

Written under the shadow of 9/11 and subsequent events, including the U.S. war on terror and the conflict in Iraq, these two seemingly disparate treatments of international news coverage foreground some pressing conceptual and methodological issues that confront scholars and observers seeking to understand the role of information in the global arena. Shanor's study is presented as an analysis of whether profit or quality should prevail in the reporting of foreign news in the U.S. and reads, itself, like an extraordinarily well researched piece of investigative journalism. Robinson's expose of "the CNN effect," on the other hand, attempts to craft a new theory of media-policy interaction to assess whether, and the circumstances under which, news coverage affects policies geared towards military intervention in humanitarian crises. At first glance, there is little uniting these two books beyond a general concern with the complexities of understanding and producing "foreign" news. Taken together, however, they provide a compelling argument for applying, as Robinson notes "a variety of research strategies" to make sense of the dynamics which govern and are effected by international news coverage.

Robinson explores an important and persistent question regarding the role of news media in affecting policy decisions, particularly during times of crisis. Focussing on various circumstances within which American forces were deployed as humanitarian intervention, he employs a multiple-layered theory and method to examine evidence for the explanatory efficacy of "the CNN Effect," or the conviction that media coverage of conflict and suffering in crisis-ridden zones of the world cause policymakers to apply military measures. Particularly critical of previous attempts to explain such matters based solely on interview data, he calls for more systematic and theory-driven approaches to isolate and explain the effect of news coverage on the policy process. His own "policy-media interaction model" instead offers a two-way understanding of the role of media in decision-making, based on more specific variables (such as the degree to which certainty about policy can be observed), and other "situational" matters (such as the personal predilections of world leaders). The approach is generally useful: he melds analysis of news frames (seeking empathy and/or distance, for example), with theories explaining media-state relations and political contexts, to generate a model which assesses the likelihood that a decision to provide military support to aid in the resolution of conflicts might be related to media coverage. In addition to testing his theory by correlating various types of news frames with types of policy, Robinson also frequently goes to primary data and sources, including interviews with players in these conflicts. Ironically, he is critical of this method in his theoretical justification, but then demonstrates how "anecdotal" and interview-derived data provide much better grounding for understanding the factors that inform his approach than content analysis alone.

His findings suggest that the CNN effect is less prominent than a more dynamic intersection of factors that come into play in the policy process. Six case studies of humanitarian interventions are used to test his model, including conflicts in Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Rwanda, and lead him to conclude that the effects of media coverage are only one of a series of factors contributing to policy decisions, and are likely to be related to the type of policy and context within which it is introduced. The certainty with which he discards previous work, including agenda-setting studies and "strong effects models" is less evident in his own findings, which tend to be qualified to a significant extent. However, he illustrates that a number of fine-grained distinctions between the ways that policy is devel-
oped and agreed-upon, types of commonly-employed news frames, and context need to be included in efforts to theorize the power of the media.

In short, Robinson attempts to answer a lot of questions that have complicated other media effects research models. He makes some missteps, notably burying much of the theoretical basis for his model in appendices, and by relying much more heavily on interview data than he suggests others should. But his conclusions suggest that, in a dense and information-rich matrix of forces and factors, foreign policy decisions are far too complex to be explained away by the impact of media coverage of suffering people in far-off places on the public, and subsequently, the government.

Shanor wants to know if any link might have existed between the deterioration of American international news reporting and events such as September 11. Underpinning his investigation is a basic contention that globalization, new technologies, and immigration patterns challenge the ways that international news coverage is practised by America’s major media outlets. In part 1, “Does Foreign News Matter?” he identifies the failure to recognize and report signs of imminent danger among the “costs of apathy” on the part of U.S. media providers towards the international arena. He cites not only the lack of coverage of the identities, ideologies, “hopelessness and misrule” that motivate groups and actors in various parts of the world, but the virtual disappearance of networks of correspondents, stringers, bureau chiefs, and local informants that comprised myriad “listening posts” throughout the world.

This analysis is a springboard for what essentially amounts to an entreaty to his fellow journalists, news directors, editors, and the like to remain vigilant—not only to world affairs, but to the impact of conglomeration, concentration, and privileging of market forces on quality journalism. He is a fan of the bureau, the foreign correspondent, and dispatches from the field, but is also attentive to new developments in technology and immigration that challenge more traditional understandings of foreign affairs. And he is most effective speaking as an insider, generating an almost ethnographic account of the political economy of American journalism, as well as the culture and politics of newsrooms, bureaus, and wire services. From this perspective, therefore, he informs us that if systematic theoretical analysis discounts the likelihood of the CNN effect, as Robinson argues, reporters themselves seem convinced by it. Quotations collected from Shanor’s colleagues illustrate “I write for the general public so they will be appalled and get involved, and I also write for the Beltway in Washington . . . [W]e hope our words and images can provoke people to do that” (p. 44).

Shanor makes no claim to his subjectivity in any reflexive way, however, or any effort to foreground his own role in this industry or the methods and tools he brings to his study. Similarly, it is difficult to discern any attempt to articulate an overall structure or set of objectives (conceptual, methodological, or otherwise) within Shanor’s book. It is a busman’s tour of a variety of American news organizations and settings, ranging from CNN, USA Today, and the major radio and television networks, to lesser-known regional and local papers: the Alabama Anniston Star, for example, and the Portland Oregonian, merit particular consideration for the ways that their editors and reporters negotiate the increasingly resistant terrain of global news coverage. Shanor efficiently compresses volumes of information about American news providers in a fairly economic discussion and, for this alone, the book is a useful resource. But he is surprisingly inattentive to alternative and independent media. This oversight is particularly evident in his final chapter where he discusses the role of freelancers as “journalistic guerillas” who confront boundaries of funding, gatekeeping, and “bookkeeping” and wonders about the potential efficacy of organizing freelancers into an alternative agency. Alternative, independent, and online press, such as www.alternet.org and the Independent Media Centre, for instance, deserve mention in such contexts, both from the U.S. and other nations and regions.
If Shanor fails to provide a coherent overview of the scope and objectives of his study, he atones by developing a compelling argument for broadening the scope of ways that the term “foreign” can and should be deployed in the U.S. as an information-rich culture, enabled by technology but hampered by the demands of market forces. Arguably, this provides one of the more unique contributions to a rapidly growing but uneven body of literature seeking to explain processes and tendencies associated with globalization. He is also refreshingly optimistic, and sees hope for recuperation through the intersection of technology, globalization, and demographics since some innovative leaders have already gained new audiences for their newspapers, networks, and broadcasters envelop new technologies. With respect to the latter point, for example, he illustrates how the previously limited readership of the Christian Science Monitor’s exemplary foreign news has grown since the publication developed Web capacity.

Neither American news providers’ efforts to produce and distribute international news nor the processes that determine how foreign policy decisions get made can be effectively understood without engaging emergent questions related to new technologies and globalization, in addition to some older ones about sources of inequities and unrest in parts of the world that do not routinely attract the attention of the mainstream media in the U.S. Consequently, these questions are brought to bear on the methodological and conceptual tools used by analysts of the contemporary global system. Shanor and Robinson serve their respective communities of fellow journalists and scholars well by pointing this out.

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