served both his wife and two mistresses”. According to sources, Guillaume had dated Marieluise Müller and another woman simultaneously.

The villain of the Guillaume story was to a higher degree the Eastern Bloc regimes rather than the spy himself. *Aftenposten* was very harsh towards the DDR government: asserting that it had played “a game so cynical and non-friendly that there is no reason to question Brandt’s disappointment and disillusion”.

In this way, two storylines were intertwined, the story of the persons with a weak character and the story of the evil KGB, which exploited these character weaknesses. At the same time, defectors from the Eastern Bloc were usually framed in the opposite way, as *strong* characters, supported by the “good” secret services of the West. Spies are consistently framed as heroes or villains *depending on their employers*. “Our” spies were heroes, especially Russians spying for the West, who had actually betrayed their mother country.

**The governments**

Not only the spies in question, but also the governments are framed as “traitors”, not “vigilant enough” against communism and the Eastern Bloc threat. In all three cases, a considerable part of the articles focused on political intrigues and controversies. It may be that these would be different in other spy cases, because both the Treholt and the Guillaume affairs were strongly political per se. Treholt was a well-known social democratic politician and Guillaume was the Chancellor’s secretary. However, even the Prime affair, which was non-political as such, was strongly politicized. In the very first article about the affair, *The Guardian* linked the information to a political controversy in parliament, where the Labour opposition used the security problems to attack the Tory government. The Norwegian tabloid *VG* took the same approach:
Quite a few MPs have challenged the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher on the security and the espionage at the Cheltenham (...) However, the Government has used all its power to try to downscale the affair (my transl.). 34

In the late Cold War, Norway and Sweden (and the DDR) still had a partisan press; and the press in the UK and the BRD were also politically polarized. These political leanings were apparent in the coverage of the spy affair. For example, the day after the arrest of Guillaume, Bild Zeitung printed a large picture of Brandt together with his now arrested secretary under the headline “Verhaftet. Brandt’s Vertrauter: Ostspion” (“Arrested. Brandt’s Intimate: Eastern Spy”). 35

Bild Zeitung’s front page resembles the conservative Norwegian broadsheet paper Aftenposten’s top story the Monday after Treholt’s arrest – a large, eye-catching picture of the arrested Treholt, together with a Russian minister and Minister Jens Evensen. The headline was “Sentralt Plassert Spion” (“Centrally Located Spy”) 36 and the framing is clear, at least to a Norwegian audience. Treholt was a spy, Evensen (and the Social Democratic Party) gave him a central position in the difficult negotiations with the Soviets concerning fishing rights in the Barents Sea, and the result was a disaster. 37

As we can see from these examples, the Spy Scandal links the social democratic parties to the spy and to the communists; they are not reliable, they are too “soft” on the Soviet Union and the communists.

The right-leaning British tabloid Daily Express was quite critical towards the conservative Thatcher government in its writings on the Prime affair, especially because the affair coincided in time with two other security scandals. The most tabloid-worthy of these was the Michael Fagan affair. Fagan had been able to break into the queen’s bedroom in Buckingham Palace. When it was revealed that the queen’s bodyguard had visited male prostitutes, the scandal was complete, and the main target of the Daily Express was Thatcher’s Home Secretary, William Whitelaw – who was also responsible for counter-espionage. 38

When Geoffrey Prime was arrested and the rumours started to spread in Westminster, the Daily Express wove all three cases together in its attacks on Whitelaw. The headline was “Massive Spy Scandal Faces Maggie” which would “eclipse even the Philby, Burgess, McLean storm in the Fifties”. 39 The Daily Express referred to Labour MPs who said that “Law and Order under the Tories seems to be crumbling, whether at Buckingham Palace, or at the sensitive communication networks”. 40

In Table 3, these analyses are summarized according to my operationalization of Entman’s frame definition:

- The main frame is the traitor frame. This traitor frame is constructed in two variations: the single spy cheating on his country 41 and the government betraying its people by being “soft on the Soviets” or “careless about security”.

- There is no room left for doubt: the Eastern Bloc spy is a traitor while “our” spies are heroes. When the well-known Norwegian social researcher Johan Galtung called Arne Treholt a “spy for peace”, he was ridiculed. Today, when the East–West frame is substantially weaker, this is much more discussed. While numerous Western mainstream media frame Edward Snowden as a spy and a traitor, Norwegian mainstream media frame him as a “whistle-blower” or “hero”. Because it is not clear whether Snowden is a spy or a whistle-blower, the mainstream media cannot use the traitor frame, but more narrow issue-related frames.
Table 3. The construction of frames in Western coverage of espionage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of the problem:</th>
<th>The spy as a traitor</th>
<th>The government as a traitor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Ideology, weak character, women, gambling debts</td>
<td>The government is “soft on Soviets”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution</td>
<td>rests with the traitor and the KGB</td>
<td>rests with the Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral basis</td>
<td>Loyalty (to the nation)</td>
<td>Loyalty (to the nation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural motive</td>
<td>The archetype of the traitor</td>
<td>The archetype of the traitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphor/stereotype</td>
<td>The deviant person</td>
<td>The politicians are not to be trusted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual image</td>
<td>The traitor and the enemy, the traitor as a weak man</td>
<td>The government and the traitor (and the enemy)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

In my three espionage cases, the Eastern European newspapers followed in their governments’ footsteps and prolonged the politics of silence. In the only article on the theme, the espionage was (like Wennerstrøm in Sweden in 1963) framed as “class struggle”.

In the West, newspapers framed the espionage using three of the more common generic frames of the news media: the national frame, the strategy frame and the human interest frame and combined them with an issue-specific cultural frame, the traitor, all “sexed” up with irrelevant and false facts, inspired by the spy stories in the fiction media. The study indicates no significant differences in coverage between the four Western countries or between the three espionage affairs. In the first week after the arrests, all the newspapers in all countries (except the DDR) in all three cases use these four frames in their coverage and all allowed more space to their “own” spies than foreign spies. The facts that were made salient were the spy’s weak character, the organizing theme was “the traitor” in the Cold War against the East, not acting according to the “remedy” in the established Cold War paradigm which was “constant vigilance and struggle on ideological, diplomatic, economic and military fronts” (Entman 2004: 95).

Treason is a morally strong cultural frame; deeply embedded in Western culture: Judas, Brutus and Quisling, to name but a few. The traitor frame is approvable and approved in many different social situations and issues: adultery, war, football and religion. M. Gregory Kendrick (2016) discusses the traitor as an extreme archetype of villainy in Western societies:

> There is only fear and loathing for the traitor. In large part, this is because we live in societies that are predicated on the notion that we can believe in faith and credit of our friends, neighbours and countrymen. When a person, group or institution betrays this assumption, they undermine the trust that makes possible everything from marriage and family life, to religion, politics, law, commerce and diplomacy. (Kendrick 2016: 61)

The study shows that Western European media, in Sweden. Norway, the UK and the BRD in 1974 and the 1980s made the Cold War “something people can understand” by
using one of the strongest cultural organizing ideas in the collective Christian heritage: the traitor.

In the three cases, the “class struggle” frame is only significant on the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain. The study suggests that the framing of Wennerstrøm was a deviant, local, time-limited framing of an espionage case.

**Notes**

1. The first number in each cell refers to news articles, the second number to paragraphs
2. VG 20.07.84
3. VG 26.04.74, Dagbladet 26.04.74
4. Die Zeit 11.11.84
5. BZ 03.05.74
6. Daily Express 04.05.74
7. The Guardian 04.05.74
9. VG 10.05.74, Bild Zeitung 10.05.74
10. VG 24.04.74
11. The Guardian 21.07.82
12. Daily Express 19.07.82
13. BZ 26.04.74
14. Observer 28.04.74
15. Arbeiterbladet 23.01.74
16. The Guardian 26.02.85
17. Daily Express 26.02.85
18. Aftenbladet 22.01.84
19. Aftenbladet 24.04.84
20. Daily Express 26.1.74
21. Der Spiegel Vol. 5/74
22. The Guardian 01.05.74
23. The Guardian 26.04.74
24. The Guardian 01.05.74
25. The Guardian 01.05.74
26. The Guardian 01.05.74
27. Neues Deutschland, 02.05.74
28. Neue Zeit 08.05.74
29. Daily Express 11.11.82
30. Guardian 11.11.82
31. Die Zeit 03.02.84
32. VG 24.04.74
33. Aftenposten 08.05.74
34. VG 19.07.82
35. BZ 26.04.74
36. Aftenposten 23.01.84
37. For years, Norway and the Soviet Union negotiated on the so-called “delimitation line” in the Barents Sea – and the conservative press in Norway was very dissatisfied with the agreement that Evensen and Treholt had signed.
38. Daily Express 16.07.82
39. Daily Express 17.07.82
40. Daily Express 17.07.82
41. (and even his wife). In all three cases it was a central element in the press coverage that the spies had cheated on their wives.
References


