
If you have only a short period of time to read this book, you should look at chapter 14: “South Africa’s Miracle Cure: A Stage-Managed TV Spectacular?” (pp. 277-296) by Australian scholars P. Eric Louw & Naren Chitty. Of the book’s 18 chapters (divided in four sections), this text offers the most enlightening and perceptive point of view on international news—as produced by the global mass media net—that has been emerging in the last decade. Drawing on a framework called “Vocabularies of Globalization,” it presents the 1994 election of Nelson Mandela to the presidency of South Africa as a drama and a grand public-relations operation staged for the world by domestic interests that were successful in mastering the expectations of the global culture and media. I suspect that in the light of the same matrix, events like the election of Vicente Fox as the new president of Mexico in the summer of 2000, or the ousting of Slobodan Milosevic from the presidency of Serbia/Yugoslavia in September of that year, would be deciphered in quite a surprising and penetrating manner.

My focus on Louw & Chitty’s chapter is not meant to detract from the remainder of the articles in this high-quality collection, the intention of which is to sum up the state of research on International News at the end of the 1990s. As the introduction announces, “this book brings together both theoretical essays and case studies that are informed by historical and contemporary debates about issues of media flow and media imperialism specifically, and those of media globalization generally” (p. xi). And it delivers. The more than 400 pages offer very solid material although most of the book is inspired by rather expected ideas. Thus, most of the essays attempt in one way or another to grasp what has changed since the fall of the Iron Curtain, the subsequent fading away of the Cold War frame of reference, and the credibility crisis of the demands for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). Accordingly, the book contains numerous case studies on countries of the former Communist Bloc, a greater number of chapters than that which could have been included a few years ago.

In fact, Louw & Chitty are by no means alone in their effort to account for the emerging globalization. But most of the others follow the more traditional path of trying to assess to what extent international news coverage no longer represents different national viewpoints nor contributes to the process of nation-building. The essays in the volume also have a tendency to examine to what degree national news systems continue to digest the international flow of information in a way that consolidates the national symbolic personality. Of specific interest here is the text of one of the Canadian scholars, Gina Bailey, who tries in chapter 8 to determine if Canadian media adopted the American point of view on the Peruvian Hostage crisis of 1996. She finds some slight differences between the two forms of coverage.

In terms of the theoretical perspectives represented, the preferred concepts of the studies include:

- “metaphor”; (although some use notions of this kind without acknowledging it: for instance, chapter 3 examines the exchange of “national” news between countries as if it involved an “interpersonal relation”);
- “matrix”: the model designed by Naren Chitty in chapter 2 and applied to South Africa in chapter 14;
- “grids”; in particular, the “four global grids” of cultural studies recalled in chapter 1;
- “frames”; chapter 4 couples that idea with the broader concept of “hegemony” and applies them to the analysis of the Moscow Coup in August 1991; chapter
6 uses the “ideological frameworks” about the newspapers coverage in four countries (other than Great Britain and Argentina) of the Falklands/Malvinas War in 1982; chapter 7 does the same with “the New York Times Coverage of the 1996 Indian and Israeli Elections”;
- “scripts”: chapter 10 in particular draws on Tuen A. van Dijk to use “cognitive frameworks” and “cognitive macrostructures” to follow the news about “the South Caucasian and Bosnian Conflict”;
- “myths” about nation-building, and “imageries” can be found throughout the text.

These concepts are mainly used to frame the storytelling process. At the same time, many chapters consist of an empirical study of news products without any regard for the reception, perceptions, and uses of this material by audiences, except for some of the texts which scrutinize how national news agencies process the material that they receive from international news agencies.

Incidentally, I bookmarked chapters 15 and 16 because I had not yet clearly understood what the concept “development news” meant before reading them. Both chapters are largely normative and editorializing but they contain a judicious summary of the debates that have taken place in UNESCO about the New World Order. In particular, chapter 16 presents very clearly the different senses of the expression and gives examples of reporting done with that angle. Those texts also give detailed portraits of the alternative international news agencies Gemini and Inter Press Service (IPS). I also read with great interest chapter 10, entitled “Covering The South Caucasian and Bosnian Conflicts,” because it helps shed light on our North American collective prejudices—or maybe the “natural” bias of those raised in the European Christian culture—against all that is Arab and Islamic. This chapter also shows how this sort of prejudice perpetuates itself through international news.

The final two chapters are also of particular interest for very different reasons. Chapter 17 offers “An Analysis of International News Releases from Xinhua,” the news agency of the People’s Republic of China. When coupled with chapter 11 about Chinese television, it describes in a very insightful manner the change without crisis in the management of the national imagery. Chapter 17 examines Xinhua’s role as an alternate source of international news in Asia, a role that it could play in the near future in many other parts of the world. Chapter 18 proposes that the East–West narrative framework at work during the Cold War Era is being replaced by a North–South frame of hostile reporting by the North that focuses on the defects of the South in matters such as environment, human rights, democracy, corruption, child labour, and so forth. But this final chapter is better understood when coupled with Louw & Chitty’s “liturgies” of global media largely inspired by the American and other English-language media.

In their introduction, the authors express the wish that their text be used for research and teaching. To this end, they offer an Appendix (pp. 409–411) of very broad “Discussion Questions and Assignments.” But if I were to recommend this book to my graduate students, I would warn them especially against an element that cuts across the numerous chapters containing content analyses and that may mislead them about what scientific research is really about. The narrative style used to divulge the results of content analysis (reflecting broader tendencies found in scientific publications) erases the hesitations and the surprises of the actual investigation, and leaves the reader with the impression that what the researcher discovered was set from the beginning. Indeed, within such a frame of reference, the theory used for the interpretation and design of the empirical research is established from the onset, the categories of data are evidently the result of a series of trials and errors, and the protocols for the gathering of the data are repeatedly indicated. In the end, the results are presented in a way that brings us to think that the only possible surprise lies in
the distribution of data. Although it appears to be scientific because of the numerous figures and quantitative operations, this type of report leaves the impression of being largely tautological and that there has been no real discovery. It obscures the actual process of investigations rather than highlighting the lively process of discovery inherent in empirical research, of which a scientific article is but only one codified moment. Such a narrative style demands that the readers write their own falsifying investigation, one that stresses the excitement of counter-intuitive findings, the continuous interplay between the empirical findings and the previous expectations, the doubting, the numerous refinements of the analytical frame, the openness to surprises from the field, and the challenging difficulties arising from data that do not fit perfectly.

Notes
1. More precisely, within the English-speaking academic community, since most of the authors are Americans, along with three Canadians, one British, two Australians, one Mexican, and two from East Asia.
2. See chapter 16, “Development News Versus Globalized Entertainment” (pp. 323-342).
3. See chapter 9, “In the Shadows of the Kremlin: Africa’s Media Image in Russia: From Communism to Post-Communism” (pp. 169-176); chapter 11, “CCTV News and China’s Window on the World, 1992-1996” (pp. 197-221); and chapter 12, “The Bulgarian Communist/Socialist Party Press, 1990” (pp. 223-249).
4. See chapter 15, “News Agencies Re-Present the World” (pp. 299-321), and chapter 18, “International Agencies and Global Issues: The Decline of the Cold War News Frame” (pp. 389-411).
5. See chapter 13, “International News Flow and News Selection at the Afrikaans Daily, Beeld” (pp. 249-276), and chapter 17, “Flows of News from the Middle Kingdom” (pp. 343-388).

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