When context matters:
Social media and the post-Soviet public spheres

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СРОЧНО! МОЛНИЯ! ЗОМБИ В #БИРЮЛЕВО! НАПАДАЮТ НА ВСЕХ! ОНИ ПОВСЮДУ!

URGENT! BREAKING!
ZOMBIES IN #BIRYULEVO!
ATTACKING EVERYONE! THEY'RE EVERYWHERE!

#sport #russia #greepeace #news #putin #lgbt #football #moscow #navalny #RT #ITAR
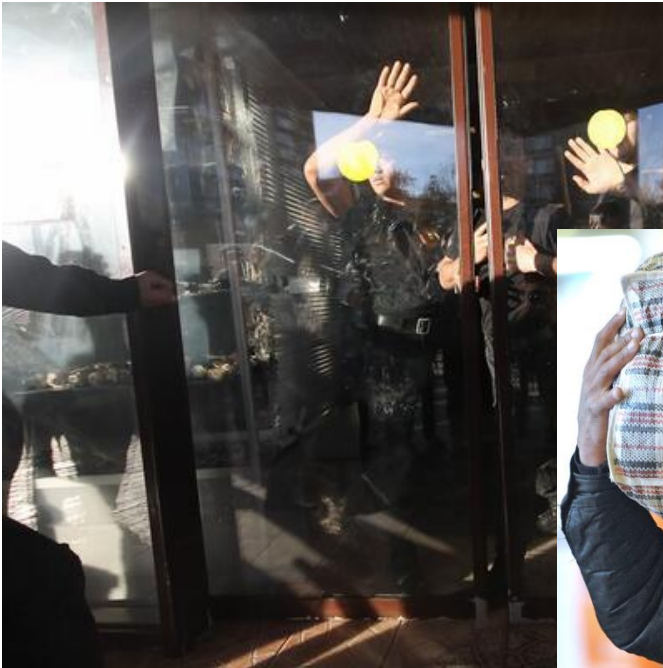
KILL ALL THE ZOMBIES – SAVE THE VEGETABLES

'warehouse'

ZOMBIES

VEGETABLES

COSMONAUTS

PUTTING SOCIAL MEDIA IN CONTEXT:
what matters for public discussion?

- Societal cleavages: values-based, political and economic divisions outside the social networks

- Discursive traditions

- Media market structure

- Internet and social media penetration levels

- Media diets and group representation in social networks

- **Not only them but the linkages between them**
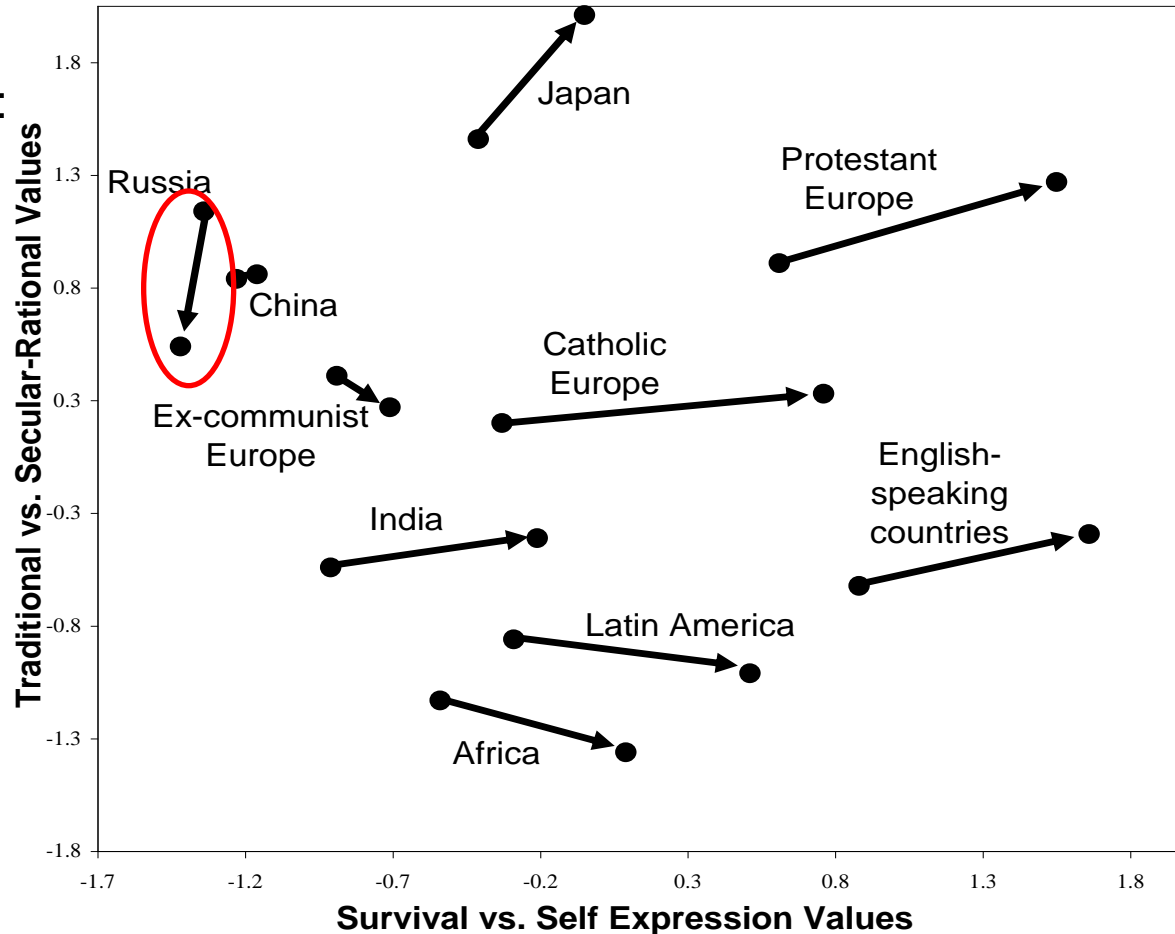
PUTTING POST-SOVIET MEDIA IN CONTEXT
societal cleavages and the public sphere

- Multi-speed / anti-modernization

- Deeply fragmented society

- Traumatized communities

HARD RUSSIAN MODERNIZATION

- **'Anti-'modernization**

Shift of values
(Inglehart, 2012):

1987-2007

We could NOT expect full modernization – the shock was too big.

HARD RUSSIAN MODERNIZATION

- **Multi-speed modernization**

  Kangaspuuro & Smith (2006), Vartanova (2013):
  uniting 'national media model' and the modernization idea

  Post-war Soviet modernization was:
  - top-down and Western-oriented (just as long before);
  - fragmented: absence of a systemic approach to transition
  - multi-speed in the industries: space and ballet vs. cars and drama
  - multi-speed for the society: groups developed alternative value sets
  - multi-speed for journalism: acceptance of innovations was not universal
  - continued in the same way even after the liberalization of the media market

  Toepfl (2010, 2015), Bodrunova & Litvinenko (2013, 2015):
  multi-speed modernization of the Russian society
  breaks Russian media into several clusters <u>across</u> online/offline divisions.

MULTI-SPEED MODERNIZATION HAS LED TO A…

- **Fragmented society**

Zubarevich (2011, 2013, 2014): **'4 Russias'**

- 'First Russia': cities over 1 mln, white-collar, self-esteem, cosmopolitan

- 'Second Russia': cities average 300,000, Soviet patterns of life

- 'Third Russia': rural, devastated, only 20-25% of population

- 'Fourth Russia': migrants and Caucasus not engaging with 'other Russias'

…which, in its turn, has led to the situation when:

- The 'third' and 'fourth' Russias **are not represented enough in media**

- The 'first' and 'second' Russias **have no common discussion goals**

…and this cleavage of values and lifestyles has **deepened** in 2010s

Post-Soviet public spheres and social traumas

- **Traumatized communities**

Censorship and the split between the *first* and *second* culture

Schoepflin (1995): *Post-Communism: A profile*

- the state is evil, the person is good
- BUT the state is to provide full living conditions

Kordonsky (2002 to 2014): not classes but 'estates'/'castes'

- re-legitimization and struggle for symbolic proximity to power
- short-termism in decision-making
- Stalinist, post-Soviet and democratic traumas

Absence – or, rather, constant change – of rules of the game
Etkind (2013): *Warped Mourning* – painful and distorted public memory

Post-Soviet public spheres and social traumas

Traumatized communities - resulting in…

- high levels of eternal insecurity, low trust to institutions, and disbelief in 'Western democracy' in <u>over 80%</u> of the population

- shifted (or absent!) understanding of left and right in politics

- major break of trust to media and special understanding of censorship

- fatigue of the absence of rules of the game and corruption

- longing for non-paradoxical times => longing for ideology

- revelation from this paradox is when the state is good again – e.g. when you find an external enemy

This is why the societies are **easy to polarize** even beyond their already existing fragmentation, and the situation is easy to abuse

This is why there is **no discursive ground** for inclusive public discussion

FOUR MEDIA SYSTEMS?

Toepfl (2010): a '4 Russian media systems' thesis

	Official Mass Media	Mainstream Mass Media	Liberal-Oppositional Mass Media	Social Media
Channel of Distribution	Broadcast / Print / Internet	Print / Internet / Radio	Print / Internet / Radio	Internet (Network Structure)
Examples of Media Outlets	*Perviy Kanal, Rossiya 1, Rossiskaya Gazeta, NTV*	*Komsomol'skaya Pravda, Izvestia, Trud*	*Novaya Gazeta, gazeta.ru, Echo Moskvy, The New Times*	Forums, Blogs, Microblogs, Social Networks
Attitude towards the Ruling Elites	Unconditional support	Largely loyal but selectively critical	Highly critical	Varying
Influence of the Ruling Elites on the Published Content	High	Medium	Low	Low
Audience	Large	Medium	Marginal	Marginal

First and Second Russias in newspapers

TV market: between state and gigs

The structure and ownership

- First Channel – major share owned by Putin's ally Kovalchuk

- Russia 1 (+ Russia 2, Kultura, Vesti24 etc.) – state-owned VGTRK   > 50%

- NTV – ex-independent, owned by Gazprom Media

- STS, TNT, REN TV – private national entertainment channels   > 20%

- 12 niche all-Russian – over 200 non-air niche – local channels   < 20%
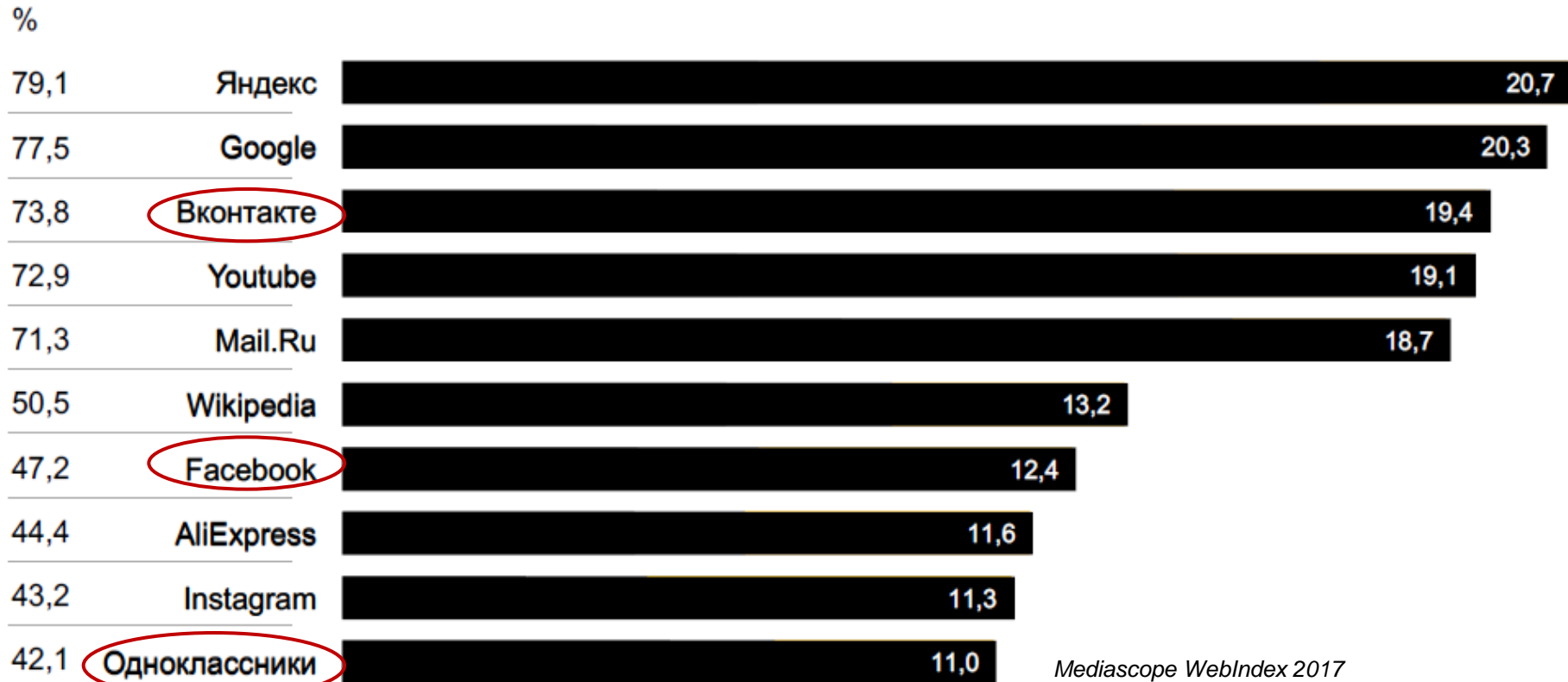
There are no communicative structures for inclusive political discussion

THUS,

there are no goals, grounds, and spaces for a nationwide public sphere

Social networks and social cleavages

| %		
79,1	Яндекс	20,7
77,5	Google	20,3
73,8	Вконтакте	19,4
72,9	Youtube	19,1
71,3	Mail.Ru	18,7
50,5	Wikipedia	13,2
47,2	Facebook	12,4
44,4	AliExpress	11,6
43,2	Instagram	11,3
42,1	Одноклассники	11,0

Mediascope WebIndex 2017

Social networks and social cleavages:
The trends are the same

1. The 'first' and 'second' Russias form **platform-wide echo chambers**:

- Facebook – a liberal echo chamber

- Vkontakte – depoliticized youth content, more pro-establishment views

- Odnoklassniki – 55+ in cities, diverse in rural areas; largely pro-establishment

2. **The 'fourth' Russia is hugely under-represented** in nationwide discussions

- e.g. the immigrants do not use smartphones

- even when they do, the community culture of media use shapes the preferences towards text messaging

3. The virtual **absence of influential civil society** outside social networks makes the discussions de-rationalize and fall into echo chambers

The Russian Twitter on migrants: A case of difference from Europe
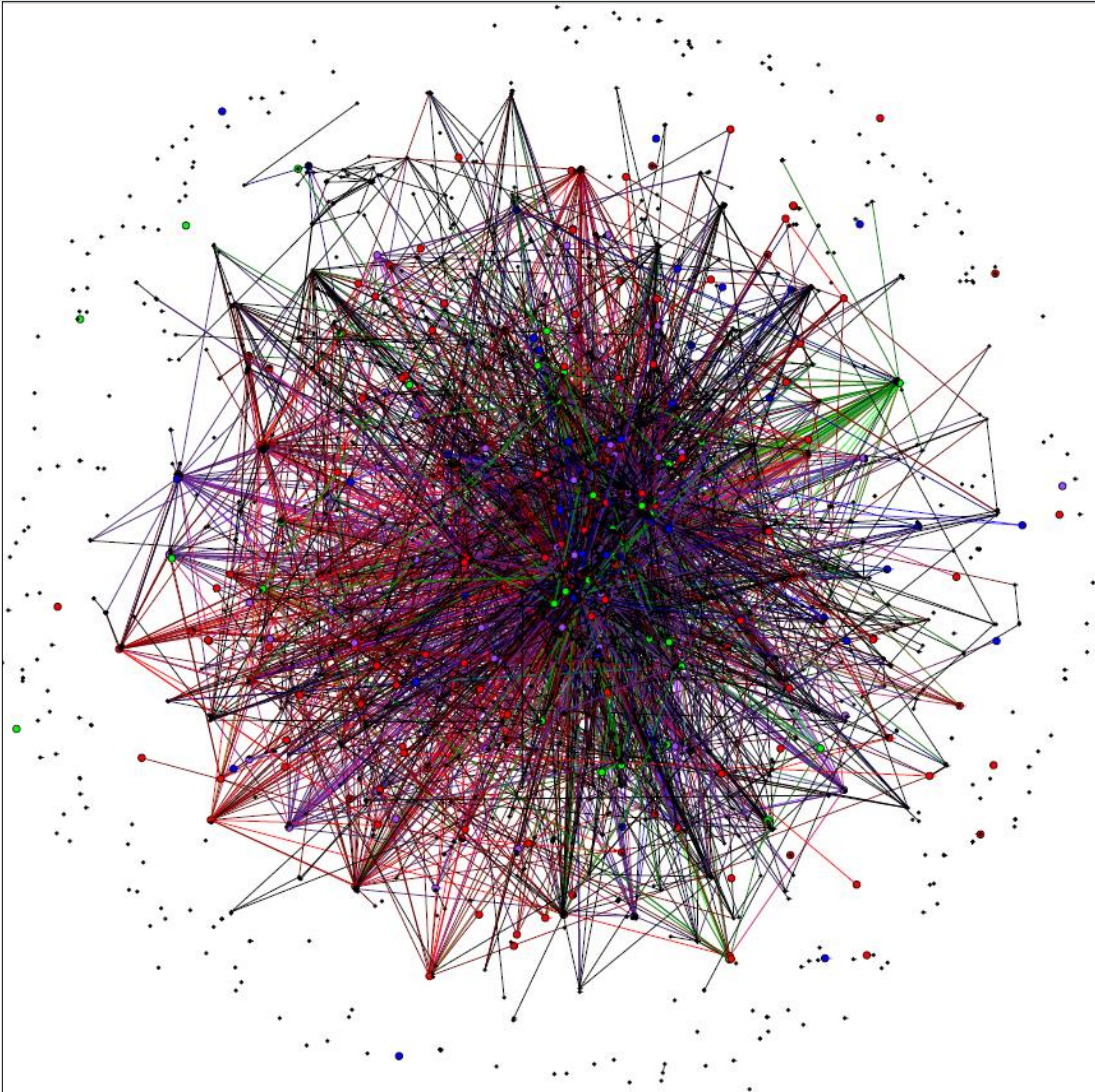
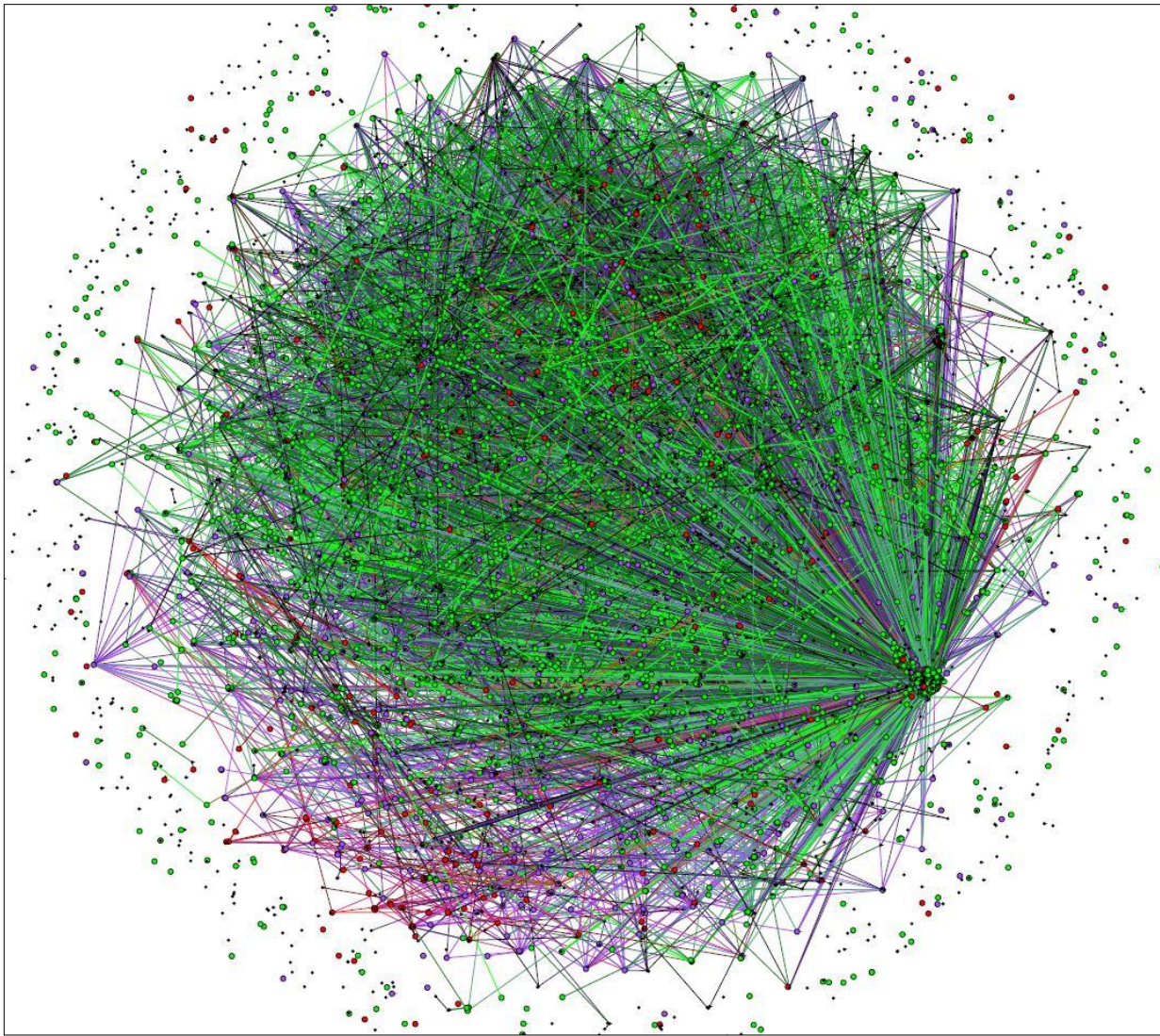**The Biryulevo case:**
Red: media discourse
Green: angry and tired citizens
Blue: nationalists
Grey: neutral users

Knowing of homophily
is **simply not enough**

The Russian Twitter on migrants: A case of difference from Europe

The Cologne case:
Green: anti-immigrant
Red: pro-immigrant
Purple: overlappers

Implications of the necessity of context

First, **we need to look larger and wider:**

- social communication is the area that demands much wider outside knowledge

- explaining communication patterns is explaining how the societies think

- not only 'how' but also 'why' matters

- one needs to link the dynamics of societal cleavages, discursive traditions, and the newly-arising platform features

- **working within multi-disciplinary teams that include SSH scholars**

- **avoiding subjectivity in interpretation**

Implications of the necessity of context

Second, **if context casts definitive impact, how do we do comparative research?**

- studying similar contexts

- but also studying dissimilar contexts!

- from case-study to regional and universal variables

…and we will all recognize our zombies and cosmonauts

even across cultures ☺

THANK YOU!

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