the notion that specifically capitalist market compulsion could not have left unscathed the basic conditions of aristocratic dominance, peasant subordination and politically-upheld commerce that underlay colonial society until Confederation must be seriously reconsidered.

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MediaThink

Megan Dombrowski

Following in the tradition of George Orwell and Noam Chomsky, James Winter's *MediaThink* exposes the substantive lack of critical analysis inherent in the production of corporate news and media content. This lacuna is more than just a quantitative insufficiency of analysis that many contemporary media critics identify. According to Winter, there is a "discernable and consistent framework of bias" which lies behind the construction of news content and the direction in which it tries to lead the public.[277] Implicated in this construction are media owners, managers and reporters, all of whom interpret and represent the world through a process which Winter terms "MediaThink".

Winter's concept of MediaThink, which stems from George Orwell's "orthodoxy" and Antonio Gramsci's "common sense", refers to the way in which reporters uphold an orthodox vision of the world by failing to challenge or provide diverse perspectives to the mainstream, corporate version of issues and events.[278] According to Winter, reporters adhere to orthodoxy by approaching issues through a process of self-censorship and a "black and white" simplification of issues.[279] They attack those who challenge an orthodox interpretation and use a number of other tactics – such as reliance on favourite spokespersons, distortion of academic research, the neglect of context, and faulty polling – to advance their distinct and deliberate agenda.

To illustrate the ways in which corporate media orthodoxy functions and affects the public's understanding of events, Winter looks at case studies from Canada's major newspapers and television news shows. It is at this point, after an initial introductory chapter, that Winter starts to provide extensive evidence to support his fairly general point. In the following chapters he demonstrates how the media's "framework of bias" operates by looking at the media's coverage of the wars in East Timor and Kosovo. Unlike many mainstream media critics, Winter extends his analysis beyond the coverage of specific political events toward an investigation of systemic issues like racism and anti-feminism, to which he devotes three chapters. The reason behind the order of the chapters is not obvious. The first chapter, which covers the Indonesian war, is followed by one on representations of feminism in the media, and then by a third chapter on the coverage of the Kosovo war. The fourth chapter moves back to an examination of feminism and the fifth discusses immigration and racism issues in media coverage. His concluding thoughts, rather than being presented in a concluding chapter (as there isn't one) are dispersed throughout his various case studies. As such, the book at time comes across as more of a compilation of essays than a tightly constructed work building upon a main thesis.

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[277] James Winter, *MediaThink* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2002), xxviii.
[278] *Ibid*, xxviii.
[279] *Ibid*, xxv.

In his first chapter, Winter demonstrates how the mainstream news media in Canada were responsible for the inadequate coverage of the massacres and violence that swept East Timor at the time it was gaining independence. The lack of attention that was given to the situation in East Timor, the manner in which it was covered, and the way that the news followed official government policy, Winter argues, had a direct impact on the creation of public opinion. This in turn led to a passive response to the tragic events that were both predicted and *preventable*. The necessity to maintain "security" in Indonesia to meet the aims of foreign investors and managers, claims Winter, were the priority of Western governments. The Canadian news media, like their American counterparts, supported the government position that it was unable, rather than unwilling, to intervene and continued to justify this position even after the attacks took place.

Winter contrasts this coverage to mainstream news reporting leading up to the Kosovo war, which invariably portrayed the bombing of Serbia as a humanitarian mission. Few reporters questioned the motives of the NATO governments – which, according to Winter, were the "privatization and third worldization of Yugoslavia" – but rather echoed government rhetoric and rallied public opinion toward support for the war.[280] The media examined neither the blatant illegality of the bombing nor the true and complex nature of the Kosovo Liberation Army. They misrepresented Serbia's position on peace talks, portrayed people and events in "stark terms of good and evil," and were implicated in presenting fabricated stories that were integral in justifying the war and leading public opinion toward support for it.[281]

The coverage of these events, Winter argues, shows how the media follow the orthodoxy of the day – that which serves the political and corporate elite. This tendency is also apparent, he claims, when one looks at racism and anti-feminism in the media. One important tactic that the media uses in its war against feminism, according to Winter, is invoking the authority of a favourite spokesperson. Senator Anne Cools and journalists Margaret Wente and Donna Laframboise are but a few of the anti-feminists who "have taken the direct, or indirect support of the corporate patriarchy, in return for furthering its cause of keeping women in their place."[282] Such spokespersons, he argues, pose as "rational" women who want what is best for everyone, in contrast to feminists who are irrational, hysterical, extremist and anti-men. The distortion of academic research, he argues, is another favourite tactic used against feminists. *The Windsor Star* misrepresented the results of one academic paper to blame feminism for the rise in violence among girls, because it freed their "aggressive" nature, while another article in *The National Post* did the same, instead blaming feminism for creating the allegedly "angriest group" in society – divorced women.[283] The authors of both research papers were shocked by the distorted conclusions drawn from their work.

Racism in the media, writes Winter, is similarly reflected in the way issues and events are covered. For instance, when a crime is committed by a black individual it is presented as a reflection on the black community as a whole, unlike crimes committed by whites which are portrayed as random and individual acts. In addition, as a general rule, claims Winter, non-white victims are consistently treated as less important than white victims. To illustrate, Winter reflects on two incidents which occurred in the same week in 1999. In one case 19 South African (black) gold miners were killed in an accident at an Anglogold mine. The event received a 104-word story in the business brief section of *The National Post*. The following day *The Post* ran a 750-word front page story on how 18 (white) tourists had been killed during an extreme sport adventure in Australia. By the end of the week the tourist incident had received a total of 2500 words, compared to the 104 words given to the South African miners.

The strength of Winter's *MediaThink* is the evidence of media-distortion that it provides, rather than an analysis of why this distortion takes place. Aside from some general commentary, little attention is given to the specifics of who is driving these agendas and why they are doing so. Monopoly, ownership and the relationships among Canada's corporate and political elite, for example, are as neglected by Winter as the economic system that creates these conditions. Rather than developing new theoretical contributions to aid further media-analysis, Winter builds on premises explored by such media critics such as Noam Chomsky and Michael Parenti. From such critics he takes the notion that specific media representations are the result of specific interests. However, his own book lacks further elaboration on the origins of those interests. He illustrates media-distortions through the political and economic motives that lie behind them, yet does not then use his research to explore further the systemic causes of these political and economic motives. Winter's case studies show the consistency of media distortion but the motives behind those distortions are left too much in isolation from each other. Therefore, the reader is left without a particularly strong understanding of what he actually sees to be the "framework" in the "framework of bias" he talks about. Nonetheless, one is left quite certain by the strength and detail of his research that such a framework exists. Winter's work is very valuable for its case studies and its investigation of particular tactics used by the media in misrepresentation.

Democracy in Latin America

Shana Shubs

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[280] *Ibid*, 95.

[281] *Ibid*, 98.

[282] *Ibid*, 44.

[283] *Ibid*, 57.