

International News Production and Globalization

A Review Article by

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Al-Jazeera and U.S. War Coverage

By Tal Samuel-Azran
New York: Peter Lang, 2010. 161 pp.
ISBN: 978143310868.

Transnational Television in Europe: Reconfiguring Global Communication Networks

By Jean K. Chalaby
London: I.B. Tauris, 2009. 278 pp.
ISBN: 9781845119539.

Global News Production

By Lisbeth Clausen
Copenhagen, Denmark: Copenhagen Business School Press, 2003. 307 pp.
ISBN: 8763001101.

A growing number of books have been published in the past decade addressing broadcasters' international news corporation production strategies, directions, challenges, and the content that emerges from the news production. These books have been highly sceptical of previous international communication theories based on a first trend about the emergence of a global public sphere (e.g., Volkmer, 1999): this trend being mainly influenced by Jürgen Habermas' concept of public sphere (1960; 1991) and Marshall McLuhan's (1962) concept of "global village". The contemporary works that will be addressed in this review article are works that additionally nuanced the second trend, which concerns the homogenization of news worldwide, advancing primarily that structural economic imbalances leads to a flow of news from richer to poorer countries (e.g., MacBride, 1980; Sreberny-Mohammadi, Nordenstreng, Stevenson & Ugboajah, 1985; Boyd-Barrett, 1980)—in other words, a Western-led conception of the world, as Simon Cottle (2009) and several other authors have argued.

The three books reviewed in this article add to these two major trends which coloured the face of international communication studies of news since the early 1980s. These three books

explore the ways in which news media organizations develop innovative and fragmented strategies to appeal to their audiences in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world. These strategies are not new, but are part of the historical development of transnational broadcast media.

In *Global News Production*, Lisbeth Clausen (2003) explores how the private and public Danish and Japanese global television news production manages to domesticate its content. In *Al-Jazeera and US War Coverage*, Samuel-Azran (2010) scrutinizes the coverage and re-broadcasting of Al-Jazeera images in the US television networks since 9/11, and contributes to the debate on contra-flows of news—meaning news coming from elsewhere than Western countries. In *Transnational Television in Europe: Reconfiguring Global Communications Networks*, Jean K. Chalaby (2009) surveys the evolution of transnational television in Europe since its very beginnings in the early 1980s, and addresses an empirical account of different strategies employed by entertainment and news media.

Domesticating the News

Lisbeth Clausen's concept of domestication is primarily based on Cohen, Levy, Roeh, and Gurevitch's research on Eurovision news exchanges. The results of Cohen and others' study were first published in a book titled *Global Newsroom, Local Audiences: A Study of the Eurovision News Exchange* (1996), and followed by *The Global Newsroom: Convergences and Diversities in the Globalization of Television News* (1997). The concept of "domestication" was used in the context of news content production. It was referred to, more specifically, as the process by which journalists produce international news stories in accordance with historical, cultural, and political links to the audiences to which they deliver the news, as a "sub-process" of the processes of encoding and decoding, and, borrowing from Gaye Tuchman's (1978) seminal work on news-making, as an effort to shape news into frames of references.

This is why, Clausen (2003) argues, the domestication process needs a more careful and critical analysis in today's world of global media. Four contextual levels are examined in her book, including:

the global influences of the international news agencies through business affiliation with Japanese national broadcasters, the national media environment and extra-media factors, the public service and commercial organizational factors and, finally the professional news values and individual expertise of the journalist that influence his or her consideration in the interactive process of making international news.

(Clausen, 2003: 2)

Clausen (2003) tries to be sceptical of claims of "universalization of news" and offers an in-depth empirical study of a Japanese public station (NHK) and a commercial station (TV Asahi), based on interviews with journalists and newsroom observation. Basing herself on the previous works mentioned above, she asks: does news organization domesticate the content through the news production process? The news production making at the public and private Japanese stations varies extensively according to national, organizational, and professional contextual settings, she argues. This claim is in line with Rao's (2009) study of Indian newspapers' news-making, and she finds that the content varies according to the five contextual levels that she

studied in her ethnography. As a result, the Japanese channel finds a need for fostering national broadcasting despite the rise of global news satellite channels. Indeed, to maintain its competitive edge, the channel pursues strategies to domesticate its content to appeal to its audiences.

Since Clausen's research is highly empirical, her results can only be generalised to Japanese television. The reasons why Japanese media domesticate their content are highly cultural, historical, political, and economical—as she also alludes to in her book. Japanese media's ability to domesticate news lies in the fact that the government is highly involved in the news-making process and its financial resources might be less limited than the ones of Western media players. Inside of this one country, the news is domesticated differently because of different audiences' aims. Through her single case study, Clausen is able to show how the domestication approach is represented in Japanese news production strategies. However, she does not draw conclusions from other global or local channels. The question whether this could be applied to most media players' news production strategies, as they all have different prerogatives, remains unanswered.

Contra-Flows from New Regional Media Players

Contrary to Clausen empirical research, Tal Samuel-Azran's (2010) study is mainly supported by the content analysis of the reproduction of Al-Jazeera English news on U.S. news networks, and relies on interviews and participant observation. Samuel-Azran's work gives a conclusion that is similar to the literature in international communication that emerged in the 2000s, which includes Clausen's work. Samuel-Azran provides an in-depth research of international news production; specifically from a contra-flows perspective. Initial contra-flows research can be traced back to Sreberny-Mohammadi's and others' (1985) extensive research of international news production in 29 countries for the UNESCO and Boyd-Barrett's (1980) research initiatives concerning international news agencies. Converging conclusions, both emerged from these two researches, confirm that there was an imbalance in news flow from richer to poorer countries. Sreberny-Mohammadi and others (1985) revealed that national systems devoted their attention to events that were happening and people who lived within their geographical region; the U.S. and Western Europe being the regions that were the most covered. More current research from the PEW Research Center (How news happens, 2010) has demonstrated that the majority of the news that is found on the Internet come from only a handful of preeminent media outlets. The rise of news networks such as Al-Jazeera pushed for a reassessment of those claims, as Samuel-Azran argues in *Al-Jazeera and U.S. War Coverage*.

el-Nawawy and Power (2010) argue, in the same vein, that Al-Jazeera English offers an alternative mode of news journalism that fosters a stereotypical attitude towards the "other". Samuel-Azran (2010) agrees that the advent of Al-Jazeera might redefine the traditional wartime news angle of reporting in the U.S. media, reconfiguring the counter-hegemonic debate in U.S. war reporting. While this might be an accurate claim, according to Samuel-Azran, images tend to be modified through re-broadcasting by other news network. Counter-hegemonic contra-flows have pushed U.S. local news stations to be defensive and offensive towards their reports concerning different world views, perceived as threatening to the U.S. national security.

U.S. news networks consistently "self-censored all counter-hegemonic news material from Al-Jazeera, without regard to the principles of objectivity and impartiality" (Samuel-Azran, 2010: 42). How do they do so? News on the War in Afghanistan was "framed as a targeted attack

on the Taliban's terrorists regime" (Ibid). Most of the images were consistent with U.S. Administration demands. To conclude, Samuel-Azran explains that

not only do news reports threatening local coherence not necessarily refine traditional reporting within nations [and consequently the local public sphere], but they may actually lead to a growing offensive and enmity between news networks that follow significantly different worldviews... underscoring the myth of globalization.

(Samuel-Azran, 2010: 115-116)

As Samuel-Azran points out in his empirical account of Al-Jazeera images in the U.S. news, foreign images are adapted to audience's demands (and perhaps the U.S. administration interests) in a specific geography. Perhaps, yet the author does not say, Al-Jazeera has a very specific vision of the world. While it might be true that flows of news are nonetheless less unidirectional from richer to poorer countries as it was suggested in various studies, but rather multidirectional pressures to reformat the content to appeal to audiences tastes and preferences remains a major concern of most news networks.

European Strategies to News Production

Transnational Television in Europe: Reconfiguring global communication networks (2009), by Jean K. Chalaby, gives an insightful portrait of the evolution of transnational television in Europe since its very beginning in early 1980s. This work also bridges the different media players, global and local, in Europe. It is the first book of its kind in that an author has reviewed most of the transnational media trends that have emerged and cohabited in the mediascapes since the 1980s—from new regional media formation to new regional media production. This book has a strong empirical foundation; most of the interviews that were conducted were with senior management and most recent media personnel, including Anne Barnard, Chief Operating Officer at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World, Simon Guild, Chief Operating Officer at MTV Networks Europe, and Gilles Storme, Head of Research at National Geographic and Senior Managers at Sky News.

While Chalaby argues that the networks can adapt to local and global matrixes, he does not conceive of the relationship between television and globalization as devoid of any complexities:

Pan-European TV Networks constitute today's most sophisticated answer to the dilemmas faced by international broadcasters. Networks enable management teams to articulate the local and the global in a unique way by combining global efficiency and local flexibility. Local channels can adapt to a specific environment and develop their own schedule, positioning with other stations' broadcasting philosophy, style, brand, programming, resources and infrastructure. Networks are interactive systems where the flow of communication is not only vertical—from head office to local teams and vice versa—but also horizontal among channels exchanging ideas and experience. While local teams benefit from the network's global expertise the latter takes advantage of their local knowledge.

(Chalaby, 2009: 225)

For Chalaby, distribution network and understanding of local cultures are elements which drove channels like MTV and Eurosport to be successful. Pan-European channels used mainly three divergent strategies to tell stories. First, channels such as CNN International, BBC World News and Al-Jazeera English used stories beyond the borders of Europe. Second, they told stories within their borders, as EuroNews and Sky News did. Thirdly, they told stories about their borders, much like Deutsche Welle, Russia Today (now named after RT) and France 24 did. Overall, localization of news stories remains the evidence that shows that localities have not been erased by globalization. On the other hand, it facilitated the process of globalization “because it allows transnational media players to overcome cultural diversity and operate efficiently in a multinational environment” (Chalaby, 2009: 225). Yet the questions of how these media organizations deal with the rise of social media and whether the pressure to localize diminished in that context, remains unanswered.

The Global and the Local in International News Production

Is there such a thing as “global” without the “local”? According to Clausen (2003), Chalaby (2009), and Samuel-Azran (2010), the answer is no. The level of “global” or “local” is quite complex and varies by setting. Major trends were denoted by all three authors including domesticating the news to appeal to the audience’s tastes and preferences, new regional media formations, and new regional media production. Chalaby provides an in-depth account of those strategies by most of the news media players in Europe, while the others work offer a deep understanding of national, public and private, news networks in a determined territory such as Japan in the case of Clausen and a transnational channel that provides images to worldwide news networks outside its geography in the case of Samuel-Azran.

While Samuel-Azran points to the myth of globalization, as something that is countered by the remaining strong impact of locality, Clausen and the researchers supporting the domestication approach do not downplay the weight of the local. Gurevitch, Levy, and Roeh (1997) even point out the possibility that there is no such a thing as a “global newsroom”. Credit goes to Chalaby (2009), who borrows a term “deterritorialization” from John Tomlinson (1999), referring to the fact that globalization does not destroy localities, but embraces them. Indeed, as Tomlinson argues, international news production “is increasingly penetrated by ‘distance’” (Ibid: 273). There is no public sphere but the content that emerges from the news production is a product of an interrelation of both the global and national forces at different levels, depending on the context in which the news is produced.

What Lies Ahead?

The field of international communication studies of the news is still one that does not have a common theoretical framework, as Stevenson (1991) stated two decades ago, and as Archetti (2008) reiterated more recently. The books that are reviewed in this article all have the advantage of being empirical, and provide good avenues for future research in the field. With their strong empirical content, they provide researchers with in-depth insight on the trends in news media organizational environment, as well as tools to analyze and understand the differences and the interconnectedness of the way in which international news is produced in a global context. Researchers must understand the trends that shape the news production strategies in the fast

changing world of news and international communication, and the trends that differentiate media organizations from each other.

However, these books have not deeply engaged the interplay between the rise of social media and international news production changes. In their defence, most of the books were written at a time when social media were only rising slightly. There is a full body of literature that explores the impact of new technologies on news production practices. One aspect of the debate is criticised for being technological deterministic (e.g., Pavlik, 2000). Since early 2000s, a revival of ethnographic studies of news production was taken on a more social constructivist approach (e.g., Paterson & Domingo, 2008)—analysing news production and the interplay of technologies in that context. International communication studies that have been addressed in this review would benefit from these studies, and vice versa, since the latter focus more on the practice rather than the cultural globalization impact on the practice and its output. The face of international news production has the potential to change with the advent of social media and technological innovations. The context of news production changes with the rise of social media and the way people in the field interact, react, and adapt to these innovations. The studies approach new technologies sometimes in an optimistic, and at other times pessimistic focus—a focus more on the process rather than the potential of social media to provide a picture of our world less embedded in the “locality”. This could be a great challenge on several levels for news organizations who are trying to adapt their old practices with these new technologies. Yet, while the domestication perspective have proven to be useful in the field, media organizations find themselves challenged by the transnational field in which they operate due to the advent of technological changes. Is the world that we are presented in the news becoming increasingly transnationalized and less foreign or domesticated, as these authors have argued? This is a question that needs to be addressed empirically in future research.

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