

## **Globalization<sup>1</sup> and Media: Do Twentieth-Century Concepts Remain Relevant?**

Lyn Gorman, Dean, Faculty of Arts, Charles Sturt University

### **Abstract**

‘Historical understanding of the emergence of modern media provides a basis for envisaging alternatives in a commercialized, globalized era’: on the eve of ‘September 11’ a colleague and I concluded a book on media and society in the twentieth century with these words. This paper asks, five years on and particularly in the context of recent literature on the media and twenty-first-century terrorism, if the concepts we had in mind remain relevant. Further into the post-Cold War era, with ‘the war on terror[ism]’ emphasizing Western-Islamic difference, with continuing rapid changes in media and communication (spread of Internet use, new forms of media and of convergence), the paper considers various claims in the light of the history of media in the twentieth century:

- that ‘history is accelerated’ because of changing media and communication technologies;
- that in the ‘war against terrorism’ media have been conscripted to patriotic, nationalist causes, in the process abandoning traditional journalistic values;
- that there is a ‘symbiotic’ relationship between media and terrorism;
- that a cluster of developments – the decline in public service broadcasting, concentration of media ownership, the dominance of global media corporations and of commercial imperatives – has had considerable impact on the extent to which the public are well informed, especially on international affairs;
- that the role of media in war has changed because of technological developments;
- that the advent of non-Western global media has significantly altered the international ‘mediascape’.

A major aim is to suggest how the history of mass media over the past 100 years might inform our interpretation of contemporary trends such as globalization as we consider history as a guide to the new international order and ‘the competition of nations’.

### **Introduction**

In *Media and Society in the Twentieth Century*, which has a 2003 publication date but for which we completed the writing in 2001, David McLean and I concluded that: ‘Historical understanding of the emergence of modern media provides a basis for envisaging alternatives in a commercialized, globalized era’ (Gorman and McLean 2003, 227). At the beginning of a new century we highlighted certain paradoxes in the history of communications.

The advocates of global communication forecast the breaking down of national and ethnic differences and the growth of international understanding, all to be achieved through the influence of media operating on a global scale. But the promise is hard to reconcile with the realities of media development since the 1980s. Far from creating a unified world, commercial media organizations have increasingly fostered a

---

<sup>1</sup> Edited to conform to US spelling

fragmentation of audiences and a strengthening of social barriers. (Gorman and McLean 2003, 226)

Media content was being shaped by perceptions of niche markets for advertising revenue; and there was less serious coverage of public affairs. In the United States (US) in particular, declining coverage of international affairs and the trend for news to be presented as ‘infotainment’ led us to conclude that ‘it is less and less the case that the media perform the vital role of helping to develop an informed public as an influence on US international policies’ (Gorman and McLean 2003, 226).

Another paradox was that, despite the rise of new media and diverse media outlets offering more access to information, news and public affairs content was declining, and ‘it was less the case that mainstream media saw an important part of their role as providing members of the public with the information they need to act as citizens in democratic societies.’ Furthermore, news and public affairs coverage was suffering from increasingly rigid formats applied to maximize advertising revenue, encouraging ‘a global trend to rely on similar forms of entertainment as the basis for profitability’ (Gorman and McLean 2003, 227).

Our conclusion highlighted central questions for media study: in what ways are the public best served by their media, and what should we expect of media? While noting the widespread acceptance of a view of media products as commodities whose success or failure is determined by the market, we stressed both the cultural and political importance of media and that history indicated other possibilities for media organization and content.

In these Round Table discussions we are examining history as a guide to the new international order, with interest in phenomena such as globalization and their impact on ‘the competition of nations’. Against the background sketched above – that is, media-society relationships salient at the beginning of this century – this paper considers the impact of change over the last five years; it then suggests how the history of mass media over the previous century might inform our interpretation of contemporary trends and concerns pertinent to this Round Table. With a predominantly US focus, written from an Australian perspective, to be discussed at a UK forum, the paper is intended to stimulate discussion of themes of global significance.

No doubt various definitions of ‘globalization’ will be proposed during these discussions. We could be satisfied with Hachten and Scotton’s statement that globalization is ‘an inexact expression for a wide array of worldwide changes in politics, communications, business and trade, life styles, and culture’ (Hachten and Scotton 2002, x). However, in relation to media it is relevant to note that Lechner and Boli, writing in 2000, referred to developments in communication and transportation infrastructure (including satellite broadcasts and the Internet) as ‘the raw material of globalization’ (Lechner and Boli 2000,1). Becker has emphasized outcomes rather than processes, seeing the globalization of media as characterized by ‘increased flow of content across borders, increased investment by media companies outside their initial home bases, and increased evidence of media companies and organizations focused on cross-border transactions’ (Becker in Demers 2003, 344). Flew, in the second edition of his book on new media, provides a comprehensive list of ‘interrelated processes’ covered by the term ‘globalization’ (Flew 2005, 177-8).<sup>[2]</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Flew’s list is as follows:

The term ‘media’ rather than ‘mass media’ is employed in this paper. The latter was commonly used in the twentieth century to describe the mass press/newspapers, radio and television broadcasting, cinema/film industries – media reaching mass audiences, media now considered ‘traditional’. The term ‘media’ embraces the traditional media as well as the many ‘new media’ which have become available in recent decades, including video recorders and home videotape players, pay TV delivered by cable and satellite, multimedia computers, CD-ROMs, digital video discs (DVDs), the Internet and World Wide Web, mobile/cell ‘phones and various handheld devices. Digitization and convergence have enabled the delivery of media content across many different platforms, with mass media and personalized, individualized media coexisting.

Finally, by way of preliminaries, it is important to note that any discussion of globalization and media occurs against a rapidly expanding literature that includes contributions from many discipline areas.

---

‘internationalization of production, trade, and finance with the rise of multinational corporations, reductions in cross-border tariffs..., the deregulation of financial markets, and the rise of Internet-based electronic commerce international movements of people ... development of diasporas ... increasingly multicultural nature of national societies  
international communications flows, delivered through telecommunications, information and media technologies such as broadband cable, satellite, and the Internet ...  
global circulation of ideas, ideologies, and ‘keywords’ ...  
the establishment of international regimes in intellectual property  
the emergence of local resistance to globalization ...  
the development of international organizations ...  
cultural, professional, and standards bodies ...  
the increasingly significant role ... of global non-government organizations ...  
the growing significance of international law to national policies ...  
the globalization of the “war on terrorism” ... after 11 September 2001 ...’  
Flew goes on to point out key dimensions in which media are central to globalization: first, in providing the technologies and service delivery platforms for international transactions; second, media industries as leaders ‘in the push towards global expansion and integration’; and third, through providing content and images ‘through which people seek to make sense of events in distant places’ (Flew 2005, 177-8).

### **Developments in a New Century**

Numerous studies of media in the ‘post-9/11’ era have captured the impact of change over the past five years. The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, New York and the Pentagon, Washington, DC on 11 September 2001 (‘9/11’) have been taken as a defining point. (A popular periodization of international history of the past half-century would include ‘post-World War II’, ‘post-Cold War’ and ‘post-9/11’.) Some main themes have emerged.

One large claim relates to the relationship between media and history. Hachten and Scotton state that, ‘News, instantaneous and vivid, speeds up history as it directly influences diplomacy and government policy’ (Hachten and Scotton 2002, xvi). This is part of their argument that twenty-first-century global communication has profound implications for international organization and interaction. They propose that ‘history [is] speeded up’ because nations and people react faster to important events because of the speed and wide dissemination of information; and diplomacy has changed, given the impact of public opinion (influenced by global communication) on foreign relations (Hachten and Scotton 2002, 170).

After the September 2001 attacks the extent to which (particularly US) media reflected patriotic and nationalist sentiments became evident, and this has been another theme in recent writing. American media ‘were largely complicit with government’, showing consensus about the national interest and supporting American military intervention on targets such as Afghanistan that were perceived to be important in the ‘war against terrorism’. Reactions to ‘9/11’ indicated ‘extensive public support for media that respond to crises with patriotism and national interest at the forefront, rather than traditional journalistic values of free speech, free flow of information,

and independence'; they reflected and reinforced the views and policy preferences of the administration and the political elite, creating an atmosphere in which criticism of policy initiatives did not feature in the public debate (Gorman and McLean 2003,182-4; Nacos 2002, 160-1).

Another theme is anchored in the comment (by Margaret Thatcher in 1985) that publicity is the 'oxygen of terrorism' (quoted in Carruthers 2000, 169). In the twenty-first century the idea of a 'symbiotic link' between terrorism and mass media has been extended. Nacos uses the term 'mass-mediated terrorism' and stresses the primary role of communication and propaganda 'in the terrorist design' (Nacos 2002). Media organizations are accused of exploiting 'terrorism as infotainment for their own imperatives', to improve ratings and circulation. This use of terrorism as infotainment is part of the broader trend whereby news-as-information has given way to news-as-entertainment, or 'hard' news has been increasingly crowded out by 'soft' news. The images and themes of terrorist incidents (with 'drama, tragedy, shock, anger, grief, fear, panic') lend themselves to infotainment formats so that news media become 'unwitting accomplices of media-savvy terrorists' (Nacos 2002, 29; Nacos in Slocum 2005, 205).

This theme is related to the growing consensus that public service broadcasting and the values informing traditional journalism and the original charters of organizations such as the BBC are fighting a losing battle against commercial organizations; that a market-led 'tabloid' version of news is edging out the public service agenda; that strong commercial imperatives are reinforced by the growth of global media organizations that are merely parts of transnational corporations whose primary concern is entertainment (CNN is part of Time Warner, ABC of Disney, Fox

News of News Corporation; NBC Universal is largely owned by General Electric; CBS was part of Viacom, but the 1999 merger was undone at the end of 2005 and CBS Corporation is again separate from Viacom, which retains the MTV Network, Paramount Pictures, DreamWorks and other interests), as well as by strong global advertising interests, themselves interdependent with global corporations. In this context commercial television journalism has had a strong influence: rather than 'hard news', there are more stories about scandals, more 'human interest' stories, more lifestyle programs, more consumer-oriented news reports, more and more 'reality TV' programs, and the lines defining formerly distinct genres have become blurred, resulting not only in 'infotainment' but also in 'docudrama' (Taylor in Thussu and Freedman 2003, 122).

With respect to war reporting this theme has been extended to highlight a change in media-war-public opinion relationships. The reporting of conflict increasingly involves entertainment formats, mimicking war-gaming – graphics, satellite pictures, chat-show use of experts, videogame-style images of 'surgical strikes by "intelligent" weaponry'. The result is that audiences are not exposed to the real face of war, and the public is desensitized (Taylor in Thussu and Freedman 2003, 124).

Another theme in 'post-9/11' literature continues the trend to identify 'defining moments' in the relationship between media and war, with technological change seen as significant. In the previous decade the 1991 Gulf War was described as the first 'real-time war' when US-based CNN came into prominence, delivering 24-hour news of the conflict to global audiences. The 1999 NATO air war against Serbia over the expulsion of Kosovar Albanians was the first 'Web war', with the Internet playing a global role in disseminating information and images of the war

(on the first day of the NATO air strikes there were 31 million page views of the CNN website: Seib, 2002, p. 99). The 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, DC and the ensuing ‘war on terrorism’ were noteworthy in media terms because of the vast global audiences. The American audience alone on ‘9/11’, according to Nielsen Media Research, numbered 79.5 million for prime time broadcast and cable television news coverage. The Internet also distributed news to a vast international audience: on 11 September the CNN website had 162.4 million page views, and in the days immediately after the attacks there were average weekday page views of 14 million (Hachten and Scotton 2002, 16). The US war against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan after ‘9/11’ was the first ‘videophone war’ (Hachten and Scotton 2002, 16, 132-41). In the 2003 Iraq War ‘embedded’ journalists – and others – used the various new technologies – videophones, mobile phones, email and the Internet – in the ‘most heavily televised war in history’ (Seib 2005, 144). (It can also be argued that ‘embedding’ profoundly changed the relationship between the military and the media.) Thus studies have emphasized the impact of technological change on war reporting that reaches global audiences. The manner in which they characterize particular wars almost seems to imply that media coverage is more defining than military engagement and its consequences.

In literature on the ‘war on terrorism’ another theme has been the emergence of non-Western media. In October 2001 the Qatar-based 24-hour satellite news channel, Al-Jazeera, ‘scooped the world’ with a broadcast from Osama bin Laden. It later provided exclusive footage of US strikes against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Since the Iraq War began in 2003, it has offered an alternative news source not only on that war but on Middle Eastern affairs more generally, particularly the Israeli-Palestine conflict. In the ten years since its foundation Al-Jazeera has



gained a reputation for ‘bringing independent journalism to a region where much of the media are state-run or controlled’ (Coulton 2006), for establishing Arab media ‘as a viable alternative to Western news organizations and ... attracting global recognition of Arab media voices’ (Seib 2005, 227) and for stimulating the emergence of a public sphere for Arab audiences (Miladi in Thussu and Freedman 2003, 149-60; El-Nawawy and Iskander 2003). Anglophone media studies now also include the role of new media ‘in expanding the public spheres of Islam, in Muslim-majority societies and for extended transnational Muslim networks’ (Eickelman and Anderson 2003).

In the first years of this new century these themes – the suggestion that history is accelerated because of media and communication technologies; that media have been conscripted to patriotic, nationalist causes, in the process abandoning traditional journalistic values; that there is a ‘symbiotic’ relationship between media and terrorism; that a cluster of developments, including the decline in public service broadcasting, the concentration of media ownership, the dominance of global media corporations and of commercial imperatives, has had considerable impact on the extent to which the public are well informed, especially on international affairs; that the role of media in war has changed because of technological developments; that the advent of non-Western global media has significantly altered the ‘mediascape’ – invite consideration against the history of media over the past 100 years.

### **History as a Guide?**

While noting that various theoretical frameworks have contributed to study of the media – from ‘mass society’ approaches, including the Marxist ‘Frankfurt school’ and other variants of

‘ideological control’ theory, through ‘effects research’, focusing on media products, the impact of media messages, the importance of popular culture, through approaches that focused on the political economy of media, including concepts of dependence, media hegemony and cultural imperialism, to theories regarding the empowering potential of media, not just the traditional conception of ‘the fourth estate’ but the idea of new media such as the Internet offering unfettered access to information and underpinning freedom, democratic rights and active civic participation – this paper does not concentrate on development of theory. Perhaps the main point here is the value of theoretical perspectives informed by multidisciplinary, given the complexity of issues relating to the political, economic, social and cultural contexts of contemporary media, their hugely diverse audiences, and the speed and impact of technological change on ever-evolving media forms.

So, to take up the themes identified above and consider them against the backdrop of twentieth-century media history: first, is the notion that history is ‘speeded up’ credible? It is true that larger global audiences than ever in the past have rapid (the term ‘instantaneous’ tends to be used) access to international news, frequently including vivid images. The term ‘CNN effect’ is used to describe perceived media influence on swift and reactive policy-making. One example is the landing of US Marines in Somalia in December 1992 to assist in famine relief after global media revealed the extent of suffering; their withdrawal after a battle in October 1993, when American casualties in Mogadishu were shown on television news, has been explained by a simple cause-and-effect argument linking media coverage, shift in public opinion, change of policy (Hachten and Scotton 2002, xv-xvi). Yet any comprehensive analysis would include other factors such as national interest, economic and geo-political considerations: direct causal links

between, say, television news and rapid, reactive policy-making are difficult to establish convincingly. Gowing has concluded categorically that ‘real-time television coverage ... will create emotions but ultimately make no difference to the fundamental calculations in foreign policy-making’ (Gowing in Palmer 2003, 206). Another view is that global television may constrain rather than determine policy. Gilboa has highlighted the speed of news transmission, the ‘video-clip pace’ of global television that has created expectations of instant results in diplomacy and warfare. As a source of rapid, real-time information for policy-makers, global television has accelerated the pace of diplomatic communication, creating pressures not only on journalists, reporters and news organizations but also on foreign-affairs bureaucracies and policy-makers (Gilboa in Seib 2005, 17, 22-3). In relation to new media such as the Internet, the complex processes behind policy-making and the calculation of what best reflects the national interest would urge a cautious approach rather than simplistic cause-and-effect hypotheses. The Internet may enhance public knowledge and thereby change the dynamic of news media, news consumers and policy-makers, but political pressures arise as by-products of greater knowledge (Seib 2002, 15), and the relationship between media and decision-making is not simple.

While not part of an argument about accelerating history, a classic instance of attributing power to, and blaming, the media in relation to foreign policy was the thesis that the media lost the war in Vietnam in the 1960s. This ‘orthodox view’ was convincingly challenged in the 1980s and the conclusion reached that public opinion – and the impact of television images of the war – were only two of a range of important considerations (Gorman and McLean 2003, 172-6). This example reiterates the importance of avoiding simplistic statements about media impacts. However, perceptions sometimes remain entrenched and influence subsequent action, even when

academic debate has moved well beyond the original orthodoxy. The ‘Vietnam syndrome’ continued to influence US foreign policy and military strategy – and a concomitant belief, that public support could not be sustained for any lengthy foreign war, especially when media persistently broadcast images of conflict, is relevant here because it implies a changed ‘pace of history’. In military engagements after the Vietnam War, kept ‘short and sharp’ to avoid any prolonged entanglement as in South-East Asia in the 1960s-1970s (including Grenada, Panama, the Gulf War), political and military leaders attempted to control the media as if they had been solely responsible for the US loss in Vietnam. It is interesting to note that, when a less restrictive approach was adopted and reporters were ‘embedded’ with US troops in the Iraq War in 2003, this did not lead to a more realistic portrayal of war. Embedded reporters were closer to the front, but audiences were ‘shielded’ and given a ‘largely bloodless view’ of the war (Aday in Seib 2005, 149-52). (One area that may prove increasingly challenging for media is how to cover peacekeeping operations in various parts of the world, but this is more relevant to international agencies, non-government organizations and cooperation – rather than competition – among nations.)

The notion that history is somehow ‘accelerated’, especially in times of crisis, has little meaning in one sense: the past is history no matter how rapidly events move. However, swiftly transmitted media content may be putting heightened pressure on decision-makers because of rapid information flows, public access to ever-greater amounts of information and public expectations. Nonetheless, foreign-policy decisions are based on many variables, of which public opinion is only one. In a broader sense, the ‘lessons’ of history seem to count little in crisis decision-making, as they not infrequently have little grounding in objective analysis.

In relation to the media being complicit in falling into line behind official, nationalist positions, the 'war on terrorism' has certainly provoked some confused thinking about traditional values. This was evident immediately after '9/11': freedom of information and diversity of opinion seemed to count for little when some Western media were accused of irresponsibility by providing coverage that might assist the enemy; and there was a nice irony when US representatives complained to the Emir of Qatar that Al-Jazeera was providing terrorism with a platform and should be curtailed, only to be reminded by the Emir that a free press is essential to democratic life (Gorman and McLean 2003, 182). In early 2006 challenges were thrown down from the Muslim world to Western media to demonstrate that they consistently applied the principle of freedom of expression after widespread and violent reactions when a Danish newspaper published cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed that were considered blasphemous.

However, twentieth-century history reminds us that use of media for nationalist, patriotic, chauvinist causes is far from new. The considerable literature on propaganda has analyzed how media purveyed official messages in not only totalitarian but also democratic states, as well as being used extensively beyond national borders to disseminate political messages and for 'psychological operations'. Nonetheless, one area that is increasingly difficult to 'unravel' is the extent to which political and cultural messages are intertwined and their relevance. Thus there are questions about the extent to which 'homogenising' influences such as global advertising of the same products, the widespread dissemination of (predominantly Western) tastes, images and consumer preferences subsumed under 'popular culture' might break down national barriers and undermine hitherto important political and cultural differences.

Studies relevant to these questions, begun in the 1970s and conducted within a ‘dependency’ framework, ensured that notions of media and cultural imperialism gained general currency. Focusing on the extent to which Third World/developing nations had been influenced by Western media, particularly American content, they underlined the international power and influence of US media and product. However, even before the end of the 1990s strong arguments were being advanced for the qualified influence of US and Western media, particularly in areas where local or national industries were developing. The Indian film industry (‘Bollywood’) and Latin American – particularly Brazilian and Mexican – production industries provided the basis for debates about ‘contra-flows’. Studies of ‘diasporas’ and their sharing of media in their own languages have highlighted non-Western media influences; and a growing body of literature on the ways in which audiences ‘use’ media has stressed local ‘readings’ and interpretations, the ‘indigenisation’ of content (Gorman and McLean 2003, 219-23). The importance of these approaches is that they highlight the need to take account of the many and varied ways in which media are used – in some instances blatantly to promote particular political positions or national causes, in others perhaps more subtly to convey cultural messages; they include questions addressed by media ‘effects research’ about how consumers interpret media content.

In relation to media use, issues of ownership and regulation are also important. History indicates that questions of media ownership and regulation in the twentieth century were equally salient in democratic states such as the United Kingdom and the United States as they were in totalitarian or fascist states such as Soviet Russia, Communist China, Nazi Germany – although the argument might go on to examine very different results with respect to media organizations, their functions,

their products. The key question in the twenty-first century is how much scope remains for national regulatory regimes, given the power of transnational media corporations, the rapid take-up of new technologies and the difficulties of regulating transborder flows via new media. The reality is that national governments continue to regulate, whether it be to limit foreign ownership of media, to sustain home-grown production through programming quota systems or to limit access to Internet sites. However, history indicates that official efforts to control or to use media have enjoyed varying degrees of success. The literature on propaganda provides a useful reminder that the issues are complex: mass media were used for the purposes of persuasion, but the effectiveness of such use varied with other factors ‘such as preexisting attitudes and beliefs, the extent to which propagandist messages confirmed or diverged from social “realities”, and the degree to which the state resorted to other measures such as terror and repression to supplement propaganda to realize official purposes’ (Gorman and McLean 2003, 102). Other examples would include governments’ inability to control media as communist regimes in Eastern Europe came to an end in the late 1980s/early 1990s. In these complex areas of media-government relations and media use it is important both to appreciate change and to acknowledge continuity. Flew, for example, cautions against overstating the impact of globalization and new media on governments and nation-states. Globalization may be associated with a variety of factors that limit the sovereignty of national governments, but governments and policy-makers are responding to the challenges. In China, for example, government policies have encouraged mass use of the Internet, but at the same time steps have been taken to maintain controls over online content (Flew 2005, 197).

The theme of a media-terrorism symbiosis might seem to be self-evident because of the importance of publicity to terrorist causes. Recent studies have presented some differences between twenty-first and twentieth-century terrorism; for example, compared with earlier decades, terrorist demands are less specific, and there is now perhaps a more generalized ‘fear factor’.<sup>3</sup> Yet it can be argued that there are parallels with the Cold War period when two ‘systems’ underpinned by conflicting ideologies were pitted against each other and the adversary demonized in the media. One aspect that is different is that non-Western viewpoints are now available to global audiences through Al-Jazeera (which not only broadcasts in Arabic but has an English-language website, introduced broadcasts with English subtitles in late 2002 and will introduce an English-language global news channel Al-Jazeera International in June 2006 with broadcasting centres in Doha, London, Washington and Kuala Lumpur) and other news channels such as Al-Arabiya (the Dubai-based 24-hour satellite TV news channel, established in February 2003). (It should be noted that CNN launched an Arabic website in 2002 and that BBC World and Voice of America deliver services in Arabic.) Another change that has so far received little attention is the use of new media, particularly the Internet, by terrorist groups to promote their goals (Conway in Seib 2005, 185-215). While international news agencies continue to be Western-dominated (Reuters and Associated Press remain the most widely used sources), technological change and the increasing maturity of non-Western media are producing an international ‘mediascape’ of greater diversity and multiple information sources. Any reaction to this that is firmly grounded in ‘democratic values’ such as freedom of expression and diversity of opinion should welcome such change.

---

<sup>3</sup> Hachten and Scotton (2002, 15) give US State Department statistics for international terrorist attacks between 1993 and 2000 as more than 2100; Brigitte Nacos cites post-Cold War terrorist acts such as the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, the 1995 sarin gas attacks in the Tokyo subway, the 1998 bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and the 2000 suicide attack on *USS Cole* (Nacos in Slocum 2005, 198).



The extent to which media diversity is utilized to convey ‘worthwhile’ content is, of course, another question – and the answer helps to explain the ‘attraction’ of terrorist activities. The trend to concentration of media ownership has not lost momentum this century, and analysts seem to be exhausting the vocabulary to describe the results – from ‘media barons’ through ‘transnational media corporations’ to ‘media behemoths’.<sup>[4]</sup> Although respected public service broadcasters have survived pressures from commercially driven media, concessions have been made (incorporating advertising, engaging in revenue-generating activities, changing the proportions of information and entertainment programming). Program content can be significantly influenced by the robustness or otherwise of local film industries, national ‘quotas’ and commitment to ‘home-grown’ content, and broadcasters’ success in the fiercely competitive world of rights for big events such as high-profile sports. It does seem to be increasingly difficult to find any convincing counter-argument to the proposition that commercialism, privatization and technological convergence have fundamentally changed international broadcasting, with a shift from public service to ratings-led television dependent on corporate advertising and global audiences (see, e.g., Thussu in Thussu and Freedman 2003, 118). Specifically in relation to news, Seaton recently concluded that news is ‘faster, slicker, better informed and more popular than ever before’, but above all news production is just a business, a small part of commercial conglomerates ‘with little interest in product but a lot in profit’ (Seaton in Thussu and Freedman 2003, 48).

One thread running through much discussion of media programming is the extent to which media influence popular taste or, alternatively, mirror it. As indicated above, Taylor has picked up on

this when discussing how media now cover war: the portrayal of ‘real war’ has been influenced by television formats and by Hollywood genres to deliver a sanitized, if dramatized, version of events, uninformed by in-depth analysis of the complex questions of international relations and foreign policy that are critical to any understanding of the causes of conflict. While much of the literature emphasizes the extent to which infotainment has edged out serious reporting, it is important to note that more traditional values continue to have strong defenders, not only among Western practitioners and academics (see, for example, Hachten 2002; Seib 2002, 2005) but also in non-Western media organizations (the Al-Jazeera culture of airing ‘the other opinion’ has been well publicized). Hachten points to the widespread influence of Western journalistic practices, norms, ethical standards, ideology, including editorial autonomy and freedom from government interference; journalists of many nations continue to see the role of the press as a watchdog and critic of government and authority (2005, 19). It appears that such aspirations are sufficiently widespread that the notion of ‘the fourth estate’ should not be jettisoned.

While some values and professional practices appear to be enduring, this is not to say that the media environment has not changed significantly. Throughout most of the twentieth century ‘news’ was delivered by mass media (newspapers, radio, television) – admittedly after considerable selection and ‘filtering’ by news agencies, reporters, journalists, news organizations. In this first decade of a new century there are more world news services: CNN has competition from BBC World, MSNBC (established by NBC and Microsoft) and Fox News Channel.<sup>[5]</sup> In

---

<sup>4</sup> By the late 1990s News Corporation reached approximately 75% of the world’s population, AOL-Time Warner was in 212 countries through its CNN subsidiary alone in 2002; Disney estimated that at least 1.2 billion people in the world’s primary markets used at least one of its products in 2001 (Demers 2003, 53).

<sup>5</sup> By 2003 CNN was available in more than 150 million homes in more than 210 countries and territories; it had some 150 correspondents in 42 international bureaux, 23 satellites and was reaching 1 billion people; in the same year BBC World was available in more than 240 million homes in approximately 200 countries and territories, with

addition, 'news' of events of global interest can be disseminated widely and rapidly by individuals, whether professional journalists using mobile 'phones and satellite links to transmit via recognized news distributors or unaccredited individuals who can bypass established 'gatekeepers' in news organizations and provide news, information, their personal perspective to a global audience via a website or 'blog'.

With such global proliferation of information (apart from matters of validity, objectivity, evidence and so on), an important question in relation to 'the competition of nations' is the extent to which national audiences, even when presented with many and diverse sources, are interested in news that goes beyond parochial or national concerns. Large claims are made for the importance of media in relation to war: for example, it is 'essential to understand the pervasiveness and influence of media in order to understand the causes and conduct of conflict' (Seib 2005, ix). Yet there is evidence that, outside crisis periods such as '9/11', US audiences have little interest in international news, and US television networks have, over successive decades, cut back their coverage of foreign affairs.<sup>[6]</sup> Seib slates a large share of blame to American news organizations for the very poor job they are doing to break down 'the public's intellectual isolation' (Seib 2005, 222). Moeller has used the term 'compassion fatigue' to describe the lack of American interest in foreign news and the way the American public turned inward in the post-Cold War era (cited in Hachten 2005, 125). (Global business/economic news is singled out as going against the trend – Magder in Thussu and Freedman 2003, 34 – an

---

access to the resources of the BBC with its 250 correspondents worldwide and 58 international news bureaux (Thussu in Thussu and Freedman 2003, 118-19).

<sup>6</sup> Magder cites surveys in the US that showed the time devoted to international news by network television dropped from 45% in the 1970s to 13.5% in 1995 (in Thussu and Freedman 2003, 34). Seib presents data on the decline in international coverage by ABC, CBS and NBC evening newscasts since 1989, on the reduction in the number of foreign bureaux maintained by American news organizations, on the decline in 'hard news' and rise in 'lifestyle' stories on network television news (Seib 2005, 222-4).

interesting point in relation to the extent to which economic imperatives drive globalization.) Research on the extent to which media audiences/users beyond the US have similar tendencies would assist in assessing the importance of global media this century.

Finally, in relation to the advent of non-Western media, in addition to points made above about the influence of Western journalistic values on organizations such as Al-Jazeera and on the greater diversity of media voices, it is important to note that significant international disparities in access to new media persist. Statistics for March 2006 show that, although there has been especially rapid growth in Internet usage in Africa and the Middle East between 2002 and 2005, only 2.6% of the African population use the Internet (representing 2.3% of world usage); in Asia and the Middle East the respective figures are 9.9% (35.6% of world usage) and 9.6% (1.8% of world usage), while Asia, North America and Europe account for 35.6%, 22.2% and 28.5% respectively of world usage.<sup>[7]</sup> As Internet take-up increases, two critical questions will be the extent to which a worldwide Islamic community fostered by technology-based cohesion might emerge, and whether such a community will be insular or participate in the larger global community (Seib 2005, 229). The spread of Muslim outrage at the Danish newspaper cartoons in 2006 demonstrated how media might be used to convey a message with power to mobilize Islamic opinion on a global scale.

## **Conclusion**

What, then, can be drawn from consideration of media in the context of globalization in this twenty-first century, given the history of media over the last hundred years? Recent literature,

---

<sup>7</sup> World Internet Usage and Population Statistics, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>, updated for 31 March 2006, retrieved 24 April 2006.

while the ‘war on terrorism’ has dominated international affairs, has emphasized a number of themes. In some there are continuities or parallels with the history of media in the twentieth century (use of media for political, propagandist purposes, concerns about concentration of media ownership and media organization, pressure on public service broadcasting values and organizations, the rise and rise of infotainment, the pressure of profit-driven, commercial concerns). In others there are areas of difference, although possibly only of degree (the complex nexus of 24-hour global news/public opinion/policy-making, the advent of non-Western global media, the scale and use of new media such as the Internet and the capacity to bypass conventional ‘gatekeepers’). From this first decade of the twenty-first century it seems fair to conclude that the global ‘mediascape’ made possible by rapid technological change presents transformational potential. In relation to ‘the competition of nations’, however, media – and particularly their relationship with public opinion – are only one among many factors, including national interest, economics, geopolitics, that influence foreign policy decisions. Nonetheless, it may be that, in an increasingly globalized world, media might play a larger role in relation to matters of peacekeeping and global governance, cultural and religious exchange, less formal communication and information transfer, and individualized access to media products that contribute to widely shared ‘digital lifestyles’. The history of media underlines the importance of examining the uses to which they are put; one area not even touched on above is worth close scrutiny – that is, the role of search engines such as Google, as more information becomes accessible via the Internet. In a recent book subtitled ‘How Google and Its Rivals Rewrote the Rules of Business and Transformed Our Culture’, the author claims that search will ‘rewire the relationship’ between citizens and their governments (Battelle 2005). I leave you with that thought.

## References

- Battelle, John. 2005. *The Search: How Google and Its Rivals Rewrote the Rules of Business and Transformed Our Culture*. New York: Portfolio.
- Boyd-Barrett, Oliver and Rantanen, Terhi, eds. 1998. *The Globalization of News*. London: Sage.
- Carruthers, Susan L. 2000. *The Media at War: Communication and Conflict in the Twentieth Century*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Coultan, Mark. 2006. 'English language takes Al-Jazeera to a new front line', *Sydney Morning Herald* (1 April).
- Demers, David, ed. 2003. *Terrorism, Globalization and Mass Communication*. Papers presented at the 2002 Center for Global Media Studies Conference. Spokane, WA: Marquette Books.
- Eickelman, Dale F. and Anderson, Jon W., eds. 2003. *New Media in the Muslim World*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- El-Nawawy, Mohammed and Iskander, Adel. 2003. *Al-Jazeera: The Story of the Network that Is Rattling Governments and Redefining Modern Journalism*. Cambridge, MA: Westview Press.
- Flew, Terry. 2005. *New Media: An Introduction*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Gorman, Lyn and McLean, David. 2003. *Media and Society in the Twentieth Century: A Historical Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Greenberg, Bradley S., ed. 2002. *Communication and Terrorism: Public and Media Responses to 9/11*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Hachten, William A. 2005. *The Troubles of Journalism: A Critical Look at What's Right and Wrong with the Press*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hachten, William A. and Scotton, James F. 2002. *The World News Prism: Global Media in an Era of Terrorism*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Ames, IA: Iowa State Press/Blackwell.
- Held, David and McGrew, Anthony, eds. 2000. *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Held, David, McGrew, Anthony, Goldblatt, David and Perraton, Jonathan. 1999. *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Lechner, Frank J. and Boli, John. 2000. *The Globalization Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Morris, Nancy and Waisbord, Silvio, eds. 2001. *Media and Globalization: Why the State Matters*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Nacos, Brigitte E. 2002. *Mass-Mediated Terrorism: The Central Role of the Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Palmer, Nancy, ed. 2003. *Terrorism, War, and the Press*. Hollis, NH: Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Harvard University/Hollis Publishing.
- Rantanen, Terhi. 2005. *The Media and Globalization*. London: Sage.
- Seib, Philip. 2002. *The Global Journalist: News and Conscience in a World of Conflict*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Seib, Philip, ed. 2005. *Media and Conflict in the Twenty-first Century*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Slocum, J. David, ed. 2005. *Terrorism, Media, Liberation*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Sreberny-Mohammadi, Annabelle, et al. 1997. *Media in Global Context: A Reader*. Foundations in Media, ed. Oliver Boyd-Barrett. London: Arnold.
- Thussu, Daya Kishan and Freedman, Des, eds. 2003. *War and the Media: Reporting Conflict 24/7*. London: Sage.

Published by the Forum on Public Policy

Copyright © The Forum on Public Policy. All Rights Reserved. 2006.