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Pondering the Future for Foreign News on National Television[°]

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This article discusses the ways television news media reinforce national perspectives in coverage of events outside their borders, and the potential consequences of this for mainstream television news. International news, as it is seen on national television, is still a rigid genre where people and events tend to be viewed either through national prisms or through generic characteristics common in hegemonic Anglo-American news sources. Globalization, in terms of the concentration of media ownership, and changing television formats have done remarkably little to change agendas and narratives in national television news. Shifting geopolitical realities, the accessibility of different news sources, and the self-reflexivity of journalists due to changing industry demands should make more of an impact on international news narratives. Some studies point to the existence of narratives portraying other types of relationships than the national "we" and the foreign "other," but systematic studies are needed to see whether such stories have increased over time.

At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, it is worth reflecting on the ways that national television news media report events outside of national borders, what this says about media globalization and television as an institution, and what consequences this has for audiences' ability to understand and engage with various "others." This article discusses the development of the academic debate on media globalization, placing television news as a paradox in that debate due to its particular combination of transnational and national production processes. Broadly speaking, international news, as seen on national television, will be shown to be a relatively rigid narrative genre in which people and events continue to be viewed mainly through national prisms.

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A number of studies over the past two decades support the notion that international events are framed by national television news media according to dominant political, economic, and cultural discourses about the rest of the world. At the same time, especially in cases of distant crises or "forgotten wars," international news stories tend to exhibit generic characteristics of the kind found in hegemonic Anglo-American news sources and media culture. This suggests that audiences' only choice would be between national versions of international events that reflect elites' geopolitical interests or an internationally generic version of conflicts and disasters, which, stripped of their specific contexts, all start to look alike.

Theoretically, the rapidly increasing number of transnational and regional news channels, and the self-reflexivity of journalists in the wake of changing industry demands should impact mainstream foreign news agendas and the stories told. So, too, should the relentless concentration of media ownership, and the effects of technological development on television formats. Yet, there is little systematic diachronic evidence of changes in the way international news stories are told in national television news. In a world where people are increasingly turning to the Internet, which caters to individual tastes and needs, this bodes ill for national television news outlets' ability to continue to attract large audiences for foreign news.

The Evolution of the Media Globalization Debate

Simon Cottle has, in various iterations, described what could be labeled as two grand theories offered in media globalization literature. There are those scholars who see the media as "emissaries of global dominance," and others who see the media as "emissaries of a global public sphere" (Cottle, 2009a; Cottle, 2009b; Rai & Cottle, 2010). The former can be traced back to the cultural-imperialism theorists of the 1970s: They are apt to use cross-border trade indicators to exemplify the asymmetric North-South flow of media products, to focus on media structures such as the concentration of ownership, and to point to evidence of the commercialization and homogenization of culture in the Anglo-American image (Herman & McChesney, 1997; Schiller, 1969). Decades later, these political economy theories still have much to recommend them; certainly, inexorable media concentration and commercialization continue—not only internationally but nationally and locally—if media are left unregulated. Even Anglo-American dominance, though increasingly challenged, seems clear in key media structures and products throughout the world (Thussu, 2007b).

In contrast, their more optimistic, cosmopolitanist compatriots are a mixed bag of theorists. Whether they portend intensified global flows of ideas, people, or images, cosmopolitan outlooks, or transnational citizenship discourses (Beck, 2006; Hannerz, 2004; Volkmer, 2003), these ideas have in common, according to Cottle, the prediction of the rise of a global public sphere. Among other things, such claims are based on assertions that changes in transnational media structures (the rise of global, regional, and local 24-hour news television), cosmopolitan consciousness among journalists, or the increasing number of globally mediated events are laying the foundations for a global public sphere. However, with the exception of Volkmer (2001), these theorists actually do not develop the notion of a global public sphere, nor do they provide much empirical evidence to support its existence.

One theoretical level down in Cottle's media globalization hierarchy (2009a, 2009b) are a collection of studies, somewhat disparagingly called "peripheral visions," that demonstrate the persistence of national or regional media cultures in the context of globalization. Whether due to persistent findings of

varying national news content of the same events (Cohen, Levy, Roeh & Gurevitch, 1996; Lee, Man Chun, Pan & So, 2002; Riegert, 1998; Wallis & Baran, 1990), the resilience of national media structures and forms of collective identity (Curran & Park, 2000; Hafez, 2007; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Morris & Waisbord, 2001), or the cultural hybridity it produces (Aksoy & Robins, 2002; Kraidy 2005), these and many more studies have for two decades demonstrated that neither of the two macrotheories of media globalization captures the diversity or complexity of the changes taking place.

The recognition of Anglo-American dominance in ownership of transnational industries and flows of media products does not preclude the existence of strong regional, national, and local media cultures, or diverse audience negotiations with foreign media products (Tunstall, 2007). If, for no other reason than for economic necessity, Western media conglomerates have been forced to localize their products in order to sell to different regional or local markets (Thussu, 2007a; Tunstall, 2007). This is exactly where the more recent research on regional and transnational satellite television channels has gone.

While it is CNN's rolling news format that appears to have caught on and led to a plethora of 24-hour news channels in regions all over the world, it is also the case that CNN has had to regionalize or nationalize (in the case of India, go into partnership) in order to stay in business (Cushion, 2010). At the same time, in a development reminiscent of the Cold War battle of short-wave radio stations, every self-respecting government seems to have started an English-language rolling news channel to challenge the claims of CNN or BBC World as worldwide distributors of news. Among these are Al-Jazeera English, Euronews, France24, China's CCTV, and Russia Today—but it remains to be seen whether these will make a dent in the Anglo-American dominance of wholesale news. Especially when, as Boyd-Barrett parenthetically notes, "for the first time in history . . . the four most economically successful world's news agencies—Associated Press, Bloomberg, Dow Jones and Reuters" are now located in North America (2008, p. 207).

This fact notwithstanding, we have entered what Cushion (2010) has called the "third phase" of 24-hour news television, which highlights the significance of regional media structures with multinational markets and translocal media. Influential regional Arabic, Chinese, Indian, and Brazilian corporations and their satellite television channels represent media flows that reflect diversity, hybridity, and the significance of non-Western media cultures on a global level (Chalaby, 2005; Kraidy & Khalil, 2009; McMillin, 2007; Sinclair, Jacka, & Cunningham, 1996; Straubhaar, 2007). The audiences for such transnational media, linked by geography, language, and culture, dwarf the small, elitist bi- and trilingual audiences of the English-language channels mentioned above. Straubhaar (2007) argues for the significance of regional and national media in the context of media globalization. Media that form "geocultural spaces"—those geographically connected and culturally linked across national boundaries—or "transnational cultural linguistic spaces"—such as satellite channels that link members of a diaspora with one another and the mother country through their common language—are at least as important as other aspects of globalization (p. 7).

However, while some non-Western media have successfully exported certain genres outside of familiar cultural spheres—such as Bollywood films to Africa, Indian soap operas to Afghanistan, or *telenovelas* to Eastern Europe and Russia—a global-dominance theorist will be quick to point out that

there is less "contraflow" from the Global South than is sometimes assumed. Certainly, as Rai and Cottle note (2010, pp. 69–75), non-Western satellite channels have nowhere near the same access to Western markets as the Anglo-American channels have to non-Western markets, despite the need to domesticate their products. They do, however, conclude after extensive research on the output of satellite news, both regional and global, that:

> . . . our position, based on findings and discussion presented here, revealed that there is indeed a communicative complexity both within and across 24-hour news channels, a complexity that should no longer be simply ignored or collapsed in a reductionist fashion under theoretical positions of "global dominance" or "global public sphere." (2010, p. 76)

The structural trends of regional satellite television indicate the continuing relevance of this "peripheral visions" group of studies. These studies demonstrate how it comes to be that regional media structures have grown in significance and that national/local television news has retained its importance while itself being influenced by international formats. In all the talk of unprecedented global flows of media across boundaries, the lessons of the Mohammed cartoon crisis are sometimes forgotten. The global dissemination of images and stories does not necessarily produce transnational news discourses (Eide, Kunelius, & Philips, 2008). Indeed, it is here argued that when it comes to news, linguistic, political, and cultural barriers are important reasons why global news is not as global as it purports to be (cf. Hafez, 2007).

The Paradoxes of International News

Although electronic media, and television, in particular, have been central to the globalization debate, television news is, in fact, a paradox. While often considered a driving force in global consciousness—conveying messages about a world that lies beyond our direct experience—it has historically cultivated a sense of national identity and unity, reinforcing notions of "us" already in the existing nation-state, and differentiating us from both "our friends" and "our enemies" in other parts of the world. As is often noted, foreign news is a genre where national identity becomes most manifest, where a government's actions become synonymous with the nation itself, acting and reacting to events and issues on an international stage (Riegert, 2004a). Nevertheless, international news stories as seen in national television news programs are also heavily influenced by the structures, norms, and practices springing from a shared, if general, concept of international news (Van Ginnekin, 1998, pp. 41–63).

This "international news culture" can be said to exist insofar as it describes an infrastructure heavily reliant on international news suppliers like the Associated Press and Thomson Reuters, regional news exchange unions such as the European Broadcasting Union, and transnational rolling news channels willing to sell their feeds, such as CNN.[1] In addition, the bureaucratic structures of Western journalists'

[1] Gurevitch, Levy, and Roeh (1991, p. 203) compared Eurovision News Exchange satellite feeds with what appeared on the main evening news in four different European countries almost 20 years ago. Despite national variations, all were dependent on EVN for roughly half of their foreign stories on a given evening. It is not clear whether they have decreased in importance since then, with the rise of satellite news

news organizations have heavily influenced other journalistic cultures in terms of ideals (such as roles, epistemologies, ethical ideologies) and practices (heavy dependence on official sources) (Hanitzsch, 2011). Indeed, the news genre itself—its timeliness, its recurrence, its "neutral" address and facticity, its basic narrative technique—is recognizable to audiences all over the world (cf. McQuail, 1994).

Chris Paterson, who has most recently written on the "hidden" dependence of the 24-hour news channels on international news agencies, describes how television news organizations, especially smaller national and local ones, are heavily reliant on the Anglo-American global news agencies (2010). It is difficult to gauge just how dependent different television organizations are on the agencies, since their work can be used directly, such as taking live footage, relying on them for visuals, or using a story in its entirety, or indirectly, such as rewriting parts of stories or using them to set the foreign news agenda. These dependencies contribute to the domination of Western-oriented news values such as prioritizing some parts of the world above others and cultivating common journalistic norms and formats among national or local news organizations.[2]

Television's dependence on the news agencies seems unlikely to diminish due to the much-lamented decline of foreign correspondents across the U.S. and Europe (cf. Hamilton & Jenner, 2004), coupled with the economic problems of the smaller national news agencies (Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 2004) in the wake of chain ownership and digital media. Typical for many news organizations is the use of a combination of rewritten news agency material, freelance work, and "parachuting" correspondents who fly off to different hot spots at a moment's notice. Broadcasters complain that in place of editorial concerns, accounts and budget restrictions now determine what foreign events correspondents will cover.[3] This is exacerbated as national television news outlets try to compete by emulating the formats of the 24-hour news channels. Although these trends are more visible in the United States and the UK, the public service organizations in many European countries have come under heavy pressure as a result of deregulation and commercialization. It is interesting, then, that foreign news still holds a privileged position in many countries with strong public service television systems (Curran, Iyengar, Lund & Salovaara-Moring, 2009; Ihlen, Allern, Thørbjornsrud & Waldahl, 2010; Kolmer & Semetko, 2010).

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channels. The European Broadcasting Union, which sponsors the EVN feeds, has been a most successful exchange, but there are a number of other news exchange unions between broadcasting organizations. See the World Broadcasting Unions homepage for a list of them all:
http://www.nabanet.com/wbuarea/about/about.asp

[2] Van Dijk analyzed 130 newspapers from 90 countries and found that there is "a shared global concept of foreign news," and that these similarities may be due to "the influence of a globally shared or imposed set of news production routines and values that derive from the cultural and economic monopoly of the Western international news agencies (1988, p. 32).

[3] The author's personal interviews with 33 foreign news journalists at Swedish TV4, British ITN and American CBS in 1999–2000 found this as an overriding concern, especially in the United States and the UK.

Domesticated International News

Many European comparative studies have shown that news agency material or generic themes are used together with specific national angles to "domesticate" international events by putting them into national political or cultural frameworks of understanding. Claes de Vreese (2001) found that television coverage of the introduction of the Euro in different countries used similar "generic" themes, but that there were significant issue-specific national spins in European news programs. Patrick Rössler (2004, p. 289) summarizes a seven-nation comparative study of a number of television news programs from the U.S. and six European nations, saying that despite rather similar visual formats, significantly different issues and actors make it highly unlikely that television news can contribute to "an integrated transnational public."

Riegert (2008) compared Swedish, Danish, and British public service news coverage of all European stories appearing during the same week, and found that despite a certain convergence in terms of major stories, the attention and framing of these stories—and consequently the image of Europe and the European Union—differed according to the national priorities of the reporting country. Other, more comprehensive empirical studies have shown that the depiction of Europe or the EU in different countries very often takes as its point of departure the domestic political and economic consequences for the reporting country. For example, a common picture of the EU is one in which negotiations are "squabbles," the bureaucracy is devastating, and the reporting country has the moral high ground (cf. Ørsten, 2004; Robertson, 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Slaata, 2001).

Despite the dependence on international sources, reduced regulation, commercialization, and competition, these very same sources can and often have been domesticated to comply with national frameworks of understanding.

National News Values

Most journalists and some media researchers would say that the newsworthiness of a given television news story depends on the geographic, cultural, and political proximity of the event to the audience in question; on judgments of how "important" and "relevant" the story is; on how fresh the information is; on the quality of the pictures; on how exclusive the story is; and on what other stories are competing to get into the evening's mix. This means that the same foreign news story often gets different attention, space, and resources in the television news programs of different countries (Van Ginneken, 1998). Since the world's crises seldom are isolated events, journalists must choose between several crises and wars going on at the same time. Paying more attention to certain crises and less to others tells us how newsrooms judge the importance of these crises for "our nation's" interests. This explains why the headlines of the national press and television often display great similarity regarding major international crises, despite television's much heralded dependence on good pictures and greater immediacy, and the more limited geographic circulation of the mainstream press (Riegert, 1998).

Hans Henrik Holm's (2001) newsroom study of foreign news in several media constituted an attempt to locate where the effects of globalization are the greatest. They were found to be greatest in terms of how deregulation, increasing competition, and technological change impacted the Danish newsroom's "media structures and policy." The changes affected the editorial structure to the extent that

specialty correspondents were disappearing as the foreign desk became integrated with other desks and editors, while younger journalists were cross-trained to cover tasks including foreign news. In terms of journalistic norms and the foreign news agenda, however, little had changed. The electronic media (television and radio) still gave most priority to traditional foreign news stories, as opposed to non-traditional news stories such as lifestyle, human interest, environmental, and human rights stories. Although Holm reported some indications that this was changing in the press, he concluded that editorial choice of international news stories still reflects "classical news criteria" to a large extent (2001, pp. 121-122).

The reporting nation can thus be said to play a large role in the kinds of foreign news national television audiences are offered (Ihlen et al., 2010). Without the Internet or satellite channels in languages you understand, where you live largely determines the news menu you are offered about the world outside. However, in light of Holm's study and the aforementioned changes due to media globalization, we must ask why these news agendas and narratives seem so incredibly resistant to change?

National Perspectives of International News

Part of the answer may be found in determining what exactly "national perspectives" of the outside world consist of. Many scholars point to the importance of societal factors in how journalists and news organizations work, yet there are as many definitions of societal factors as there are researchers. Quantitative studies of large numbers of countries tend to attribute varying amounts and types of foreign news to the importance of national interest, geographic proximity, trade, and the dominance of elite countries like the U.S. and European nations (Kolmer & Semtko, 2010; Wu, 2000). Other studies point to the importance of foreign policy tradition of the reporting country—that is, the country's allies, its international organization membership, the history and status of the country, and its relationship to the countries or parties involved in the event (Cohen, 1995; Hess, 1996; Pedelty, 1995). If a country is embroiled in hostilities in a foreign country, these factors are obvious. They are not as obvious if the reporting country is not directly involved in such hostilities.

Riegert (1998) found that Swedish television news (SVT) was consistently more critical of the "aggressor" country in four international conflicts than British news (BBC) was, although neither country was involved[4]. This was, in part, the result of reporting about the negative effects of the hostilities on civilians, and giving voice to civilians on the ground. In some of these cases, Swedish television news framed the conflicts in a more regional context, highlighting background and consequences that reflected negatively on the aggressor. In contrast, British audiences were offered close-up images of embattled American soldiers, as well as happy and relieved civilians (in the case of the U.S. invasions of Grenada and Panama). The military strategies of the aggressors were described in greater detail in British news, and solutions to the conflict and negotiations depended more on the Great Powers than on international organizations.

[4] These conflicts were the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983, the U.S. invasion of Panama in 1989, and the Soviet military crackdown in the Baltic states in 1991.

The fact that the BBC was less critical of the aggressors in these conflicts was thought to be related to Britain's pragmatic approach to conflict resolution ("coalitions of the willing"), to its "special" relationship with the U.S., and to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's "constructive working relationship" with Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev at the time (cf. Hellman, 2006). It also mattered that in Swedish political culture, international law was considered key for the defense of the rights of small states against aggression, and that Sweden gave diplomatic support for the separatist aspirations of the Baltic states from the Soviet Union. In implicit ways, the British and Swedish foreign policy tradition provided angles for the news programs, and therefore indirectly influenced the ways these conflicts were framed in each country.

There were also similarities attributable to the aforementioned "international news culture": Sources were overwhelmingly drawn from the aggressor country (an interesting finding in itself), the story narratives fit well into generic themes such as aims and justifications for the conflict, military and civilian activities, world reactions, home country's reaction, negotiations, and aftermath. However, these themes were inflected differently depending on the specific story. Even small editing differences in news agency footage gave different portrayals of the same leader's speech (Riegert, 1998, pp. 166, 196).

One explanation given by Swedish journalists for the greater proportion of soundbites from ordinary people in foreign news is the need to provide another angle to balance the press conferences and speeches of world leaders supplied by international news bureaus (cf. Ihlen et al., 2010, pp. 40–41). The use of ordinary people as sources is part of the journalistic mindset whereby even foreign witnesses to conflicts should be dignified with names and allowed to speak for themselves (cf. Robertson, 2010, pp. 51–55). Hanitzsch (2011) summarizes the results of numerous studies demonstrating that journalist cultures can vary substantially even among otherwise similar European media. Especially, different epistemological notions of objectivity and what role journalists should have vis-à-vis audiences have been the focus of various studies (Donsbach, 1995; Donsbach & Klett, 1993; Köcher, 1986). Television journalists are apt to take a more pedagogical role in relation to the audience due to a number of practical and logistical factors, but one is clear: Audiences must comprehend a foreign event in a short space of time. Often that is accomplished by relating to what people in that country already know and are prepared to accept, given their national history and culture.

Even recent comparative studies of such conflicts as the Kosovo War in 1999 or the invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Nohrstedt, Höijer & Ottosen, 2002; Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2006) demonstrate that the closer a conflict is geographically, politically, and culturally, and the more engaged the foreign policy elite is, the more attention and resources are given to the story by journalists, and the more the image of events are seen through national prisms where foreign policy and specific journalist cultures shape the coverage.

In light of increasing globalization and regionalization, however, the question is whether this is true over time and whether national perspectives apply to international news that is not about conflicts. Maria Hellman's (2006) comparison of French and British television news coverage in the mid-1980s and mid-1990s revealed only minor differences between the time periods, despite globalization. The French news channel TF1 was impacted by commercialization, but it continued to juxtapose a new kind of national community against an outside world. Differing journalist cultures and political cultures meant that

television news coverage of daily events maintained and reaffirmed national community, despite increasing commercialization and fragmentation.

Jan Ekecrantz's (2004) study of the image of Estonia in the Swedish media during a 12-month period in 2001–2002 reveals "striking and unexpected similarities" with Swedish feature stories from the 1920s. In both time periods, Sweden was helping Estonia to become "part of the West" at the same time that Sweden wanted to fend off unwanted "Eastern" problems connected to socioeconomic deprivation (pp. 43, 60–61). While this is not based on systematic comparative analysis of the two time periods, it suggests that the Swedish media reflect a surprisingly stale view of Estonia—not a distant country, but a neighbor, one that historically had been part of Sweden. Ekecranntz suggests several possibilities for this stability: 1) "A fixed, very narrow, and very stable repertoire of descriptive, discursive techniques when reporting from abroad," 2) that journalists draw on cultural myths in contemporary society in news stories, 3) that it reflects the stability in geopolitical interests, 4) or that media institutions are rooted in the nation-state, resulting in state-centric views of the external world (p. 62; see also Billig, 1995).

The Regionalization of News or the Cosmopolitanization of the Domestic?

These studies mainly point to processes related to prevailing political cultures in the European news media at particular moments in time. However, during the 1990s two important changes affected those cultures. European states became increasingly drawn into the process of EU integration, while journalism faced global pressures associated with the technological development of the media, deregulation, commercialization and competition. These factors, at the least, should increase the likelihood of an emerging transnational or at least a regional discourse in national television news.

During the 1990s, several studies of Nordic media identified what could be called a generic Orientalist narrative toward Eastern Europe, the Baltic states and Russia. This discourse identified the changes taking place in the region as dangerous, outdated Eastern "backwardness" transitioning into safety-conscious technologies, and therefore civilized modernity (cf. Olsson & Åker, 2002; Riegert, 2004a; Roosvall, 2005). Riegert (2004b) identified what could be a Nordic view in the television coverage of the Baltic states and Poland between 1995 and 2000. Such a narrative lauded these countries' successful adaptations to EU demands, but highlighted the social consequences of "brutal capitalism" as an explanation for the return of the former Communist parties to power in several of these countries. It is impossible to determine whether this focus on the plight of the elderly, the farmers, and the newly unemployed reflected a Nordic journalistic discourse based in "third way" welfare states, or whether these explanations were also found in other European media.[5] Clearly, more studies are needed to ascertain such narratives as Nordic regional discourse, but it is interesting that less newsworthy regions like the Baltic states and Poland could produce a stronger "Nordic" perspective than the more newsworthy European Union or larger Western European countries do (cf. Riegert, 2008).

Both Berglez (2008) and Robertson (2010) identify the need for global journalism to reach beyond national perspectives to represent a news discourse where relations are depicted as taking place between peoples and in other spatial arenas than the national. Berglez argues that such a news style

[5] A cursory review of BBC World's coverage of the Polish and Estonian elections of 1995 suggest that this indeed is a specifically Scandinavian interpretation of the electoral politics of these countries.

should reflect a global "outlook" and a concern with complex relations—that is, news that depicts multi-spatial processes, transnational power entities and transnational political identities. Yet instances of such reporting appear to be exceptions rather than the rule. Take the Indian Ocean tsunami, in which a mediated cosmopolitan outlook appeared briefly as a "moment" in several European news programs, says Robertson (p. 102). What is more interesting, she concludes, is that this type of cosmopolitanism was just as prevalent, if not more so, in several domestic broadcasters than their transnational equivalents (such as Euronews, BBC World and Deutsche Welle). Hellman and Riegert (2009) found that CNN International's coverage had substantial disadvantages for audience engagement in that very same crisis.

> As we have shown here, in the case of the tsunami catastrophe—a global crisis indeed—the advantages of technology and organization were not matched by a superior capacity to fill the therapeutic role played by many national television channels. Furthermore, according to our study, there appears to be a discrepancy between the way in which the transnational channel CNN sees itself "as a force for good in the world," contributing to engagement in global issues, and how Swedish viewers perceive CNN's coverage in an actual crisis, at least at the very beginning. (p. 146)

In other words, domestic broadcasters may be more likely to promote what Höijer (2004) called a "global discourse of compassion" than the transnational broadcasters are. Widholm (2011) found that transnational broadcasters such as Euronews and BBC World coverage distinctly reflected each channels' mandate: the promotion of Europeanization in the former case, and a peculiar combination of British and global news identity in the latter case. Here again, more studies are needed to see where there are emergent regional news narratives, when they are likely to come to the fore, and the relationship between these and national or local perspectives. Secondly, more work needs to be done on the ways domestic broadcasters differ from the transnational ones in major international news stories, particularly in relation to what kinds of communities the two see themselves as addressing and how audiences understand them. In crisis, transnational broadcasters compensate for their lack of a stable audience base with speed and technological prowess—the question is whether audiences in such situations find this satisfactory. Since few studies compare the substance of foreign news over time, we have been unable to answer questions pertaining to the relative stability of the genre, and how coverage relates to globalization and changes in the reporting country's relationship to the world.

The Consequences of National News Images

It may be understandable that television news is related to foreign policy tradition and national journalist cultures, and that cultural proximity is a relevant yardstick in a world where thousands of events happen every day. But what are the consequences of the domestication of international events? One is that audiences for television news must be satisfied with scanty coverage of those parts of the world that the political, economic, and cultural elites are not interested in. Distant events—the Uyghur uprising against the Chinese authorities, an earthquake in Guatemala, the famine and ongoing conflict in Sudan, the conflict in Somalia—are generic news discourses in the television news of many European countries, because lack of interest means fewer media resources deployed to make greater sense of those events.

Lack of interest means that stories that do get on national news bulletins are more dependent on international news sources, which, as we noted previously, are dominated by American and British news corporations—and therefore not free of their own national prisms.[6] This means that the aforementioned generic aspects of foreign news play a greater role with their storylines of: Attacks by *A* left 300 dead in *B* country; *C* country held an election; and an earthquake killed millions in *D* country. Whatever their particularities and historical contexts, such reporting makes different types of events similar, since they will be pigeonholed according to predetermined media frames of reference. Take, for example, Western news coverage framing Africa as a "dark continent" where savagery and tribalism, ancient ethnic violence, and extreme poverty must periodically be alleviated by Western aid and intervention (Carruthers, 2004, pp. 155–169).

Thirdly, the dependence on international news sources for remote conflicts is also more likely to reflect the increasing commercialism already prevalent in that sphere. The hardening competition between television channels has had the effect of increasing the entertainment factors in news programs (Thussu, 2007b). This means the packaging of armed conflicts as neat, sanitized, little events with easily identifiable taglines reminiscent of made-for-TV movies, where the roots and consequences of conflicts are glossed over. Increasing the human interest factor in conflict coverage may not always be journalists' attempts to show "the true face of war," and superficial 20-second sound bites of human suffering could make it seem an inevitable consequence of circumstances in the developing world, rather than something that can be stopped.[7]

Fourthly, a consequence of different national perspectives of international news is that different framings of causes and consequences act as hindrances to the formation of a truly transnational opinion about a phenomenon, which limits the influence of democracy on matters of global import. The absence of knowledge about ethnic conflicts, climate change, or famines before they become serious problems is obviously an obstacle to effective preventive international measures.

Finally, when one thinks of the Yugoslavian wars of secession and conflicts in Rwanda during the 1990s, national filters of international events can be downright dangerous when the country you happen to be living in is in a bilateral dispute with another country. The importance of mobilizing the support of the international media for the U.S. "war on terrorism" was not lost on the U.S. administration in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Initially, the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center were shocking enough to provide President George W. Bush with overwhelming Western media support for an attack on Afghanistan. The considerable Arab reservations about this went unreported in much of the Western media. However, when the hunt for evildoers reverted back to Saddam Hussein, European countries interpreted the evidence according to historical, political, and cultural contingencies, thereby splitting European and international support for the war. Many European media fell in line behind their governments, with the UK as a notable exception (Goddard, Robinson, & Parry, 2008; Lewis, Brookes, Mosdell, & Threadgold, 2006). It was, in fact, during the invasion of Iraq in 2003 that the dominance of the Anglo-American news supply began to be questioned. A battle for credibility between the Anglo-

[6] See Küng-Shankleman (2000) and Widholm (2010) for CNN and BBC World.

[7] See Lilie Chouliaraki (2006), who argues that news narratives are crucial for positioning viewers to engage with distant suffering in very specific ways.

American transnational news channels and the pan-Arab news channels as to who was most credible in bringing audiences the "true" face of the war ensued (Riegert with Johansson, 2005). The transnational Arab satellite channels, with their awareness of Arab opinion and their advantage of being on the ground, and armed with Western journalistic norms, signified a fragmentation into transnational micropublic spheres at a time when the credibility of Anglo-American news organizations was undermined.

Another example of this credibility problem could indicate an increased awareness that it is possible to get a different perspective of one's own country from transnational news channels. Orgad's (2008) fascinating study of the media debates in Spain following the 2004 terror bombings and in France following the 2005 *banlieues* riots outside Paris is case in point. Coverage by transnational channels such as CNN and BBC World revealed the inadequacy of the national media at a time when those governments' authority was undermined.

> The analysis demonstrates how transnational networks' coverage of these events generated estrangement, de-familiarized and cast doubt on national narratives and commonsensical discourses of us/them, thereby offering viewers an alternative distance from their national unit and encouraging a self-reflexive process of introspection and critical discussion. (p. 301)

While we have few indicators that domestic audiences tune into transnational channels such as these, it could be argued that their coverage can come in through the backdoor, via the Internet and through the national media's coverage about what "outsiders" are saying about "us" in times of crisis.

This culturally relativistic broadcasting landscape has made manifest the increasing self-reflexivity of journalists regarding previously taken-for-granted notions of objectivity and autonomy. Entrenched journalistic norms and ideals are being questioned (especially as increasing commercialism has prompted new types of "news-you-can-use" formats). Indeed, the journalism of attachment—"a journalism that cares as much as it knows," as the adage goes—is part of a resurgent interest in journalistic ethics in the wake of changes in the transnational media space (Chouliaraki, 2006; Silverstone, 2007; Tumber & Prentoulis, 2003).

It should be noted, however, that the micropublic spheres of transnational news channels—Al-Jazeera, France24 and CNN—claim to provide balance but are instead providing competing views of the world. This means that elites and well-educated people may take part in the "new global visibility," but they don't have a common platform. Rather, they have fragmentation along political or religious lines—micropublic spheres whose realities never meet. Even if it could be argued that mass audiences prefer news perspectives consonant with their cultural and social values, other (younger) audiences and ethnic minorities are turning away from news on television and utilizing the possibilities of the new global media environment (Aksoy & Robins, 2002; Costera Meijer, 2007; Rantanen, 2005). Little wonder, when the foreign news genre continues to "grossly underrepresent" women and marginalize and exoticize whole regions of the world (Roosvall, 2005, p. 333).

To recapitulate, despite the rapid expansion of transnational news channels, the regional media conglomerates and national television channels have remained robust with audiences. While the latter may be influenced by the former, regarding live formats and so forth, the genre of foreign news has been resistant to change because it draws on stable foreign policy traditions and cultural myths, and is rooted in a national-political culture that attempts to reassure the viewer that whatever happens, it happens to someone else. Mainstream national television news offers several types of news narratives about the world outside the nation: generic news stories, domesticated angles coupled with generic stories, and stories sent in from foreign correspondents and freelancers who attempt to create their own narratives. It is the latter that tends to offer narratives that allow the national "we" to relate to various "others" in new ways: by depicting spatial relationships, power relations or identity relations that transcend the national (Berglez, 2008; Robertson, 2010). However, even these types of narratives are in the minority of news stories about the world. Systematic historic research is needed on whether such stories have increased, in tandem with globalization, over time. Whether foreign news journalists will broaden their news sources, embrace the debates on new journalistic ethics, and tell us different stories about the surrounding world is more a matter of necessity than of choice, if they are to retain viewers in this quickly changing media environment.

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