

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

ULF HANNERZ, *Foreign News: Exploring the World of Foreign Correspondents*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. xiii + 273 p.

Hannerz shows how reporters and the constructive mechanisms of the media represent and frame far-off lands, which end up in our First World television sets, car stereos, and beloved newspapers. It is a far-reaching and fascinating, yet troubled, text. The questions that *Foreign News* raises, intentionally or not, make it worthy of consideration.

Across the globe Hannerz tracks reporters to find out their practices, career trajectories, and relationships. He takes us through the big stories—South African apartheid, the Kobe earthquake, the ongoing tragedy of Israel and Palestine—to show how a particular region’s narrative thread emerges, and the ways cost, the news cycle, and geographic distance can determine how these story lines develop within a complex interplay of forces. The strengths of *Foreign News* are founded upon Hannerz’s exposition of how these internal factors shape and color the product. The ‘village’ of which his study is centered is a network of like-minded individuals scattered across the globe. Successful in portraying this community, which, despite competitiveness and dispersal, still serves as his ‘global tribe,’ Hannerz provides a case for ethnographic work that cannot be confined to a single site. Of George Marcus’ vision of an ethnography that ‘follows the thing’ (*Ethnography Through Thick and Thin*, 1998) rather than a spatially limited group, *Foreign News* is a good text that could inform the likes of Appadurai and Clifford.

But it is on this terrain where *News* loses its footing. As a flow of quotes and quick stories, the narrative flits widely, from respondent to respondent, taking on the form of hyperactive news programs themselves. By ‘following the thing’ the text seems to float along the airwaves, unmoored. To these ends, *News* avoids presenting the lifeworld of news correspondents. After reading about bureaus, I was, for example, still wondering what one looked like. Early on he makes the distinction between ‘off site’ and ‘on site’ interviews (p.7)—the former in places like L.A. the latter in places like South Africa. But is being in the country the same as being ‘on site?’ Hannerz will mention sipping tea in Jerusalem but never how he carried a notebook into the field. Is the process of conducting interviews enough to call such an endeavor ‘ethnography?’ As he states in his essay “Being There ¼ And There ¼ And There!” Hannerz was “clearly not trying to study the ‘entire culture and social life’ of these ¼ cities” (2003: 208). But surely an ethnography should involve more fieldwork

than sitting in on a newspaper staff meeting and making a single reporting trip to the West Bank (p. 211). Should a good-natured attempt at, or inclination toward, fieldwork make a project ethnographic ipso facto? He too often tells rather than shows, and if there were particular difficulties that led him to abandon ethnographic methods, the project could have used a description of such decisions.

On establishing ethnographic authority, some of the best ethnographic work today (i.e., Duneier and Wacquant) develops characters whom the reader can follow throughout the text to provide color, verity and a narrative thread. In *News* there are no such protagonists for more than a few pages, though there are more than a few contenders who could fit the bill. Marjorie Miller from the *Los Angeles Times*, Chris McGreal from the *Guardian*, and Göran Leijonhufvud from Sweden's *Dagens Nyheter* appear at the beginning of the first chapter but fall back into a cacophony. A sustained description would have provided a greater picture: their "vicarious experience," a goal he himself offers (p.231). If 'multi-sited ethnography' is to be pursued, it ought not be at such a cost.

Stating that he wanted to study 'mainstream' media (p.5), Hannerz, in fact, selects 'Western' media, offering little discussion of the relationship between Western and Eastern media landscapes, and the roles that might arise from these positionalities. To view the new film documentary *Control Room*, it became obvious that *Foreign News* could have benefited greatly from a comparative analysis of how Western media portray the East and vice versa. If not East-West, why not a comparison between the different news agencies, or different media, on a single event? Would they highlight the same issues? Does the *Los Angeles Times* report on a suicide differently than the *Dagens Nyheter*? There is little to answer such interesting questions.

While there are many absences in Hannerz's text, he still bridges other gaps. The notion that we ought to be able to 'study sideways,' is one of its greatest contributions: *Foreign News* proposes that, instead of 'studying up' or 'studying down,' ethnographers can also attempt to study towards social groups that participate in practices similar to their own. In the concluding chapter, Hannerz states that in our own work, we must "engage with a craft that is in some ways parallel to [our] own" (p.3). But, this too is problematic, and returns to the issue of power. To 'study sideways' here—correspondent for ethnographer—is to reproduce a unidirectional power that has been heavily criticized in anthropology: Can these locals speak? What is their voice in the global media? What can we learn from them? He writes as if Spivak and Said never did; and through this lens, he reinforces the West's domination over the East. It is an unfortunate epiphenomenon of a noble concept.

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