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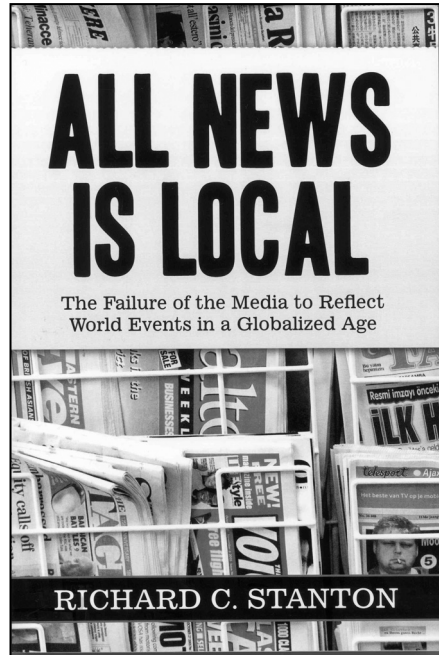
Seeking the wider public, not ‘power triangle’

All News is Local: The Failure of the Media to Reflect World Events in a Globalized Age, by Richard C. Stanton. Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland, 2007, 221 pp. ISBN 13:978-0-7864-3069-7

RICHARD C. STANTON'S new work is a reminder that brevity can be a virtue in academic writing. Stanton's concise book contends that a centuries-old Western approach to news which plants all news in the local prevents the Western press from fully reporting world issues. He organises his discussion with supporting analysis from the news roles of world and regional institutions such as ASEAN and the UN as well as NGOs.

Stanton makes his case based on a thorough understanding of the role of the journalist in ‘making news’ for all forms of news media.

His achievement in meshing Habermas' theory with the workaday



life of the editor and journalist is impressive. The public sphere and its ostensibly democratic media is well discussed and then advanced into the 21st century complete with a prescription for change to face the challenges of globalised news issues.

All News Is Local reminds us of the contribution of original Australian scholarship to global debates in media study (Catharine Lumby's *Gotcha: News in a tabloid world* comes to mind). Perhaps distance and its accompanying worldview distinguishes an original academic culture separate (but linked) from the US and the UK. Certainly Stanton's knowledge

of Asian news issues in the Western media is impressive and understandable given Australia's geographical place.

His Taxonomies of Interest are a case in point. He begins by defining Western with free news media which 'allow debate and opinion to exist within the public sphere' (pp. 45-6).

He argues for a paradigm shift in the role of the news media to complete a 300-year-old cycle of modernity which will end in the first third of this century. As conditions change so must our media's thought and action. Stanton suggests we will look to Asia for this new paradigm and points to Al Jazeera as a staging post along the way.

The position of newspapers like *The Economist*, committed to liberty and free trade, epitomises the conundrum of localised and ideological media (however much they may protest their 'fairness and balance') which cannot deliver us what we as readers, viewers and citizens need. We need, Stanton writes, more investigative reporting (inductive reasoning) and less speculation about outcomes (deduction).

Stanton observes that the Western news media paradigm has favoured elites for nearly 300 years and does not operate in the interests of ordinary citizens. He notes that journalists try

to find a place among elite professions such as the law. They seek regularised reporting practices which favours their own status as well as that of their elite consumers. The media form part of his 'power triangle' of media, corporations and government who support and develop each other's interests.

Stanton allows himself a wide ranging brief to discuss the 19th century origins of corporate social responsibility while remaining on his theme of the changing role of news media. He notes the paradoxical situation of Western news media who are tasked with the democratic role of exposing corporate malfeasance but owned by corporations whose quest is profits.

Stanton takes the view that terrorism in the 21st century has forced media and governments to find secure ports in the storm to avoid continued globalisation. He argues that local FTA's are 'backup positions' to 'avoid becoming the focus of terrorist action' (p. 87).

He uses Habermas to link the 18th century to the 21st summarising his view by saying that news media have gone from core information providers to 'show-time warm-up clowns' (p. 89).

So where does all this leave the non-elite viewer/reader/consumer of

news? And what role in news will NGOs and world institutions such as the WHO and the UN serve?

There appears to be too many contradictions and too much inertia after 300 years to bring the change Stanton expects and wants to see.

Yet he has set a timetable of the first third of this century to do so. Radical change comes quickly to those who haven't identified trends early.

Imagining news is a favourite term of Stanton's and he wants to see a new objectivity takes its place in the Western news media. 'Investigating and reporting truth' as opposed to 'imagined truths' is at the core of his stance (p.190). We expect the analysis and interpretation the news media give us and as citizens we would resent a situation in which all news came from corporate websites of whatever persuasion.

Stanton asserts there must be a 'new sphere where publics are competent and able to differentiate opinion and truth and to recognise the value in institutional discourse at a global level' (p. 195). This involves the wider public in a conversation rather than the public relations and media manipulation of the present model which relies on the 'power triangle' for its place in the socio-political structure.

We need narrative and conversation but the Western news media do not aid our understanding because of its reliance on the old paradigm of localising our news. Web-based news, blogging and social network applications are forcing change. So is the catastrophic decline in advertising revenue in the current recession. Perhaps Stanton's new direction is being hurried along in unexpected ways.

Although I found his thesis interesting and many of the arguments compelling I could not help feeling continued references to *The Economist* newspaper and some divergences into theory were extraneous. The book sometimes read like a valuable paper which had been expanded unnecessarily. However that may just be nitpicking and overall the book is valuable for students of media and government.

Reference

Lumby, C. (1999). *Gotcha: Life in a tabloid world*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin.