

<https://helda.helsinki.fi>

The Media, European Integration and the Rise of Euro-journalism, 1950s 1970s, Martin Herzer (2019)

Ojala, Markus

2020-06-01

Ojala, M 2020, 'The Media, European Integration and the Rise of Euro-journalism, 1950s 1970s, Martin Herzer (2019). [Book review]', *International journal of cultural politics*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 260-263. https://doi.org/10.1386/macp_00028_5

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/335299>

https://doi.org/10.1386/macp_00028_5

unspecified

submittedVersion

Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository.

This is an electronic reprint of the original article.

This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Please cite the original version.

The final version of this book review was published in the *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics*, 16(2): 260–263. https://doi.org/10.1386/macp_00028_5

Book review

The Media, European Integration and the Rise of Euro-journalism, 1950s–1970s, Martin Herzer (2019), 1st ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 357 pp.

Reviewed by Markus Ojala, University of Helsinki

Contact: Faculty of Social Sciences, P.O. Box 54, 00014 University of Helsinki, Finland, markus.ojala@helsinki.fi, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7784-8179>

In a welcome contribution to the study of the mediated history of European integration, historian Martin Herzer traces news media reporting of the European Communities (EC) from the 1950s to the 1970s. The core purpose of the study is to chronicle the establishment of ‘Euro-journalism’ as a type of advocacy journalism that developed and strengthened during this period in the Western European press. This Euro-journalism, according to Herzer, was not only supportive of the European integration in the abstract but also backed its particular political and institutional forms that formed around the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the European Economic Community (EEC) and Euratom. In this way, Euro-journalism significantly contributed to the European integration precisely as a process led by the European Communities.

Euro-journalism was pioneered by a select group of journalists in the editorial departments of major Western European newspapers and international news agencies, often working as their Brussels correspondents. In chronologically organized chapters, the book documents the evolution of the news coverage of European Communities EC and describes the personal backgrounds and careers of some of the most influential ‘Euro-journalists’. It also offers examples of how they networked with each other in professional associations as well as with the pro-European elite circles in politics, administration, business, academia and the civil society. As the basis of this detailed account, Herzer relies on an impressive array of archival sources and news materials from the FRG West Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom, not to mention interviews, biographies and earlier research on the European integration history and journalism. There really is a lot to condense into a single volume.

Having become deeply embedded in pro-European elite networks, Euro-journalists internalized their integrationist narratives and learned to effectively promote the coverage of the EC in their own news organizations. As a sign of their success, Herzer argues that by the end of the 1970s, the Euro-journalistic frame dominated the coverage of the EC in Western Europe. That entailed the reproduction of what he labels as the ‘Euro-narrative’, referring to the portrayal of the EC ‘as the only legitimate incarnation of European integration and of Europe’ (3). Integration through the ECSC, EEC and Euratom was seen as a precondition for peace and prosperity and would ensure Europe’s continued relevance in the international stage. The Euro-narrative also presented European integration as a linear and inexorable

process that nevertheless faced frequent threats and crises in the form of political setbacks throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

An example from Reuters' archival records – only one among numerous others in a book rich in historical detail – illustrates the discursive power of the Euro-narrative. Herzer accounts that, in 1972, the news agency's production editor critically noted that its own reporters had begun to use phrases, such as 'Britain's relationship with Europe' or 'people being pro- or anti-Europe', in their reporting when they in fact alluded to the European Common Market (215). For Herzer, this increasingly habitual equation of Europe with the EC institutions indicates the growing dominance of the Euro-narrative in the Western European press throughout the 1970s. Yet the editorial complaint also demonstrated that the 'crusading Euro-journalism' occasionally collided with the self-conception of news organizations as suppliers of objective information.

Herzer's analysis of the early European Union (EU) journalism makes a valuable contribution to the sociological and historical study of European integration. It convincingly demonstrates how the integration process became discursively constructed as a linear narrative and how the EC institutions gained a symbolic centrality in this narrative. As another major strength, the book sets the integration and its journalistic coverage in a broader context of international relations and economic history, including such developments as decolonization, the Cold War and the shift from a Keynesian to a neo-liberal economic policy paradigm. It also provides a welcome counter-narrative to the mainstream of EU scholarship and public commentary that tends to regard the news media as an impediment to European integration. As a rebuttal to the common critiques that news reporting foments anti-EU sentiments, reinforces the national perspective to EU issues and pays little attention to what goes on in Brussels, the book traces the evolution of a consistent pro-EU narrative in Western European quality journalism.

In terms of journalism studies, the study emphasizes the function of mainstream news media as a facilitator of the inter-elite communication on both national and international levels. From this perspective, journalism appears as a mediator between and an instrument for decision-makers. They use journalists and the news media to monitor each others' actions and opinions, to communicate both explicit and hidden messages to foreign governments and to influence the public opinion. Herzer argues that the Western European elites were highly convinced of the media's power to shape citizen opinion and to indirectly influence the decisions of governments. The media's perceived importance prompted them not only to establish confidential relationships with journalists but also to intervene in media reporting by complaining about unfavourable coverage.

Herzer's findings about journalists being deeply embedded in elite circles, as well as news reporting reflecting the extent of disagreement and consensus among the elites, are hardly ground-breaking in the critical traditions of political communication and media studies. In landmark studies from Lippmann's ([1922] 1965) analyses of journalism to the studies of US war reporting by Hallin (1986) and Herman and Chomsky (1988) – not to mention the British tradition of studying the news as an ideological discourse (e.g. Hall 1978), it has been well established that the news media tend to align with the government or the broader elite opinion, and particularly so on matters of foreign policy. Ignoring this critical research tradition limits the book's contribution to the research on journalism and political communication. Yet, Herzer in some ways also goes against the grain of the critical tradition,

which tends to view journalism as largely determined by greater economic and political structures, granting relatively little individual agency to journalists. Instead, Herzer is interested in journalists' own political agency as advocates of societal and political causes. This allows him to challenge the historical account of journalism, destabilizing its conventional narrative of objective reporting as a rising professional ideal and practice in post-war Western European news media: 'The ideal of objective reporting certainly mattered to journalists, but so did the desire to influence politics and society', Herzer claims (68). Indeed, one of the book's significant contributions lies in demonstrating how journalists, integrating into elite circles, adopted the identity and role of social influencers and opinion leaders.

Another key insight yielded by Herzer's detailed analysis is the tension he constructs between national perspectives and the cosmopolitan approach within Euro-journalism. Those Euro-journalists who focused on the economic aspects of European integration tended to be strongly embedded within their national contexts and framed their reporting from a national point of view. Moreover, their views of European economic governance – its nature and goals – were shaped by their own national economic policy traditions and often in direct contradiction with their colleagues in other member states. In contrast, the cosmopolitan Euro-journalists, often working for international news agencies, sought to serve publics in multiple countries. That required them to integrate various perspectives into their reporting rather than adopting the view of a single country. In this way, Herzer illustrates how the national and European exist in a constant tension in EU journalism and how this tension plays out in journalistic practices that are heavily affected by the organizational environment in which journalists work.

As a contribution primarily to the history of European integration, the book is relatively light on theoretical work. For instance, Herzer refrains from engaging more deeply with the field of news and journalism studies, which understand news reporting as an outcome of a complex process shaped by various intertwining factors, including organizational goals, professional routines, sources, stakeholders and societal ideologies, as well as the status, organizational position and personal traits of individual reporters. Therefore, even as the study provides rich descriptions of news reporting and journalists' interactions with their sources and organizations, it largely fails to discuss these findings in light of any theoretical framework concerning the newsmaking process.

More crucially, Herzer repeats certain core claims throughout the book about 'Western European journalism' being elitist and politically motivated but does little to reflect on the specificity of his objects of study – a few elite journalists specializing in EC reporting. Yet it is well established in the literature on journalism that leading columnists, foreign correspondents and journalists specializing in certain technically difficult areas tend to have much more freedom than general news reporters in selecting their topics and expressing their views. Taking into consideration the very different statutes and roles of reporters, one could easily explain why such practices as objective news reporting and advocacy journalism can live side-by-side in a given media outlet, never mind the entire media system. Unfortunately, one finds no real discussion in the book about the obvious problems involved in making general inferences about the news journalism in the studied countries based on its highly selective material, rendering any sweeping claims about post-war 'Western European journalism' rather unconvincing.

Being motivated by the need to explore how the pro-EU narrative has been historically constructed, the book feels at times strangely uncritical about that story. When detailing how the media covered the EU Council and European Parliamentary elections towards the end of the 1970s, Herzer argues that this period saw the transformation of the EC into ‘the democratic supranational polity that we know today’ (253). It is unclear whether this is meant as a reference to the EC itself or its media portrayal, but in either case, the claim appears rather dismissive of the limits to the capacity of elite institutions to dominate public narratives. In this regard, critical accounts of European integration, such as the one by Schulz-Forberg and Stråth (2010), are more rewarding as they deconstruct the Euro-narrative’s ideological nature.

It is only at the very end of the book that Herzer turns a truly critical eye on the period under study. Pointing out that the current Euroscepticism has deep historical roots in all the studies countries, the final chapter makes the critical case that, because of its own ideological commitments, Euro-journalism failed to give a voice to this criticism. In addition, Herzer suggests that the capacity of elite journalism to generate a mass opinion in favour of the EU has always been limited. Instead of mainstreaming pro-EU attitudes, Euro-journalism seems to have widened the rift between the elite discourse and citizen opinion. In these final pages, then, the book can be read as a powerful media critique. Not only has the news media failed to facilitate a pluralist debate on European integration, it has also demonstrated the limits of the European identity-building project. Such critical remarks serve well to close out the book. One only wonders how it would have turned out had Herzer adopted this perspective from the very beginning.

References

Hall, S. (1978), *Policing the Crisis*, London: Macmillan.

Hallin, D. C. (1986), *The ‘Uncensored War’*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Herman, E. S. and Chomsky, N. (1988), *Manufacturing Consent*, New York: Pantheon.

Lippmann, W. ([1922] 1965), *Public Opinion*, New York: Free Press.

Schulz-Forberg, H. and Stråth, B. (2010), *The Political History of European Integration*, Abingdon: Routledge.