

Global Discourse in Fractured Times

Global Discourse in Fractured Times:

*Perspectives on Journalism,
Media, Education, and Politics*

Edited by

Yahya R. Kamalipour

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Dedicated to my family members for their unwavering support,
encouragement, and unconditional love!

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

—United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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INTRODUCTION

I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.

—Nelson Mandela

This book contains a selected number of diverse papers presented at the 12th Global Communication Association (GCA) Conference in Greensboro, North Carolina. Hosted by the High Point University and supported by Elon University, University of North Carolina Greensboro, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical University, and Winston Salem State University, the conference brought together scholars and graduate students from throughout the United States and the world.

During the two-day event, forty-five diverse papers thematically-organized on ten panels, were presented—most of which were closely related to the overall theme of the conference: Global Discourse and Discord. Also, the venue provided a unique opportunity to over a dozen master’s degree students enrolled in regional universities to present the results of their research projects to an international audience and receive valuable feedback from experts in the field of communication.

A highlight of the conference was CNN’s Emmy Award-winning veteran anchor and international reporter Jim Clancy, who delivered a thought-provoking keynote speech, “The Trump Era: Alternative Facts Confront Journalists with Unprecedented Challenges and Opportunities,” at the opening conference reception. Clancy discussed the contemporary issues and challenges facing journalists in the United States. He also discussed how the media should respond to such accusations as being “liars,” “dishonest,” “the Opposition Party,” and having limited access to the White House Officials.

Established in 2007 and inaugurated at the Shanghai Global Communication and Development Conference, the GCA intends to:

- Foster and promote academic research in global studies;
- Promote academic collaboration among major universities around the world;
- Facilitate joint projects and research opportunities among scholars, researchers, and graduate students;
- Facilitate faculty research and exchange programs;
- Facilitate joint programs, grant opportunities, symposiums, and timely initiatives among centres, institutes, and global organizations;
- Explore the myriad opportunities and challenges in the areas of teaching, learning, communication development, globalization, mass media, and international cooperation; and
- Organize annual conferences throughout the world.

More specifically, the GCA provides an eclectic international platform for corporate executives, communication specialists, policymakers, academicians, graduate students, bureaucrats, political leaders, public relations practitioners, journalists, and co-related industry professionals to meet, interact, and generate new knowledge that should contribute to a more harmonious, understanding, peaceful, and tolerant global environment.

In the past, GCA conferences have been successfully organized across the globe, including in China, Canada, Germany, India, Malaysia, Oman, Poland, Russia, Zambia, and the United States. For information about past and future GCA conferences, visit www.globalcomassociation.com.

Considering today's interconnected and interdependent digital or information age, in which communication, facilitated by the internet and social media, plays a highly influential role in people's daily lives, you should find the diverse, multifaceted, and well-researched papers in this volume engaging, through-provoking, and informative.

It should be noted that while the central theme of the state of global discourse in our current uncertain times is strong and relevant and there are many chapters that speak to important contemporary issues, based on recent original research and making worthwhile contributions, there are some contributions which are not directly related to the central theme of this volume. Also, as is normally the case in any edited volume, the writing styles vary and, unlike single-authored or co-authored books, do not flow seamlessly in a coherent manner. Nonetheless, they stand on their own and enhance the overall discourse around the activities and interventions of groups of actors, including political actors, journalists, educators, and the members of various imagined communities.

This collection will be an excellent supplement to senior and graduate-level courses in international communication, cultural studies, the mass media, journalism, political communication, and related subjects.

Yahya R. Kamalipour
Founding President, Global Communication Association
North Carolina
January 2018

JOURNALISM IN THE ERA OF TRUMP: A KEYNOTE SPEECH

JIM CLANCY
VETERAN INTERNATIONAL JOURNALIST
AND CNN NEWS ANCHOR

Abstract

The presidency of Donald Trump presents unprecedented challenges and opportunities to journalists. Jim Clancy addressed those issues in a keynote speech at the 14th Conference of the Global Communications Association in April 2017. How did journalists arrive at a point where the President of the United States was accusing them of being the enemy of all Americans? How should they respond? Journalists have the opportunity of a lifetime to define what “freedom of the press” really means in America. Clancy described to the journalism students and professors how it was a moment for journalists to examine their own work and pursue methods that will shore up public confidence in their reporting. Most of Mr. Clancy’s comments were extemporaneous; what follows here is written in the spirit of that address.

Keynote Speech

Donald Trump has done more for journalism than anyone in my lifetime. As he roared about “fake news” in front of thousands of adoring supporters during the campaign, he deliberately paved the way for the arrival of “alternative facts.” What has followed in this era of Trump has reinforced the need for all of us to embrace the challenge and demonstrate why now, more than ever, journalism really matters. In that sense, President Trump has inspired an awakening among reporters and editors at all levels to pursue their work with a renewed sense of purpose.

No one can doubt there is something called “fake news.” For President Trump and those aboard the Trump train, that would be news they don’t want to hear. It is often composed of facts they don’t like. Those would be

facts that undermine their rejection of climate science. They would be those facts that paint some aspects of GOP healthcare plans as cruel and harmful. Or it might be photos from the National Park Service that contradict White House Spokesman Sean Spicer's claim about "the largest audience to witness an inauguration, period." It came on day two of the new Trump administration and earned a "pants on fire" rating from Politifact (Qiu, 2017).

Some fake news is exaggerated solely for the purpose of generating advertising revenue. Any internet link promising "shocking" revelations can usually be placed in this category and earns the description of "click bait." We're all familiar with the "ten most shocking revelations" that require us to load ten pages that seem to take forever because they are laden with advertising.

In the months since the election, we have come to learn more about another kind of fake news: the kind that came from Russia and focused on the American election. Max Fisher outlined what we know and what we don't know in a *New York Times* article about that Russian interference. We know US intelligence agencies concluded there was plenty of evidence of fake news intended to sow conflict and confusion on a scale unfamiliar to us. We don't know whether or to what extent it had any real effect on Mr. Trump's victory (Fisher, 2016).

Interference in democratic elections is a serious matter. As American journalists, we should take particular note of how our own US corporate media played its role in the election and almost certainly affected the outcome. It is much easier to measure—it would be all the free airtime it gave to Donald Trump. By mid-March 2016, *The New York Times* estimated the amount at around \$2 billion (Confessore & Yourish, 2016).

At the conclusion of the election cycle, some estimated Mr. Trump had received \$5 billion in media exposure compared to a little more than \$3 billion for Mrs. Clinton (Harris, 2016).

What really mattered was the brazen response of corporate leaders like Les Moonves, the Chairman of CBS:

It may not be good for America, but it's damned good for CBS. Man, who would have expected the ride we're all having right now. The money's rolling in and this is fun. I've never seen anything like this and this is going to be a very, very good year for us. Sorry. It's a terrible thing to say. But, bring it on, Donald. Keep going. (Collins, 2016)

In so many words, the CBS Chairman admitted the motivation for all this free air time was the ratings and the money those ratings raked in for the networks. Some would jettison normal network standards, e.g.

foregoing a satellite link and accepting even a phone call just to get Donald Trump on their program.

The media gave Donald Trump a bully pulpit to rail against Hillary Clinton, journalists, and news organizations. He proclaimed his intention to “drain the swamp” in Washington without providing details. He was rarely challenged in real time as he addressed cheering crowds at his rallies. Members of the news media were usually contained in small, reserved areas used as a whipping post by Mr. Trump as he scorned them and evoked cheers and applause from his crowds. Those crowds even menaced the journalists present in some cases. In other cases, physical attacks were launched against protestors as Mr. Trump shouted “throw them out!”

In contrast, Hillary Clinton was often featured trying to dispel criticism of her email server, the deaths of US diplomats and security staff in Benghazi, Libya, and other negative issues.

It should be of vital concern for journalists that surveys released during the election cycle showed trust in the American news media was falling to new lows. Gallup released a survey in September 2016 that found public trust in the news media “to report the news fully, accurately and fairly” had fallen to thirty-two percent, down eight percent in a year. If respondents identified as a Republican, the figure was fourteen percent—half what it was the previous year. Those were all-time lows. It is a trend that Gallup says began with its first “media trust” poll in 1972 (Swift, 2016).

As reported for Gallup by Art Swift: “Over the history of the entire trend, Americans' trust and confidence hit its highest point in 1976, at 72%, in the wake of widely lauded examples of investigative journalism regarding Vietnam and the Watergate scandal.”

Trump's campaign adopted the slogan “Make America Great Again,” asserting that America was somehow broken. What was really broken, he often argued, was the news media that reported affairs of state and, of course, his campaign. President Trump reserved his harshest criticism for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and CNN. At times, candidate Trump heaped scorn on reporters covering his campaign appearances. He mocked a disabled member of the media on camera and later denied it. He told his audiences the media was refusing to show the size of his crowds. Sometimes, such assertions came precisely at the moment the news media was doing exactly the opposite, airing sweeping panoramas of his supporters in attendance. But the crowds couldn't see it. It worked in the moment. Candidate Trump's poll numbers held firm and even rose in some places.

Journalist Salena Zito saw a complete disconnect by the media. She spent much of 2016 travelling “Trump Country,” the back roads that weave through America’s heartland. Zito wrote that the media’s problem was that it “takes him literally, but not seriously; his supporters take him seriously, but not literally” (Zito, 2016).

After the election, President Trump doubled down on his criticism of his critics. In February, he tweeted that “the news media is the enemy of the people” (Grynbaum, 2017).

As journalists, we must take up that challenge both literally and seriously. We are in need of a strategy to counter not just President Trump’s deception, but the loss of our own credibility in the minds of the American public.

The strategy is journalism.

Writing in Politico, media critic Jack Shafer put it like this:

Instead of relying exclusively on the traditional skills of political reporting, the carriers of press cards ought to start thinking of covering Trump’s Washington like a war zone, where conflict follows conflict, where the fog prevents the collection of reliable information directly from the combatants, where the assignment is a matter of life or death ... In his own way, Trump has set us free. Reporters must treat Inauguration Day as a kind of Liberation Day. (Shafer, 2017)

But what are the specific steps journalists should take in this “Era of Trump?”

In my opinion, we need to embrace the core principals, the pillars of investigative reporting: data, interviews, and observation. We must commit relentlessly to pursue the raw facts, and uncover the data. We need to reach out and listen to as many different points of view as possible and share those perspectives. We need to take the time to observe the effects of changing politics and policies based not on the bombastic rhetoric of politicians but the actual predicament of the citizenry.

I am reminded of my years spent in war zones in the Middle East, Africa, and the Balkans, and how the best stories were not about the characters who directed the conflicts but the people who were trapped within them. It is precisely those who are caught in the crossfire who suffer the most and can help put a human face on the policies we are debating.

In my opinion, too much emphasis remains on Mr. Trump himself and those early morning tweets that do more to deflect us from the important stories of the day than provide any meaningful insight. The news media needs to focus less on the leading personality and more on the essential facts about the budget, tax reform, health care, campaign finance and the

treatment of women in our society. We need to develop that “data state of mind” that tells us there are digital indicators that ignore political leanings and focus only on the facts. We need to reach out, far from the comfort of our chairs and glow of our computer screens, to listen to the voices of the people who are affected by the policy decisions and appointments being made in Washington. In short, we need to wear down some shoe leather.

As we include data to support our reporting, we recognize that the easiest-to-acquire data is often the least accurate. Consider the death toll from the hurricane in Puerto Rico that officials there said stood at fifty-five. CNN contacted more than one hundred funeral homes and found the real number of deaths linked to Hurricane Maria was nine times higher at 499 (Sutter, Santiago, and Shah, 2017).

The methods used to obtain this new data were explained by disclosing that CNN had contacted 112 funeral homes and interviewed doctors and family members, making the story more human and more credible. It noted reporters were only able to reach about half the funeral homes on the island, making it possible that the death toll could even be higher. It cited Puerto Rico’s department of health, noting that though some of the deaths were “indirectly” caused by the hurricane, they should still be counted in the hurricane’s toll. That transparency is an important part of how news can win the trust of viewers and readers.

The Trump Era has breathed new life into journalism. Many journalists and editors recognize a national need to fact check, and to dig deeper. We’ve got a real, old-fashioned “newspaper war” going on between *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. The real winners of that war are the readers.

Reporters are using more sources to back up their reporting. A single nameless source isn’t enough. Even when multiple sources can be used to back up elements of a story, it is imperative that the reader be informed why these sources were allowed to speak off the record. Multiple sources also reflect the diligence of reaching out to listen to multiple points of view.

But the “anonymous” source is still a problem. For many, it is a shortcut that obtains a revealing quote without holding the source directly accountable for its contents. It can encourage exaggerations, particularly along political lines. Explaining why the source was allowed to speak without being identified is only a partial solution. Some sources in some stories will always need anonymity. But the overall problem in the current atmosphere suggests that reporters have to work harder to get people on the record.

The most successful journalists in the Era of Trump are going to be those who seek out diversity and reach out to interview sources from as many political leanings as possible. Deconstructing the notion of “Red Voter vs. Blue Voter” is essential in both interviewing and observations. The effects of tax reform, the shape of healthcare, and how our political campaigns are funded are matters that concern all Americans.

As journalists, we have to closely examine how political opinion has wended its merry little way into everyday reporting. The solution can be found in another important method popular in investigative reporting: line-by-line editing. This requires that each sentence be examined to fairly determine if it is supported by the data, interviews, or clear observations presented. If it isn’t, it should be discarded. It doesn’t belong there. Accuracy is the cornerstone of everything journalists do. It is paramount if we want to rise to the challenges of “the Era of Trump.”

In 1979, I interviewed the poet, professor, journalist, and chicken farmer John Beecher. A descendant of abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe, he had inherited a fierce style and fiery presence. During the McCarthy era, Beecher refused to sign a California State loyalty oath and lost his teaching job at San Francisco State University. His interpretation was that he had already taken an oath of allegiance to the US Constitution that required he take no further oaths. In 1967, the US Supreme Court agreed. Ten years later, the aging Beecher was re-instated, but his health had already deteriorated. He returned to teaching full time for a brief three-year stint and passed away in 1980.

During our interview, Beecher autographed and presented me with one of his books that included poems on social injustice and discrimination against blacks, gays, Jews, and newly arrived immigrants. “I want to leave my mark on history like a bear claw,” he laughed, raising his hand to swipe at the air between us.

John Beecher was an optimist and a patriot. Not the false patriotism that proclaims, “America is the greatest,” but the kind of patriotism that says we’ve got something precious and we need to protect and defend it. Beecher scorned those who used the word “freedom” to suppress the Bill of Rights or prevent workers from organizing unions.

On page ninety-three of his *Collected Poems 1924–1974* are the closing lines of “Freedom the Word”:

The old coin freedom is worn slick and smooth
 the inscriptions rubbed off and the eagle dim
 but it is clean silver
 and can be reminted ...

We have to see journalism and democracy in our time as Beecher saw that coin. It may be worn but it is precious in value. It is essentially pure. It needs to be reminded.

All that needs to be answered now is what are we going to do, and how much enthusiasm will we bring in our reporting to rise to that challenge?

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PART ONE:
**NEWS AGENCIES, MEDIA RESPONSIBILITY,
AND REGULATION**

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ATTENTION: GLOBAL NEWS AGENCIES AND THE DESTRUCTION OF DEMOCRACY

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Abstract

The digital information age brings an unlimited capacity for news and entertainment, as newspapers, television, and satellite and cable networks are supplemented (or supplanted) by some two hundred million websites. For news and information, the abundance of sources and stories has prompted news aggregating websites and social media bundlers to alert users to immediate developments and short-term news trends. In the process, citizens report news overload, news fatigue, and partisan preferences—all of which short-circuit information, knowledge, and understanding of world events and conflicts.

Ironically, in the midst of this burgeoning information circus, global news agencies, public, state, private, and non-profit, remain primary producers of news and information, even for entertainment. The largest news agency is Associated Press (AP), which has some 250 news bureaus in 120 countries, with a net income of almost \$200 million. Yet, despite its size and reach, AP may be the least investigated news media organization. Indeed, AP is seldom mentioned or appears as a normative given in media studies of news framing, agenda setting, and political economies of the media industry.

This contribution provides a brief critique of the practices, functions, and cultural effects by investigating the six primary stories of three major crises: the 2014 Crimea referendum, the 2017 US missile attack on Syria, and the two 2017 electoral events in Venezuela. The findings indicate that as part of a transnational media regime constrained only by the limits of human attention, AP robustly competes for viewers by shortening messages from “legitimate” sources, emphasizing news spectacle, and privileging ideological assessments over geopolitical and historical context. AP releases

rely on headlines, soundbites, and heavily dramatized events. The result has been more news clutter, more news stimulation, and more transnationally hegemonic news frames. As the primary news producer and distributor on four continents, AP thus contributes to reducing democratic public discourse.

This essay concludes that to make sense of any specific global news event, citizens need more than disjointed information because information is not knowledge, and knowledge alone does not bring understanding. One needs to understand the whole to make sense of the parts. Adhering to market and advertising imperatives, AP's rush to attract more attention crushes the news, undermining the participatory and thoughtful communication necessary for democracy.

Introduction

The world is at war and verging on even more calamitous escalations. Yet, news media triggering of public attention seriously interferes with our ability to discern and resolve the actual causes and relations of power that underwrite chronic social and political conflicts. In fact, media frames obscure historical contexts, while blaming the victims or anyone who opposes austerity, dispossession, or military occupation. Unfortunately, access to information that might better serve a democratic citizenship is largely overwhelmed by the political economy of transnational media concentration.

Much has been observed and written about the consolidation of media and its negative impact on diversity of information and public knowledge. The adverse conditions for news dissemination and public awareness are exacerbated by the changing political economy of news media that are consolidating domestically and transnationally through mergers and partnerships. News media structures and practices have reduced the quantity, quality, and political diversity of global news within almost every nation. Except for a few elite exceptions, commercial print media in particular suffer from declining advertising revenue and circulation (Barthel, 2016; 2017). In the United States, just thirty-five million people read daily newspapers, the lowest number of readers since 1945, although daily papers have some eleven million more readers online. In the United Kingdom, print advertising revenues were projected to fall by one-third from 2014 to 2018. (There are significant exceptions to the general global decline in newsreaders: India publications continue to thrive and grow for now as literacy increases and internet connections remain spotty for much of the country.) Given their primary purpose is to generate profits for

owners and shareholders, print and broadcast media elsewhere have been cutting costs by severely reducing investigative reporting and international assignments, and radically cutting journalist positions across the board. As a consequence, the local media production of global news has dramatically declined in the last decades.

The Decline of International News Reporting

Pew Research Center reports that twenty-one out of fifty US states do not even have a news reporter in Washington, DC (Lu, 2016). News pages are regularly filled with heavily individualized and dramatized stories that do little to contextualize information that is hyped in the headlines (Bennett, 2016). Ad revenues for network and cable television are increasing, with cable news viewership increasing to 3.1 million in prime time in the United States in 2016. Still, in both network and cable, news staffing has been constrained or reduced and shifted to trendy, celebrity, and lifestyle news talk shows.

Meanwhile, newspapers, television, satellite, and cable networks are supplemented (or supplanted) by some two hundred million websites, which provide an unlimited capacity for news and entertainment. Facebook is now the primary source of news for the millennials, aged eighteen to thirty, and almost half of the American population accesses news online (Gottfried, 2016). Nonetheless, while seventy percent of the population turns to the internet for news, two-thirds also watch network television news. Only twenty percent of the population still receives their news from daily papers, and, remarkably, only two percent of the US population uses social media exclusively for news. In other words, the internet and social media have not replaced traditional news media, only the means of accessing the news has changed. Furthermore, considering that most online news sites retransmit news published or broadcast elsewhere, it's clear that news media and global news agencies continue to predominate in the news media environment. Indeed, most online news sources are not actually news producers, but overwhelmingly aggregate and repost stories from major commercial news media, alerting users to immediate developments and short-term news trends culled from traditional media. Internet users undoubtedly have access to many more sources and apparently much more information, but "the environment is increasingly dominated by a limited number of very large players [which] is accompanied by consolidation and cost-cutting elsewhere in the media landscape," which actually reduces diversity of news production" (Nielsen, Cornia, & Kalogeropoulos, 2016, p. 5). For example, fifty-seven

percent of all Yahoo news content is directly from the AP; ninety-eight percent of top Yahoo stories are from either AP or Reuters (Bui, 2011).

In other words, broadcast news media—even with shrinking budgets and reporters—remain the primary retail sources for news, even as social media become major distributors of news. Billions may use digital media (Facebook, WeChat, RenRen, Google, Baidu, etc.) as their *means* for receiving communication, but neither social nor digital media are replacing the commercial media production of news *content*. Commercial news media remain paramount as sources of news frames and information (Nielsen, Cornia, & Kalogeropoulos, 2016). Moreover, in the current political economy of media relations, delivering news content to most commercial media internationally, global news agencies effectively set the public news agenda by the stories they choose to produce and distribute (and those they choose to further promote with graphics and video) to commercial publishers and broadcasters (MacGregor, 2013, p. 39). In short, for international news in particular, global news agencies “serve as the primary sources of news for local and regional publications that cannot afford to maintain correspondents abroad” (Rauch, 2003, p. 87).

Softening and Constraining News Content

In our super-rich information environment, citizens report news overload, news fatigue, and partisan preferences—all of which short-circuit information, knowledge, and understanding of world events and conflicts. Legacy news media in both print and broadcasting are threatened by the loss of audiences and advertisers. With their resulting myopic conclusion that readers and viewers have little interest in international news and contextualized reporting, commercial news media have turned to entertainment, “soft news,” and news spectacles of crime and crises and other “infotainments” (Thussu, 2009), while reducing overall national and international news reporting. One Associated Press Television News (APTN) marketing manager explained that this as “a trend for lighter stories ... [commercial media clients] want ‘more light and shade’ to make it less ‘depressing’,” while Reuters editors confirm that “we are more in the entertainment business now” (MacGregor, 2013, p. 51). Consequently, with fewer reporters covering international news and less space and time devoted to international stories, most local and many national news media have turned to global news agencies (or a few elite media wire services such as *The New York Times* or media chains like Gannett in the United States or Albavision in Central America). Short dispatches and video news clips by global news agencies easily and affordably fill the limited space

left for international news in press and television around the world. Consequently, global news agencies have an increased influence on the public's access and understanding of world events. In fact, media framing by three primary global news agencies now globally influences what most citizens know and understand. The Associated Press (AP), Reuters, and Agence France Presse (AFP) dominate global news production and the content of news flow internationally. Ironically, in the midst of a burgeoning information circus, these few global news agencies are now the primary wholesale producers of news and information, even for entertainment. As the world globally expands in trade, culture, and conflict, news about that world becomes more constrained and concentrated.

Emerging Transnational Media Relations

These three dominant news agencies had already established transnational alliances by the mid-twentieth century, agreeing to zones of operation and influence among competitors and signing exchange treaties with national agencies as part of their transnational operations, "forming intricate, collaborative relations of news production across borders and regions" (Bielsa, 2008, p. 357). Driven by transnational corporate needs for fast and accurate information for trade and investment in the increasingly deregulated global markets, global news agencies developed new economic and financial services for their expanding private client base. (Reuters, in particular, generates most of its revenue from its financial media service, rather than general news.)

New client services, along with the increased horizontal integration (partnerships with other transnational media) and vertical integration (developing their own retail online businesses), these news agencies work with each other, national news agencies, and domestic commercial clients to further consolidate a global communication interconnectedness. The structure and practices of these global news agencies parallel and serve transnational capitalist collaboration and competition in commercial and consumerist terms, privileging markets and profits as well as parallel government economic and political policies (Artz, 2015). As national governments deregulate and privatize national and public resources and encourage transnational partnerships with formerly nation-based industries, public services, social welfare, and citizen rights are undermined as capitalists and their political representatives accumulate wealth by dispossession of public goods and increased wage exploitation. "Actions by governments, corporate business interests, NGOs, and the civil society

in general (demonstrations, appeals, strikes, etc.)” contribute to disruptive “reactions and discursive responses” by popular social movements (Hjarvard, 2001), while national and transnational politicians and media seek to persuade or at least divert public opinion from concerted, coordinated democratic responses. Obviously, from a hegemonic leadership perspective, the transnational capitalist class cannot leave challenges and critiques of neoliberalism and austerity to an unfettered public discourse or the vagaries of social movements and protest. Transnational capitalists and their domestic partners depend on an accepting global public opinion. Not surprisingly, the emergence of global news agencies that lead the construction of acceptable debate and policy accords with the political and social needs of the transnational capitalist elite. Despite their cultural differences, commercial media in every nation share a business ethos and interest in commodified news that underwrite and depend on the consolidation of appropriately organized and functioning global news agencies.

The contemporary dominant trio of global news agencies arrive at their dominance through different historical trajectories and processes, have different ownership structures, and fulfil slightly different but complementary functions in their news reporting. The full stories of AP, Reuters, and AFP are beyond the scope of this essay, but can be cobbled together from a variety of narratives, including from their own websites, as well as both popular and scholarly work (e.g. Associated Press, 2007; Boyd-Barrett, 1998; 2000; Read, 1999).

Similarity in Diversity: The Associated Press, Reuters, and Agence France Presse

Associated Press is the largest news agency in the world, formed in 1846 as a collaborative effort of five New York newspapers. The AP is now a transnational non-profit organization serving 1,700 newspapers and more than 5,000 broadcasters around the world. With 243 branches in more than 100 countries, including Saudi Arabia and China, AP leads a network that reaches over one billion people. The AP releases 2,000 stories every day to thousands of commercial media around the world. Half the world reads AP stories every day. AP has licensing agreements with Google, Yahoo, and other websites and is the leading news source on Facebook, with thirty-four million hits in July 2017 compared to twenty-nine million for Huffington Post (which is also an AP client). AP now supplies news content “for every platform, from podcasts to long-form explanatory journalism, with a growing emphasis on video and multimedia”

(Richhiardi, 2008, p. 36). The AP obtains part of its credibility from its non-profit, cooperative model of ownership. However, cooperation among commercial media does not override the AP's primary function as a concierge news service on behalf of private, competitive, and consolidated commercial media for corporate profit. The Associated Press only exists to serve the narrow interests of its owners and commercial clients (Boyd-Barret, 2000, p. 17). Expectedly, as news media consolidate, the interests of the concentrated entities become more pronounced in global news agency productions and the diversity of political perspectives declines sharply. News is produced as commodity, as product for sale to clients who pass along the news product to viewer-consumers as means of delivering audiences to advertisers (Smythe, 1977). In the process, news content produced by concentrated news agencies and consolidated news media becomes even more assertively ideological. In the Associated Press copy at least, there is no alternative to neoliberalism, austerity, and military intervention.

Reuters, a private for-profit news agency began in 1851 transmitting stock market quotes from London to Paris, but soon expanded to reporting economic and political news from around the world. Now, as a division of the Canadian-based Thomson media conglomerate (a fifty-three percent owner since 2008), Reuters remains the leader in world financial news and is the world's second largest news agency. Most major news media in the world subscribe to Reuters. With revenues topping \$11 billion in 2016, Reuters has forty-five thousand employees and operates in more than two hundred cities in one hundred countries, with news services in twenty languages (Reuters.com). Reuters ranks number six in digital news media, with 3.7 million Facebook followers and 17 million on Twitter. Along with AP, Reuters stories appear digitally on the internet as retransmissions of their news—often unattributed—further illustrating the centrality of global news agencies as agenda-setters for public knowledge and understanding.

The third largest global news agency, Agence France Presse, was founded in 1944 as part of the French resistance. AFP is a government-chartered public corporation that is essentially a commercial enterprise—indirectly and partially subsidized (forty percent by the French government, which is one of its primary clients). AFP is the primary news agency for the French-speaking nations, and with 150 international news bureaus provides news in English, Arabic, Portuguese, Spanish, and German. By the turn of the twentieth century, AFP operated in 125 countries, with more than two thousand journalists and technicians turning out five hundred thousand words of copy every day. *The Washington Post*

and *Los Angeles Times* are also part of the AFP network, which includes 207 US newspapers on its client list.

In short, AP, Reuters, and AFP “have realized the objectives that were established at their creation ... and become truly transnational entities, with worldwide networks for news production and circulation” (Bielsa, 2008, p. 360), confirming Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen’s (2004, p. 36) prediction of a diminished scope for national news services and media. These global news agencies continue to present “communication appropriate to the informational and relations needs of the state, capital, and civic society” (Boyd-Barrett, 1996, p. 142), but now in the interests of an emerging transnational capitalist class and its variety of national political leaders (Artz, 2015; Robinson, 2004). At their respective inceptions, AFP was openly propagandistic for French interests, Reuters was blatantly pro-British, and the AP was influenced by the US newspapers to which it belonged (MacGregor, 2013, p. 39). Today, however, this triumvirate of global news agencies do not singularly present American, British, or French points of view, but instead provide news attuned to the shared geopolitical interests of a global elite of transnational capitalists (in all their national diversity). Recent and ongoing consolidations of news agencies include Bloomberg partnering with AFP, the AP with CBS and Yahoo!, and Reuters with Dow Jones. Reuters and APTN (the AP Television Network) are now also the premier world television producers and wholesalers of news video, producing more than one hundred thousand news videos per year. The national news agencies that remain are essentially “component parts of a global news system” with the interdependent sharing of sources, news exchanges, and alliances that sell services to new media clients with or on behalf of the three global agencies (Boyd-Barrett, 2000, p. 6). Each of the three also has agreements with multiple internet partners and clients among a diversity of nations across Europe, Asia, and the Western Hemisphere. While global news continues to misrepresent the developing world and the interests of the working majority (as charged by the UN’s McBride Commission in the 1980s), they do so now as part of a shared neoliberal ethos and news paradigm for transnational market globalization—not as advocates for a particular nation state or its domestic corporate interests.

From Western Dominance to Transnational Capitalist Relations

The appearance of a new political economy of transnational news media also modifies the structures and conditions of production that

reflected cultural imperialism and global homogenization. The perceived contraflow push back from the global South also no longer obtains merit, given that “there is little evidence of substantial return flow” (Xie & Boyd-Barrett, 2015), and more importantly leading media in every nation now have partnerships or mergers with media from other nations, including those historically identified with the global North. In the most pragmatic way, the “Western” influence per se is no more. Rather, nationally-interlocked global capitalism leads the organization of world trade, culture, and politics. Despite the rise of nationalist populism and the ongoing default essentializing description of industries or interests as Chinese, British, American, Indian, or other attending nationalities, today the more manifest identity clearly must be the transnational capitalist classes which own, control, and direct media production. In all cases, transnational media provide the requisite “glocalization” with cultural hybridity and diversity apropos and necessary for attracting consuming audiences—obscuring the global capitalist function of this new transnational media system and even confusing some academic researchers.

Global news agencies are vital cogs in the transnational media regime because they construct and distribute news with apparent legitimacy for newsrooms around the world. “Clients who take [global news] agency products edit them and give a local national or cultural slant, adding adjectives, or further comment and information, and relating the news to the domestic audiences with cues they will recognize ... [but] merely changing a lead angle or styling news in a specific way does not mean a story’s core messages are altered, nor that the selection of what is regarded as news is really being changed” (MacGregor, 2013, p. 44). The sources, themes, and frames constructed by the global news agencies remain in localized re-presentations. Pro-market, pro-interventionism, and tolerance for austerity and corporate dominance “all [float] along on the neutral raft of accuracy, factual detail, and professional ethics. Bland and homogenous perhaps, but still ideologically distinctive ... stories challenging the ideological positions of the dominant political players on the world scene” are seldom released (Patterson, 2006).

The validity of journalism rests in part on the structure of objectivity, which accords with the economic and political power, goals, and ideological presumptions about who and what news is. Global news agencies gather stories everywhere and sell them everywhere to anyone: that is their business model. Yet, news as a saleable commodity is primarily purchased by commercial media clients, not the public, nor even public media. Thus, overall, global news agencies and their commercial clients “relay and reinforce existing global interests ... they put corporate