
Journalistic field wars: defending and attacking the national narrative in a diversifying journalistic field

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Robert L Handley

University of Denver, USA

Lou Rutigliano

DePaul University, USA

Abstract

Whereas others have noticed a strengthening of journalistic–state relations due to pressures caused by new media, this analysis reveals an ideological strengthening of the state–journalistic partnership. This article uses a deep reading of journalistic coverage of the WikiLeaks-released cables to examine the influence of field position upon newswork and narratives from diverse sources. Despite the hope that new technologies will enable new journalistic forms, establishment journalism continues its allegiance to traditional practices that are a consequence and cause of the national narrative. Because of competition within the journalistic field made possible by changing political economies, one reaction of dominant news organizations is to become more committed to the national narrative to maintain their position of strength within the field.

Keywords

extra-nationalism, field theory, globalization, journalism, nationalism, WikiLeaks

Among critical theorists it has become common knowledge that U.S. commercial news media propagandize on behalf of U.S. foreign policy ventures, internalizing the premises of U.S. power (Hallin, 1986), accepting war advocates' frames (Reese and Buckalew, 1995), going along with press restrictions (Kumar, 2006), and suppressing information

Corresponding author:

Robert Handley, University of Denver, 2490 Gaylord Street, Denver Co 80208, USA.

Email: robert.handley@du.edu

that might disrupt imperial objectives (Herman and Chomsky, 2002). Journalists don ‘a pair of domestic glasses’ to show common cause with ‘our’ conflicts (Nossek, 2004: 349), and adopt officially preferred terminologies even when not relying on foreign policymakers to interpret geopolitical issues (Handley and Ismail, 2010). Propaganda is the result of the ‘filtering’ of news (Herman and Chomsky, 2002), the routinization of press–institutional relations (Reese, 2004), and the indexing norm (Bennett, 1990; Zaller and Chiu, 1996), but also of cultural values and national moods (Ravi, 2005), and a deep sense of national patriotism (Jensen, 2003). In short, there is a well-documented consensus among American news organizations that ‘we are good’ and ‘our’ foreign policy ventures, while tainted by mistakes, are rooted in a principled Jeffersonian ‘empire of liberty’. We refer to this belief and the journalistic practices associated with it as the ‘national narrative’.

While there are alternative ways to interpret U.S. actions, these interpretations are typically made inaccessible, marginalized, or ridiculed by the U.S. press. Yet the emergence of a globally interconnected and ideologically diverse media ecology may help improve access to alternative interpretations, particularly as transnational news organizations emerge that abandon a national lens for a ‘global outlook’ (Berglez, 2008; Reese, 2008) and as extra-national news organizations (e.g. WikiLeaks) emerge that are unbound from the constraints of covering ‘our’ news properly. This article uses Bourdieu’s concept of the field to analyze this global media ecology and global media system as it is mediated by U.S. *forms of journalism*. As the internet and cable television system find commercial support for narratives that more directly challenge U.S. foreign policy ventures, the potential availability of alternative interpretations increases as nationally based news organizations rely on information provided by trans- and extra-national news organizations, and as these latter organizations benefit from an increased audience. We propose that as the journalistic field expands globally and diversifies within national boundaries, the national narrative’s dominance within the journalistic field erodes; but those news organizations most tied to the nation-state, due to political economic factors, professional inertia, and preservation of their position of strength within the field, maintain their allegiance to the state and become even more committed to the national narrative.

Bourdieu (1983) used the field concept to consider how structures of power can be reproduced, despite the absence of direct control by institutions, and to consider how change within a system can occur. Agents within a field struggle to control the field by competing for various forms of capital, amid persistent hierarchies and inequalities. Agents’ position in the field is a product of their habitus and the forms of capital they possess, and their position in the field also affects the degree to which it is in their interest to support or subvert the current structure of the field (Bourdieu, 1986). Here, we employ a deep reading of journalistic coverage and incorporation of the November 2010 WikiLeaks-released cables by the established broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, NBC), irreverent media programming owned by media conglomerates (*The Daily Show*), and media that are independent of corporate ownership (*Salon* and *Democracy Now!*) as a vehicle to examine the influence of field position upon newswork from diverse sources and the narratives and counter-narratives they produce. Our goal is to understand the extent to which the national narrative is receding in these different layers – establishment and alternative, U.S.-based, non-U.S.-based, non-state-based, and hybrid variations of

these and more – currently participating within the journalistic field. We argue that an understanding of this requires not only the study of global news flows but also of the diversifying national media as they mediate global contra-flows. That is, we are using journalistic coverage of and partnership with WikiLeaks as a case study to test the possibility that the emerging global journalistic field can either render the national narrative more vulnerable or solidify it among competing journalistic organizations, and to assess the extent to which new entrants to the field, characterized by some as having radically democratic potential, are merging with or diverging from the national narrative. Our findings suggest a tightening of journalistic–state relationships among traditional journalistic outlets as these organizations mark themselves off as ‘responsible’ national community members vis-à-vis emergent journalistic forms.

Theoretical framework

Critical theorists have tended to focus their explanations for journalistic propaganda campaigns on routinized state–institutional relations, ownership, ideology, and normalized journalistic practices in which individual reporters do not matter. With the emergence of Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory, however, some recommend that we turn toward a ‘more systematic attempt to incorporate empirical data on individual journalists, newsbeats, and media organizations into progressively larger systems of power’ (Benson and Neveu, 2005: 11). Field theorists connect the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of analysis; and while these units of analysis are not new (see Shoemaker and Reese, 1996), what is new is the ‘call for exploring how various (previously explored) variables interact with each other’ (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009: 119). The new unit of analysis becomes ‘the entire universe of journalists and media organizations acting and reacting in relation to one another’ (Benson and Neveu, 2005: 11).

In Bourdieu’s model, fields are spaces where individuals and groups with different levels of power compete to acquire and control different forms of capital within the field. As such, struggle and dynamism are central characteristics of fields, as those who have positions of power vie with those trying to gain power. Such struggle is central to understanding globalization’s influence upon theoretical models of political economy. In the political sphere, macro analysis typically considers inter- and intra-state relationships, but with globalization and ‘liquid modernity,’ non-state actors like the global pro-democracy movement are increasingly relevant. Indeed, the extra-national organization WikiLeaks was credited by the *New York Times*’s Bill Keller for igniting the spark that lit the frustrations of people in the Middle East and North Africa (The impact of Assange and WikiLeaks, 2011). At the global communicative level, there are concerns about the westernization or Americanization of global communication flows (for a review see Cottle, 2009) but also evidence of contra-flow (Thussu, 2007). WikiLeaks is emblematic of this dynamic. The debate about globalizing communication flows has recognized ‘unparalleled opportunities for obtaining diverse information and expressing contrary political opinions’ amid ongoing worries about the increased capacity of the state to manage the citizen (Walsh and Barbara, 2006: 197).

With globalization has come what Reese (2008: 242) terms ‘a system of newsgathering, editing and distribution not based on national or regional boundaries – where it is not

expected that shared national or community citizenship is the common reference uniting newsmakers, journalists, and audience.’ Globalization ‘deterritorializes’ the news but simultaneously makes possible the solidification of smaller cultural, political, or diasporic communities (Reese et al., 2007). This may be true, but to fully understand globalization’s impact on communicative practices one must also understand media systems and practices as they exist within and are bounded by the nation. News coming from transnational organizations is said to suffer from ‘domestication’ into a nation’s dominant ideologies, which acts as a ‘countervailing force to the pull of globalization’ (Gurevitch et al., 1991: 207). Despite the hope that new media technologies will democratize journalism, professional pressures lead journalists to *increasingly* rely on the same old sources, resulting in the same old interpretations and stories being offered (Fenton, 2010).

It is not enough to understand contra-flows from the global South to the North as information. Nor is it enough to study the globalization of news practices. We must also understand the global flow of stories told – and how media systems and journalistic practices (both global and national) craft and mediate competing stories, especially as those journalistic practices change within the journalistic field. If we are to understand the flow of stories and the competition between hegemonic and oppositional narratives across the globe when trans- and extra-national news services emerge, we need to connect the picture provided by theories of globalization to the mediating effects of nations’ media systems and intra-state dominant and subaltern news practices.

It is important to situate the journalistic field within the larger field of power in this way. As Bourdieu’s analysis of cultural works makes clear, work itself is not explained by focusing on the text or social structure alone, but by the structure of the field that produces the work (a structure that is itself the product of the interactions of the field’s participants) and by broader political economic shifts that might alter the sub-field’s position within the field of power. Note how global social and economic forces operating at a level beyond the journalistic field alone create changes within the journalistic field that open up spaces for contra-flows. Contra-flow should not be understood as information flows only, without any regard to the particular values that organize information into meaningful forms, but should be understood as counter-hegemonic (Georgiou and Silverstone, 2007) and sufficiently oppositional when the host nation comes to ‘appreciate’ it (Sakr, 2007). Arab news networks have made oppositional interpretations more available to western audiences, but western news media have hegemonically managed contra-flow by framing Arab networks as untrustworthy, irrational, immoral, and unethical (Wessler and Adolphsen, 2008). These mediating effects by the establishment national news media limit the impact of contra-flows and reinterpret the oppositional for use by the nation, protecting the national narrative. The so-called CNN effect has not been sufficiently supported, calling into question its media-centric position and challenge to the indexing hypothesis, which emphasizes the primary role that elites play in establishing mediated discourses (e.g. Gilboa, 2005). Establishment American journalists have long operated within appropriate ‘spheres’ of political contestation and consensus (Hallin, 1986), reporting from within a narrow political spectrum (Patterson, 1998).

Despite these norms and the ‘weak autonomy’ they provide establishment journalists, journalists sometimes demonstrate a ‘critical autonomy’ (Handley, 2009) and have been shown to reconsider the utility of dominant narratives (Handley, 2008). With

economic changes, more and more foreign correspondents are now *foreign* foreign correspondents, which may erode the ‘American lens’ through which the world is viewed (Hamilton and Jenner, 2004). The U.S. media system has diversified, too, as the internet, satellite technology, niche cable marketing, and public access channels have created new spaces for new forms of journalism. News organizations operating on these platforms have managed to maintain audiences and (even commercial) funding. ‘Fake’ news programs like *The Daily Show* – even though they are ultimately owned by commercial conglomerates – have introduced new journalistic forms that defy Serious Journalism’s respect for political authority and mock professional practices as propaganda enablers (Baym, 2005; Jones, 2009). Globalization is said to have influenced all news organizations in at least minimal ways (Reese, 2008), and national irreverence might be one of those effects. Deuze (2007: 29), for example, has argued that as liquid modernity emerges, as flexible capitalism expands, citizens and media workers naturally shift from a nation-based prism toward a global outlook and maintain a principled and ‘distinctly anti-hierarchical character’.

In an ironic twist, globalization makes the individual newsworker more important than ever. The journalistic field might ‘statistically determine’ positions that individuals take within a field (Bourdieu, 2005), but as the journalistic field expands globally and diversifies within individual nations more of an opportunity becomes available for individuals and organizations to ‘mark one’s difference vis-à-vis others’ (Benson and Neveu, 2005: 3). Struggles within the field may not occur on an equal playing field (Lawler, 2004), but it is our position that, as the national journalistic field expands beyond the established national news organizations and partners with extra-national news organizations, the playing field has leveled somewhat and the national narrative has receded in the nation’s journalistic field as a whole. The established networks, however, have partnered with dominant actors within the political field in an attempt to maintain their position as ‘responsible’ members of the national community and mark themselves off from the ‘irresponsible’. Non-state actors pose a direct threat to the state and journalistic fields, so the state and journalistic fields overlap to contest emergent forms of journalism as irresponsible and threatening agents.

Although establishment news organizations have always practiced professional boundary maintenance to mark themselves off from others (Reese, 1990), our analysis is particularly concerned with how threats to narratives emerge through globalization and the subsequent diversification of the journalistic field. During ‘journalistic field wars’ new agents and/or marginalized agents enabled by these social, political, and economic forces challenge those agents who dominate the field. Julian Assange is a case in point. Assange and the WikiLeaks organization he founded more than fit the description of the liquid modern person who possesses an irreverent stance toward the nation, existing ‘in between’ nations so much that in December 2010 a British court denied him bail because he posed a flight risk due to the fact that he had no postal address and never stayed in one place for very long. Opposed to the neoliberal philosophy that informs the political and much of the journalistic field in the U.S., Assange and hackers associated with WikiLeaks possess a radically democratic politics. In Lummis’s (1996: 25) words, liberal democrats favor individualism but exist nearer the negative conception of political rights due to their legitimization of economic concentrations of power, whereas radical democrats offer a ‘critique of centralized power of every sort’. Hackers are generally committed ‘to

the free flow of information, unrestricted access to computer resources, and the idea of computer technology as an instrument of the public good' (Nissenbaum, 2004: 203). They work toward freeing information, whether it's controlled by the state or business, believing free information is essential if they are to live out their positive conception of political freedom (Coleman and Golub, 2008).

According to an Australian investigator who once arrested Assange: '[He] had some altruistic motive. I think he acted on the belief that everyone should have access to everything' (Khatchadourian, 2010). His dedication to 'scientific journalism' was compromised, however, when he built relationships with the *New York Times*, the British *Guardian*, and Germany's *Der Spiegel*. In the U.S., at least, his radically democratic beliefs collided with the neoliberal politics of establishment journalists, which modified his extra-national news organization's ability to chip away at the national narrative. The agenda-setting news media like the *New York Times* and the broadcast networks valorize political authority, hierarchies, and the orders they establish (Gans, 2004), and often work with the state to keep information from the public (Schudson, 1978). The birth of professional journalism even had as a founding principle the idea that journalists should work with the state to 'manufacture consent' to the established order (Lippmann, 1997 [1922]). Indeed, as we show in the analysis, reporters' biographies at the major networks reveal that established news organizations treat the ability to work with and for the state as a resumé bullet point.

Yet the journalistic field has changed, and we want to know how different layers of the U.S. news media system framed Assange and WikiLeaks, and how they incorporated the cables that WikiLeaks released into their news coverage. From our deep reading of journalistic framing and incorporation, we infer how the national narrative has solidified in the establishment networks but receded in the expanded (even commercial) journalistic field. To examine this issue, we analyzed the established broadcast networks, alternative media that operate independently of established news practices (*Democracy Now!* and Glenn Greenwald), and 'fake' journalism that has political economic ties to the establishment press (*The Daily Show*). We analyze news coverage and meta-coverage starting 29 November 2010, when WikiLeaks released the first batch of diplomatic cables and ending 7 December 2010, when Assange turned himself in to British authorities on charges of sexual misconduct in Sweden. Using relevant 'moments' like the time-range studied here acts as a 'reference to guide' the examination of news (Ismail, 2008: 185), and allows for a textual analysis, which constitutes a 'very detailed analysis' of publicly available data (Silverman, 2000: 828). Our method involved looking for recurring patterns (Larsen, 2002) in an iterative manner in which interpretive acts were repeated against old and new data to check the validity of the interpretation (Morse et al., 2002), which meant that we surrendered to the data as opposed to imposing a strict methodological test to which the data would fit (Altheide and Johnson, 1994; Potter, 1996).

Analysis

The networks

Although the networks reported some cable contents,² these contents were incorporated into a framework that defined WikiLeaks as a national security threat and Assange as a

criminal, even a terrorist.³ Framing WikiLeaks as a threat, as opposed to mining the cables for truth about U.S. foreign policy, reveals an ideological attachment to idealized Jeffersonian principles and illustrates establishment journalists' willingness to (contradictorily) treat partnerships with extra-national news outlets as threats to the nation and to 'proper' journalism.

The first CBS broadcast on 29 November contained at least 14 references to WikiLeaks-as-threat. Katie Couric, introducing coverage, stated: 'Tonight the government opens a criminal investigation into a massive leak of diplomatic cables, saying the leaker put lives and the nation's security at risk.' ABC's John Karl called the WikiLeaks revelations 'troubling', 'damaging', 'harmful', and 'embarrassing'. Karl revealed that the U.S. was bombing Yemen, whose government was lying for the U.S., but the release of the cables containing the information was, for ABC, 'damaging' and 'potentially undermines a key U.S. ally'. NBC's Brian Williams opened his 29 November broadcast by stating: 'The website WikiLeaks has gone public with U.S. state secrets, thousands of them, a massive coordinated leak of documents seemingly designed to hurt the United States.' Andrea Mitchell reported that the revelation that the U.S. was bombing Yemen 'undermines trust among world leaders already suspicious of the United States'.

By 6 December, the 'war on terrorism' framework had been grafted onto coverage of WikiLeaks and Assange. As CBS's David Martin reported, an image of Osama bin Laden morphed into an image of Assange and WikiLeaks: 'If Osama bin Laden, wherever he is, needed a to-do list, he's got one courtesy of WikiLeaks.' NBC's Peter Alexander reported, 'NBC News has learned that jihadists with links to Al Qaeda have begun an online discussion about how to use the latest WikiLeaks information to exploit U.S. security vulnerabilities.' ABC's Jim Sciutto reported, 'U.S. officials see it as aiding and abetting terrorists.'

More interesting than this framework is the networks' valorizing of particular types of journalistic backgrounds, as well as their rhetorical strategies employed to position themselves as allies of the state and to distance WikiLeaks from journalism. NBC's Brian Williams is a former White House intern,³ Andrea Mitchell is married to former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan, CBS's Chip Reed was once Counsel to the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee,⁴ NBC's Pete Williams worked for Dick Cheney in Congress and in the Department of Defense,⁵ ABC's Diane Sawyer was formerly a Nixon administration press aide, and Jim Sciutto was a 2002 term member of the Council of Foreign Relations.⁶ This information, readily available on network websites, indicates not only an incentive to hire people with close ties to the state but operates as a sort of 'nation-valorizer', in which positive relationships with the state are more valuable for correspondent and network resumé's than exposing state wrongs.

As responsible members of Lippmann's 'governing class', newswriters protected the state, condemning WikiLeaks as a national security threat whose actions threatened to derail proper state-journalism relations. Juan Zuarate, described by CBS as its 'national security analyst', implied that the cables should not have been released: 'It's tit-for-tat diplomacy that requires some messy work on the part of diplomats, and that includes horse-trading that may not be comfortable completely in the light of day but sometimes is necessary to get things done.' Diane Sawyer called the cables 'highly sensitive documents, never meant to be read by the public'. Brian Williams added that the cables are 'meant to be secret and now that it's out it will no doubt hurt the ability

of the U.S. to do business around the world'. The networks sought to 'plug the leaks' as soon as possible.

John Karl: Today, Attorney General Eric Holder said that crimes have been committed with these leaks, and Diane, he announced that the Justice Department has launched an investigation to try to figure out how it all happened and to hold those responsible accountable.

Diane Sawyer: Thanks, John, and that's of course the question asked all day long: How could this happen?

Sawyer was not asking for a description of the process by which the cables were leaked, but how the state could be so irresponsible (her view) as to allow the leaks to occur. ABC's answer, given via a former federal prosecutor, was an editorial not a description: 'Too many people had access. Six hundred thousand people have access to this classification network. That is absurd.' NBC's Peter Williams was surprised WikiLeaks had broken no law: 'Brian, officials here say they are aggressively investigating the leaks but as surprising as it may seem when it comes to the website, there is no federal law that explicitly covers something like this.' Despite no illegal behavior, an NBC image appeared that asked, 'Who's to Blame?', asserting that a violation had occurred despite the law. Brian Williams opined that the release of the cables 'strikes most people as wrong', asking, 'Will anybody go to jail for this?'

The networks acknowledged the fact that WikiLeaks had broken no law but their reporters framed WikiLeaks as a criminal organization by repeatedly associating it with the alleged crimes of Assange, by constructing Assange as a fugitive even though he was not a fugitive, and by framing the law as an unfortunate obstacle for the state. In nearly every story, the networks mentioned the allegations of sexual misconduct against Assange, which linked WikiLeaks with criminality despite the legal facts. The networks called Assange a 'Mystery Man', 'fugitive', and 'in hiding', even after their reporters acknowledged that British authorities were perfectly capable of getting in touch with him. On 1 December Brian Williams tainted Assange as a fugitive when he reported: 'Investigators believe he's on the run and hiding out from the outrage over what he's doing.' This rhetorical strategy – 'outrage over what he's doing' – enabled NBC to frame Assange as a fugitive while technically avoiding the cardinal sin of reporting non-facts as truth. Similarly, NBC's Lisa Meyers reported that Assange is 'living the life of a fugitive', painting Assange as a fugitive while avoiding the reporting of a factual error. The next day ABC's Jim Sciutto reported that he 'learned British police know how to contact him and probably where, at a location in southeastern England'. Nevertheless, Diane Sawyer introduced the report by stating, 'Tonight on World News, fugitive hunt: Police closing in on WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange wanted for rape, and running out of options.' As she reported, the image 'Fugitive Hunt' hung over her shoulder. Days later Sawyer continued to use the term 'manhunt'. When Assange willingly went to British authorities, CBS's Elizabeth Palmer claimed that those authorities had forced Assange 'out of his hiding place today'.

As proper teammates of the state who were 'surprised' that WikiLeaks had broken no law, the law was framed as an obstacle to be overcome. Correspondents literally endorsed

illegal state action to target Wikileaks and Assange. On 4 December CBS's Elain Quijano reported:

Ratcheting up the legal pressure on WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, Attorney General Eric Holder is vowing to go after anyone the U.S. believes has broken American laws, but he acknowledges there might be loopholes.

For Holder and Quijano, who did not question the actions of a state that viewed legal behavior as 'loopholes' that did not prevent state violence, the law was nothing more than an impediment for a state that was encouraged to operate outside of it. That same day Peter Alexander transmitted without challenge a false claim made by PayPal that Assange's behavior is illegal: 'The website PayPal cut access to donations to WikiLeaks, saying its services "cannot be used for any activities that encourage, promote, facilitate or instruct others to engage in illegal activity".' For CBS's Chip Reed the law could be dismissed as 'outdated':

On Capitol Hill, some Republicans are calling on the Justice Department to put Assange behind bars, too, under the charge of espionage. But that won't be easy. For starters, Assange is an Australian citizen whose whereabouts are currently unknown and the espionage laws are outdated, written during World War I.

ABC was so proud of its ability to help the state that it discovered a WikiLeaks-released cable that suggested that its prime-time soap operate *Desperate Housewives* was facilitating the 'war against terror'. Tellingly, when Assange turned himself in to British authorities on 7 December, the networks, having covered WikiLeaks every day since 29 November, abruptly cut off coverage. The story for the networks was not about what the leaks revealed about U.S. foreign policy but the legal drama unfolding around Assange, which allowed the networks to publicly convict WikiLeaks by association. As mediated by the established broadcast networks, WikiLeaks had not cracked the national narrative at all. In fact, the national narrative organized the networks' reporting so much that illegal state behavior was rhetorically transformed into legal and normative state behavior.

Democracy Now!

In contrast to the established networks, alternative media focused their criticisms on U.S. foreign policy and establishment journalism's reporting of WikiLeaks. The New York-based *Democracy Now!*, far from framing WikiLeaks as a threat to national security, employed the term 'whistleblower' to describe the organization in nearly every story. Amy Goodman, the program's host, associated the WikiLeaks-released cables with the Pentagon Papers and Assange with Daniel Ellsberg, the man who released the Papers. The name of the program – *Democracy Now!* – suggests a radical belief in citizen access to information that facilitates self-governance as well as a demand for positive rights. *Democracy Now!*, consistent with its radically democratic principles, did not merely praise or condemn WikiLeaks but hosted a debate between Steven Afterwood of the Federation of American Scientists, who condemned WikiLeaks as irresponsible, and Glenn Greenwald of Salon, who framed WikiLeaks as a whistleblower.

Elsewhere, however, *Democracy Now!* demanded more leaks with its choice of guests. On 29 November Ellsberg said to Goodman:

The lying, as in Vietnam, is being enforced by the upper levels. What we need to see, really, is someone following Bradley Manning, or whoever the source is, following his example. He gave what he could, at his 22-year-old's level, corporal's level, what was available to him, to inform the public. We need somebody with higher access, the kind that I had at that time and unfortunately didn't use them, I'm sorry to say. I apologize.

The next day Goodman interviewed Noam Chomsky, who had helped Ellsberg with the Pentagon Papers and who compared the Pentagon Papers with the released cables:

But if you look at the Papers themselves, there are things that Americans should have known that the government didn't want them to know. And as far as I can tell, from what I've seen here, pretty much the same is true. In fact, the current leaks are – what I've seen, at least – primarily interesting because of what they tell us about how the diplomatic service works.

He added: 'What that reveals is the profound hatred for democracy on the part of our political leadership.'

Whereas the networks had constructed WikiLeaks-as-criminal-and-threat, *Democracy Now!* reporters read through the cables to construct news that focused on U.S. crimes and imperial actions abroad: U.S. pressure on Germany to suppress arrest warrants for CIA officers who abducted an innocent man and held him in captivity for several months; Secretaries of State Hillary Clinton and Condoleezza Rice ordering embassies to collect foreign dignitaries' 'frequent flier numbers, credit card details, and even DNA material, like fingerprints, [and] iris scans'; pressure to halt Spanish investigations of U.S. torture at Guantanamo Bay, CIA rendition flights, U.S. troops killing of a Spanish journalist in Iraq; transfer of prisoners to countries where, in the words of U.N. Special Rapporteur Juan Mendez, U.S. officials 'knew that these people were going to be tortured'; the storage of banned cluster bombs in Britain; 'massive civilian casualties', in Goodman's words, following a U.S. attack on Yemen; American opposition to Afghani reconciliation talks with Taliban leaders; and neutralization, co-optation, and marginalization of states opposed to inadequate American plans to curb global warming.

Unlike the networks, *Democracy Now!* correctly pointed out that Assange had reason to conceal his location because of assassination threats coming from talking heads on cable networks and U.S. House members. *Fox News* commentator Bob Beckel, for example, called for the murder of Assange because a 'dead man can't leak stuff' and U.S. Representative Peter King called Assange a terrorist.

Glenn Greenwald

Greenwald, a daily columnist for *Salon* who lives in Brazil but is a U.S. citizen, was even more direct than *Democracy Now!* in his criticism of establishment news coverage of WikiLeaks. From the beginning of his coverage, Greenwald observed the degree to which establishment journalists and the state were aligned, noting that the released cables and coverage of WikiLeaks 'revealed not only numerous government secrets, but also

the driving mentality of major factions in our political and media class' (30 November). He compared journalism's claims for state transparency with journalism's behavior, citing CNN's Wolf Blitzer's reporting to support his claim that 'major media stars are nothing more than Government spokespeople and major news outlets little more than glorified state-run media' (30 November). For Greenwald, Wikileaks exposed the cozy relationship between establishment journalists and state officials by defying that relationship. That challenge to the state-journalism relationship fed the near unanimous hostility toward Wikileaks that Greenwald documented over the next week.

Greenwald debunked establishment journalism's narratives by linking to segments of establishment coverage that established facts that contradicted the narrative. He cited the McClatchy news service to demonstrate that no evidence exists to support the establishment claim that WikiLeaks's disclosures had harmed state sources in Afghanistan and elsewhere. He quoted a blogger writing for the *Economist's* website who wrote that Wikileaks 'may be the best we can hope for in the way of promoting the climate of transparency and accountability necessary for authentically liberal democracy' (1 December). Greenwald also opined that most establishment journalists have become 'dependent upon the very political system they are supposed to check and which these disclosures threaten' (1 December). He attributed the merging of the political and journalistic fields to the corporate ownership of establishment news organizations, which for him made the press more easily manipulated by the state.

Greenwald also sensed something else that informed hostile rhetoric toward WikiLeaks and that was 'a literal war over who controls the Internet and the purposes to which it can be used' (7 December). The establishment vilification of WikiLeaks led Greenwald to conclude that the state, news organizations, and corporations had moved into a closer alliance to curb the threat that Wikileaks posed to their control of information flow and narrative constructions: 'leading media figures and government officials are completely indistinguishable in what they think say and do with regard to these controversies ... there is no real distinction between most of these establishment reporters and the government' (8 December).

The Daily Show

While *Democracy Now!* attacked the national narrative and Greenwald attacked the journalistic practices that enabled the construction of the national narrative, *The Daily Show*, while owned by a corporate conglomerate, simultaneously challenged and strengthened elements of the national narrative. It openly mocked establishment constructions but did so within the confines of the establishment agenda.

Owned by Viacom, *The Daily Show* brands itself as a 'fake' news program that, as part of the Comedy Central brand, bills itself as 'irreverent. smart. clever.'⁷ Like Greenwald, *The Daily Show* exposes weaknesses in professional journalism and offers satirical commentary that brings audiences closer to 'truth' (Jones, 2009). Its status as a 'fake' news organization provides it the added benefit that it cannot be accused of undermining the state (Baym, 2005), although this seems to limit the strength of its critique. Jon Stewart, the program's liberal-leaning host, mocked the establishment's

framing of Assange as a national security threat and also took the opportunity to criticize U.S. foreign policy, although he trivialized the leaks.

Whereas *Democracy Now!* mined the released cables for truths about U.S. foreign policy, Stewart seemed to follow the network rhetoric and trivialized the leaks as ‘*Mean Girls*-related information’, and called their contents ‘non-policy chit chat about things we already know’. He compared WikiLeaks’ goal of total transparency to the right of everyone to see everyone else’s genitalia, arguing: ‘If there’s total transparency we don’t really see anything.’ That these leaks were trivial allowed Stewart to ridicule the hysteria tied up in network coverage of WikiLeaks. Responding to a CBS *Early Morning* broadcast in which David Martin reported, ‘Italy’s Foreign Minister is calling this leak a diplomatic 9/11’, Stewart retorted, ‘Well, then he’s a [censored expletive] idiot.’ Stewart also mocked U.S. Representative Peter King for stating that Assange is ‘clearly’ a terrorist: ‘Ah, clearly! Assange is Osama bin Laden crossed with Magneto and the albino guy from *The Matrix* with more than a schooch of the Dyson vacuum guy.’

Stewart did not view WikiLeaks as performing a valuable service, however, and urged it to stop the leaks – demanding that if it continued to release information, it release more revealing and relevant information. Simultaneously, though, he employed the news of WikiLeaks to peg a critical history of U.S. foreign policy:

I think you’re underestimating how cynical Americans are about our government already. We’ve engineered coups in Chile, Iran, et cetera, sold arms to Iran and then used the money to fund Central American revolutionaries. We sell weapons to our enemy’s enemy who somehow always then becomes our enemy and forces us to defend ourselves from our own weapons. That happens a lot.... It takes a lot to un-impress us. You really should read up about the [censored expletive] we already know about us, so unless in these WikiLeaks we’re going to find out that aliens from Area 51 killed Kennedy stop with the drama.

Conclusions

In the debate about globalization’s impact on communicative flows, the emergence of WikiLeaks has added an interesting twist: the birth of extra-national news organizations. Dissidents located in the state can now leak information to newswriters who possess no allegiance to any state and who lack a national lens through which to interpret world events. These newswriters operate according to a radically democratic philosophy that contradicts the liberal-neoliberal positions that establishment journalists occupy, that lead them to cover ‘our’ news properly and respect political and economic hierarchies. Yet, despite the hope for these new technologies and new journalistic forms, establishment journalism continues its allegiance to traditional practices that are a consequence and cause of the national narrative. Whereas others have begun to notice a strengthening of journalistic–state relations due to professional pressures caused by new media technologies (e.g. Fenton 2010), our analysis reveals an *ideological strengthening of the state–journalistic partnership* that cannot be explained by journalistic practices alone (after all, all news organizations relied on the same sources – the leaks), and this relationship has grown so close that network broadcasters, in this case, literally

advocated for illegal state action against the globe's and nation's citizenry. Because of competition within the journalistic field made possible by changing political economies, new technologies, and globalization, one reaction of dominant news organizations is to become more committed to the national narrative, in an attempt to maintain their position of strength within the field.

On the other hand, within the globalized journalistic field new forms of journalism have emerged to challenge the national narrative. This simple fact requires that the debate about globalization consider not only information flows, corporate colonization, and globalizing journalism practices but also the intra-state media systems and journalistic practices that mediate information and narrative flows; and to understand the stories that journalists tell – that is, how they organize information – is at least as important as understanding information flows through the news gates. Ironically and unfortunately at this point WikiLeaks must build relations with nation-based news media, which hegemonically manages WikiLeaks's ability to erode the national narrative. After all, some of the facts that WikiLeaks released through establishment gatekeepers were interpreted according to the principles bound up in the national narrative.

Our analysis reveals, as others have argued, that despite globalization the influence of the state continues to matter a great deal with respect to communication (Morris and Waisbord, 2001). When Amy Goodman of *Democracy Now!* asked U.S. special climate envoy Todd Stern about cables that revealed the U.S. had pressured states to acquiesce to its limited climate change measures, Stern refused to comment:

Thanks very much. Well, on the WikiLeaks release, *per se*, I have no comment. And that's a U.S. government position, and we don't comment on leaks of classified or private information.

Stern's statement reveals that the state attempts to cut off information flows and frames competing information-generators as threats to the nation. That Goodman continued her line of questioning while establishment journalists never reported these facts illustrates quite well that the official state position continues to inform establishment news discourse. According to establishment journalistic practices, officials' public rhetoric, not their behind-the-scenes rhetoric, is what is indexed; and because officials publicly denounced WikiLeaks as a threat to national security, so did the networks. It seems likely that boundary work played a role in network framing, too, as the journalism produced by WikiLeaks threatened the liberal-neoliberal conception of proper state–journalism and state–citizen relations and the networks' roles as powerful gatekeepers.

It is obvious from our analysis that establishment journalists, despite opportunities created for them by the extra-national WikiLeaks, selected which facts to report and how to interpret those facts that made it past the news gates by employing the national narrative as an organizing work tool. Although we did not analyze the *New York Times*' coverage, statements made by Bill Keller, the paper's executive editor, reveal another means by which to distance WikiLeaks from 'proper' journalism. Keller repeatedly ridiculed Assange's appearance and personality, quoting accounts from *Times* reporters who said that Assange looked 'disheveled, like a bag lady off the street' who 'smelled as if he hadn't bathed in days', as if Assange's appearance had any impact on his contribution to

journalism. While praising his journalists (who on videos on the paper's website were dressed professionally), Keller mocked Assange's behavior as child-like:

Schmitt told me that for all Assange's bombast and dark conspiracy theories, he had a bit of Peter Pan in him. One night, when they were all walking down the street after dinner, Assange suddenly started skipping ahead of the group. Schmitt and Goetz stared, speechless. (Keller, 2011)

However, information flows from WikiLeaks to the American citizenry were mediated by news organizations in the U.S. – *Democracy Now!*, Salon.com, and *The Daily Show* – that folded that information into narratives that attacked the national narrative in multiple ways. The fact that Salon.com and *The Daily Show* ridiculed the national narrative (both the content and journalistic practices) calls into question the validity of models that emphasize advertising-driven subsidies by for-profit companies as a cause of the national narrative. On the other hand, *The Daily Show* is the most commercial of these alternative media and it was more aligned with the networks than *Democracy Now!* or Greenwald as it placed unreasonable demands on WikiLeaks (to have value, WikiLeaks must demonstrate the unthinkable), trivialized the leaks (accepting one-half of the networks' contradictory framework and covering them only for two days), and did not consider how citizens will be able to find information to help them self-govern if establishment journalism and WikiLeaks are faulty. Yet *The Daily Show* did attack the national narrative, and this is made possible by its branding as a comedy and 'fake' news program. *Democracy Now!* and Greenwald, however, attacked the national narrative from both ends: its content (*Democracy Now!*) and the journalistic practices that make it possible (Greenwald).

This analysis, then, demonstrates that the nature of the intra-state media system plays a mediating role with regard to global communication flows within the journalistic field; the branding of the news organization (Serious Journalism or 'fake' news), an organization's political philosophy (neoliberal-liberal or radically democratic), and the individuals within those organizations (Greenwald, an expatriate writing for a U.S. audience) all play a gatekeeping role with respect to information, but, at least as importantly, a shaping role with respect to how to organize that information into a narrative.

Notes

1. In addition to the cables, the networks ran in a few broadcasts WikiLeaks-released footage of U.S. soldiers murdering unarmed Iraqi civilians, including two Reuters journalists.
2. Paradoxically, the networks also framed the released cables as releasing merely trivial information, which led *The Daily Show* to mock the networks' national security threat frame (see p. 11).
3. See: www.msnbc.com/id/3667173/ns/nightly_news-about_us/ (accessed 23 February 2011).
4. See: www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/09/24/eveningnews/main3291301.shtml (accessed 23 February 2011).
5. See: www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3689493/ns/nightly_news-about_us/ (accessed 23 February 2011).
6. See: <http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/jim-sciutto?id=127567> (accessed 23 February 2011).
7. See: www.viacom.com/ourbrands/medianetworks/mtvnetworks/Pages/comedycentral.aspx (accessed 23 February 2011).

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