



Journal of Yasar University, 2014 9(35) 6099-6260

# Eritrea Basınında Dış Ülke Haberleri — Eritrea Profile Gazetesi İncelemesi

# Foreign News Coverage in Eritrean Newspaper - Eritrea Profile

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Öz: Bu çalışmada gelişmiş ülkeler dışında kalan periferi ülkelere gelen haber akışında Johan Galtung'un ileri sürdüğü Batı ya da Merkez Medya Ajanslarından bağımsız bir yatay etkileşiminin olmadığı yönündeki varsayımının aksine bir bulgu elde edilmiştir. Eritrea Profili gazetesi için İran haber kanalı Press TV uluslararası haber alanında önemli ve baskın bir haber kaynağıdır ki bu bağlamda yatay haber akışı bulgulanmıştır. Bu durumda gelişmiş ve merkez ülke konumunda olmayan ülkeleredeki daha büyük medya ajansları da diğer periferi ülkelerdeki medya ajanslarını beslediği öne sürülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yatay akış, hegemonya, görüntü, temsil, Afrika'ya ilişkin haberler, haber kaynakları, olumsuz haberler.

Abstract: This study shows the existence of horizontal news flow between periphery countries in contrast to the assumptions of Johan Galtung who saw the absence of horizontal interaction between peripheries independent on Western or Center media agencies. The dominance of Iranian news channel, Press TV as an important source of international news for Eritrea Profile shows that, today, there is some level of horizontal level of interaction, where bigger media agencies in the periphery nations feed media in other peripheries. This study also shows that there is persistence on particular types of news stories about certain countries, showing that periphery media select news based on their political inclinations.

Keywords: Horizontal flow, hegemony, representation, African news stories, news sources, negative news.

#### 1. Introduction

Media in the developing countries continue to depend on Western countries' media agencies for information including news in neighboring countries. The construction of understanding about the World power and socio-economic realities for the readers in developing countries is indirectly dictated by these Western media agencies. This dependency is usually due to the fact that media agencies in the developing countries lack the resources to send reporters to foreign countries to gather news. "Not only is there a quantitative imbalance in news flow, with the Third World receiving far more material about the First World than vice versa," states media theorist Annabelle Sreberny, "but the continual coverage of the global centers of the industrial world contrasts with the intermittent images of the south in crisis" (Philo 2001). This which is mainly the result of the dominance relationship between nations that hold contrasting levels of power is outlined by Johan Galtung (1971, 81)as "a sophisticated type of dominance relation which cuts across nations, basing itself on a bridgehead which the center in the Center nation establishes in the center of the Periphery nation."

According to Teun A. van Dijk (1995, 26), the focus of research on the dominance of communication flow, so far, has focused on "Western biases in news about the Third World, on the dominance of Western news agencies and communication multinationals, on the cultural hegemony of Western (and especially U.S.) television programs, and so on." The exchange andq1 flow of news between countries of the Third world (described as peripheries in Galtung's theory) is also shaped by the imbalance of the World Order and its consequences.

This report will focus on how a government-run newspaper in Eritrea, a country that would be classified as a periphery in Galtung's theory, uses news information from media that belong to countries it has adversary political relations with United States and United Kingdom. The nature of news flow into the newspaper is analyzed by

dealing with how the newspaper obtains its international news from news centers in the UK and US and shows how news about other African countries is handled in the frame of Galtung's structural theory of news flow.

#### 1.1. Country Profile

Eritrea is a country in the horn of Africa with a population of 6.1 million. There are nine ethnic groups in the country, and the official languages are Tigrinya, Arabic and English. No national census has been carried out yet to indicate clearly the percentage of adult population in relation to the total population by qualification and levels. According to the UNESCO (2013), however, there are indications that majority of adult population could be classified at their lower basic education level and there is a wide gap of literacy rate among the six administrative zobas (zones) ranging from about 30 percent illiteracy rate in one zoba (Zoba Markel) which is almost urbanized with more than 75 percent illiteracy rate in the other five zobas which are predominantly rural areas.

Eritrea achieved its formal independence in 1993. The country went to war with Ethiopia in 1998 and much of the politics of the country and the region has been influenced by the conflict in the last decade. Following the war, the government of Eritrea has been at political odds with the United States, Britain and some other Western countries that have friendly relations with Ethiopia. The Eritrean government blames the United States for a sanction imposed on it by the UN Security Council in December 2009.

The study will focus on *Eritrea profile*, the official national English newspaper published twice a week. The newspaper is one of the four government newspapers published by the Ministry of Information in Tigrinya, Arabic, Tigre and English. *Eritrea Profile* is mainly directed at foreigners and Eritreans residing outside the country.

It is difficult to know the exact size of its circulation due to absence of independent circulation surveys. The newspaper is mainly distributed in major cities in Eritrea and abroad - through the internet. Currently, it is the only English newspaper in the country

The newspaper has been selected as it is the official English newspaper of the government that serves as the primary news outlet of the government for foreigners and Eritreans. As it publishes only news stories that give critical views about countries like UK and US, the fact that its news is imported from news organizations belonging to these countries makes it interesting to study. Studying the sources for such kinds of stories shows how the vertical flow of news is handled by media agencies in the Third World which do not necessarily want to echo the ideologies of the Western media centers. Another reason why this newspaper has been chosen from the other government newspapers is that it is methodologically easier to identify the exact sources of the news because the stories are in English language like their original sources, making the comparison more certain. A pilot taken at the beginning of the study showed that all the stories are copied and pasted from the websites of the international media agencies.

The main task in this study is to identify the key sources of international news sources and how the US and UK are portrayed in the newspaper in comparison to other African countries.

# 2. Theoretical Frame Work and Focus of study

This study analyses foreign news coverage in *Eritrea Profile* from Galtung's perspective of structural/logistic approach of international news study. This approach relates the volume and direction of flow of international news to other contextual factors such as international relations. The view that describes a vertical flow of news from the developed Centers to the periphery indicates that there is no horizontal exchange between peripheries. According to Galtung, (1971,93):

The periphery nations do not write or read much about each other, especially not across bloc borders, and they read more about other Centers- because the press is written and read by the center in the Periphery, who want to know that most 'relevant' part of the world- for them.

Teun A. van Dijk (1995, 26) has stated that due to the absence of Third World news agencies and a lack of correspondents for Third World newspapers, most news about these countries, even in their own newspapers, is channeled through First World news agencies and inevitably shows a Western perspective.

Media institutions in the third world employ different strategies in the face of Western hegemony, mainly based upon their respective nature of ideology and diplomacy with the West. In this case study, most of the dominant ideology prevalent in the Western media flow is in contrast with the Eritrean government's views.

Nnamdi Ekeanyanwu (2012,138) sees the news domination by Western countries as a deliberate scheme to maintain their hegemony:

Third World journalists and scholars, on their part, counter-charged that what the West call global "free flow" of information and news is, in fact, a euphemism for the economic, political and cultural domination of developing nations by the West with the aid of its powerful transnational news agencies. The major focus of the developing nations' grievance is that there is a deliberate attempt by the developed countries, especially the western world, to exploit the advantages of their industrial and economic superiority to establish and perpetuate domination in mass media systems over the developing nations both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Jaap van Ginneken (1998, 44) describes the phenomenon as 'US media imperialism', by citing theorists like Herbert Shciller, Armand Mattelart and Yves Eudes who view a deliberate policy to promote the introduction of American media models and values there. Ginneken writes that the content of media in Western media organizations is not produced to suit the interests of Third World media clients:

Western media organizations active on a global scale will first of all cater to Western media audiences and their values... poorer clients from the Second and Third Worlds are obviously of marginal concern, particularly if their sensibilities clash head on with those of clients from the First World.

This hegemonic relationship impacts the way the dominated African countries use foreign news to construct their own geopolitical perspectives for their readers. The stature of the country is established in reference to the overall global situations that are reported selectively in the press. The challenge to the African media's desire to overcome dominance is complicated due to several reasons. The fact that the African press lack correspondents around the world makes it impossible to get first hand reportage of international news and events. Besides, the information that is acquired from the dominant media in the 'Centers' is largely negative and in limited quantities. Rosenblum (cited in Ekeanyanwu 2012) admits that media in the developed countries have limited number of correspondents in the developing regions like Africa citing a reason that there is less interest for news about those areas:

There is little demand for African news in much of the world, and the cost of maintaining correspondents there are high. International news agencies concentrate on crises centers – Lebanon, the Israeli borders, Southern Africa and pay scant attention to most other areas until they become a 'story' (Ekeanyanwu 2012, 142).

The imbalance of news flow has also been described as practically "one flow" as opposed to "free flow" of information, according to a report by the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems (MacBride Commission) indicting the west in its handling of global flow of news (Macbride 1981, 36).

The birth of influential media outside the Western circles such as Aljazeera of Qatar and Press TV of Iran presents a new opportunity for media in Eritrea and other periphery countries to get international and regional news in a different – possibly favorable perspective.

This study checks if Galtung's vertical structure of news flow works in *Eritrean profile* by identify the key sources of international news used. As mentioned earlier, the Structural theory of Galtung describes the absence of horizontal flow of news between peripheries. The study will also see if there is any interaction between countries of the periphery. The study will investigate the dominant countries that are focus of the international news report and the general pattern of such representation including types of news covered and order of placement in the newspaper. The goal here is not only to show the existence of imbalance between the North and South. As the MacBride report indicates, this is a "virtually undisputed reality". Rather, "[there is] no general agreement...about concrete applications of the concept, still less about remedies to the problem and desirable policies." The main goal is to identify such remedies, if they exist at all, in the newspaper amidst the stated realities.

#### 2.1. Previous Studies and Background

According to Jun and Ha (2009, 25) the overall structure of international newspaper trade is very similar to Galtung's structural presentation of the world. The volume of international newspaper trade is concentrated on a few countries in Western Europe. While newspaper trade flows from core to peripheral countries, horizontal connections among peripheral countries are virtually non-existent. The pattern of international newspaper trade is very similar to the core/periphery structure predicted in Galtung's structural theory of imperialism.

William Meyer (1991, 232) discusses a thesis by Robert D. Haynes who sought to test Galtung's thesis by looking at the coverage of events in the Third World as carried in the Latin American press that arrived at

discoveries about the existence of African news in Latin American press and sought to refute Galtung's claim that neocolonial news flows largely follow a center-to periphery (vertical) pattern only and that horizontal flows between periphery countries are nonexistent. Meyer challenges this finding by stating that Galtung's theory should not be understood that it means no interaction takes place between the states on the periphery, but rather that the West acts necessarily as an intermediary in the process:

What Galtung has said is not that no interaction exists between the states on the periphery, but rather that the center (e.g. the West) will act as the intermediary for most economic and communication transactions among peripheral nations.

Meyer gave a hypothesis that usually news from peripheries, example from former African British colonies, is channeled through British media to other peripheries in Latin America, in a periphery-center-periphery structure.

Following Galtung's theory of news flow, several research studies have been carried out that resonate with the ideas of vertical flow and horizontal non-flow described by Galtung.

A study that analyzed international news coverage in English newspapers of Papua New Guinea (Islam 2011, 1131) found out that the Pacific region's coverage was dominated by Australia and that the U.S.A was the most covered nation than "the rest of the world" showing strong evidence of Galtung's structure.

A similar study was directed at analyzing Malaysian government's foreign news coverage in its newspaper in light of unfavorable Western stories showed that there is high dependence on Western media agencies and yet underlined that great care was taken by the local newsrooms to provide balanced images of other countries particularly the Super powers (Ibrahim 2011, 13).

Ekeanyanwu (2012, 138) discusses quantitative imbalance (amount of news flowing from industrialized nations to the un-industrialized nations and vice versa) based on his previous study. "For instance, if a content analysis of CNN, BBC, etc is carried out, it is likely that out of 100 news stories, maybe only 10 will be about the unindustrialized nations put together. Ekeanyanwu also noted that out of the paltry 10 news stories about the unindustrialized nations, nine maybe all negatives".

### 2.2. Methodology

As this study focuses on carrying quantitative examination of international news in the newspaper, content analysis is used to make comparisons and to define trends in the news production process.

The final page is the target of the study, as international news in the *Eritrea Profile* newspaper is published in the final back page. In all of the newspaper issues, there were a total of five news stories that dealt with international news. The news pieces have been ordered by numbering the top left as the first story and the bottom right as the last story in a descending order. The 20 news pieces that were published in the four newspaper issues were carefully analyzed and the news stories were categorized into three variables:

- 1. Origin/Source: Which media agency is used as the source of the news story? And to which country does it belong? According to Meyer, "by focusing on the origin, conduit and end-point of each report in this manner, one can get a graphic representation of global news traffic" (Meyer, 234).
- 2. Type: What type of News is covered? For the convenience of the study, news stories have been categorized as political news, business news, science and health news, and another category is reserved for types of news that do not fall in these categories.
- Country: Which country is the focus of the news story? This is mainly to identify the countries that get more coverage in the newspaper and to identify how much and in what way African countries are represented.

### 3. Identifying News Sources

The procedure used in this study to find out the source of the news is an uncomplicated system that may not necessarily be effective in other media samples. All of the stories in the newspaper were found to be copied from news websites according to the result of a small pilot study that had been carried before the main study. The whole news story is copied to the website Google and searched to locate the original source of the news story. This led to the exact source of the news. The pilot has been carried, to check if such a technique would work. All 20 of the stories in the pilot were tested this way; and they led to the web pages of their origin where the same story with exact wording and content lay. The only difference between the published news articles in *Eritrea Profile* and the

original stories was that in some cases only a segment of longer stories was copied and in some cases where there are multiple photographs, only one photo would be used.

The study is based on a randomly selected sample of twelve newspaper issues of *Eritrea Profile* published in the second quarter of 2013. A total of 59 international news stories have been analyzed by classifying into categories of source (origin), type of news, and the countries covered.

## 3.1. Findings of the Study

The first data analysis was carried to identify the key sources of international media news stories in the newspaper.

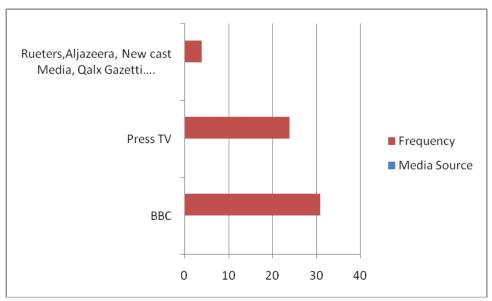


Chart 1. Main sources of news for Eritrea Profile

Source: Tewelde 2014

As can be seen from the chart, most of the international news stories in *Eritrea Profile* was acquired from BBC (Unied Kingdom) and Press TV of Iran. BBC stood first as the primary source of news with more than half (53 percent) of the news followed by Press TV(41 percent). Other media agencies like Rueters, Aljazeera, New Cast Media, Qalx Gazetti (Azerbajjian) were also sparcely used.

The second data analysis was carried to identify which sources of news were used for stories about other African countries.

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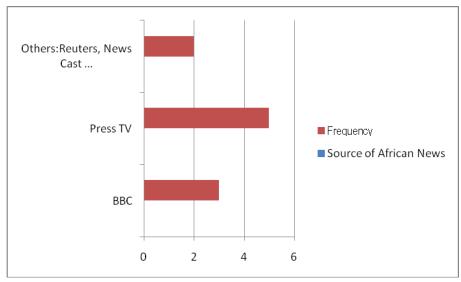


Chart 2. Main Sources for news about African countries

Source: Tewelde 2014

As can be seen in chart 2, most stories about other African countries were acquired from *Press TV* followed by BBC. 50 percent of the stories about African stories were originally produced by *Press TV* before they were published in *Eritrea Profile*. *BBC* was also an important source of news for *Eritrea Profile* about other African countries with 30 percent of the news in the sample. The rest of the news about Africa (20%) was acquired from sources including *Reuters* and *News Cast*.

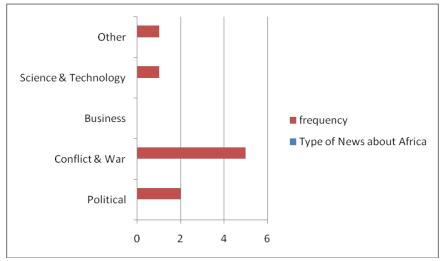


Chart 3. Types of news about Africa in Eritrea profile

Source: Tewelde 2014

Moreover, the news stories about Africa were classified based on their content. Most of the African stories published in *Eritrea Profile* (55 %) were about conflict and war. 22 percent of the African stories were regarding political affairs like elections and other non violent political affairs. There were no business or development related stories about other African countries in the sample.

The United States was the most covered nation followed by the United Kingdom (see chart 4). 29 percent of the stories were about the US, and this does not include stories in other countries like Afghanistan and Iraq where the

US is also involved in, making it the most dominantly covered country in the newspaper. The UK followed with 18 percent of the news coverage. African countries were not given such a size of coverage. All African countries were grouped into a single category to score only 15 percent of the total amount of coverage.

The way the international stories were arranged in every issue according to prominence has been also noted. 79 percent of the first and second stories (top page headlines) were about the US and UK.

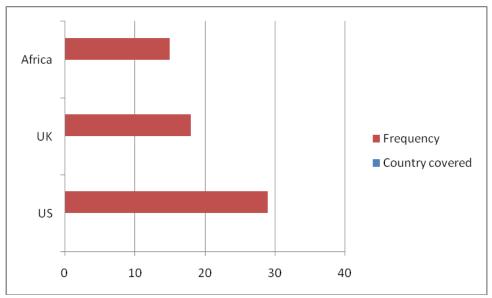


Chart 4. Main countries covered in Eritrea profile

Source: Tewelde 2014

To make a comparison, the news coverage about the United States and United Kingdom was analyzed following the above mentioned manner of content classification based on type of story.

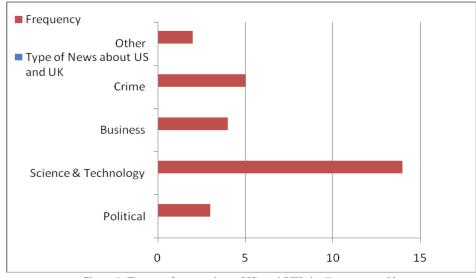


Chart 5. Types of news about US and UK in Eritrea profile

Source: Tewelde 2014

Most of the stories about US and UK that were published in Eritrea Profile (50%) were about science and technology. This includes different scientific, medical and technological discoveries and events. This was followed by 18 percent of crime related stories and 14 % of business related stories. Political news about the US and UK were sparsely used (11%).

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

William Meyer analyzes Galtung's Structural theory of Information flow that industralized countries are the sources of news for peripheries in a vertical relationship and that there is absence or scarcity of news flow interaction between periphery countires.

Advanced industrialized nations occupy the center while the Third World lies at the diagram's periphery. Galtung terms this a "feudal structure" because the bulk of interaction takes place within the center, and between center nations and their respective peripheries. In other words, little or no interaction is said to characterize the system from one peripheral region to a separate area of the periphery. If this approach is valid, then one would expect to find that news and information flows follow the feudal patterns which Galtung delineates (Meyer, 231).

The fact that more than half (53%) of news stories in *Eritrea Profile* was used from BBC shows conformity with the view of Galtung that there is high volume of news flow from the center nations to the periphery nations (like Eritrea).

Yet, another important finding is the emergence of new sources of news which do not belong to the centers of this "feudal structural". The dominance of Iranian news channel, *Press TV* as an important source of international news for *Eritrea Profile* shows that, today, there is some level of horizontal level of interaction, where media agencies in the periphery nations feed media in other peripheries, thus proving periphery countries engage in horizontal news exchange.

A similar finding in Latin American press by Robert D. Haynes (2002)which found the coverage of African countries in Latin American press, thus contradicting Galtung's theory had been refuted because the Western countries still acted as intermediaries in the horizontal flow of communication. Teun A. van Dijk (1995, 26)also had made the same concern by noting that most news about third world countries in their media is channeled through First World news agencies and inevitably shows a Western perspective. However, in this case study involving the Eritrean newspaper and the Iranian media agency, there are no Western intermediaries involved, nor a colonial relationship between the two countries involved.

The flow of news from the Iranian media to Eritrean media does not resonate with the assumptions made in Galtung's structural theory. Meyer's interpretation (1991) of Galtung's theory who assumed that former colonies would depend on their colonizers media centers for news feed is also not supported in this case study. News flow from Media agencies like Iranian *Press TV* cannot be explained by this theory, because in this case study, Eritrea and Iran are not related in a colonial or hegemonic way. Therefore, the emergence of new media agencies in countries of peripheries is creating a new horizontal road for the transmission of information and news flow.

Moreover, Galtung had related international flow of news to contextual factors like international relations. This I s applicable in the Eritrean case study as the influence of the rocky relations of the Eritrean state with US and UK and on the other hand good relations with Iran may have played a defining role in employing the Iranian News channel as a major provider of international news.

It is also important to note how the Iranian news dominated the news about other African countries in the study. When it came to news stories about other African countries, *Eritrea Profile* dominantly (50%) used the Iranian news agency *Press TV* as the source of the international news. The BBC had also a significant role as a source of International news with 30 % of the African news borrowed from its agency. Although BBC belongs to Britain, only favorable stories on BBC were being published in *Eritrea Profile*.

It is important to note that the published news stories about Africa from BBC were basically in a similar perspective with *Press TV* when it comes to criticizing the US and UK. For example, in the 30<sup>th</sup> October issue, a story about Libya that was acquired from BBC mainly focused on the security turmoil in Libya that followed after the US and NATO backed toppling of the regime of Muamar al Ghadaffi, indirectly criticizing the action taken by US and NATO.

Thus, the study (Ibrahim, 13) showed that particular attention is given to the representation of Super powers in a similar way to the Malaysian case study where there was high care taken by local newsrooms to provide balanced images of particularly the Super powers.

On the other hand, the representation of Africa in the international news in Eritrea Profile has been largely negative. Most of stories about African countries were about conflicts including war, coup d'état, ethnic tensions, etc. 55 percent of African news stories were about violence, followed by 20 percent coverage about political news (elections, meetings, visits...). This shows that the stereotypical representation of a violent African continent is also reflected in the news in Eritrea Profile. The findings resonate with the view of Stevenson and Gaddy (cited in Ekeanyanwu 2012) who blame third world editors for their over-selection of conflict news from the Western wire services. They pointed out that since conflict is newsworthy, the imbalance in global news flow was a reflection of events and that there were more international conflicts in the third world than elsewhere in the world. Although this holds true for Eritrea Profile in the sense that the editors have the option of choosing more positive news about Africa, the abundance of readily positive news about Africa in wire services and international news agencies is not something to be taken for granted as well. Ekeanyanwu (2012, 138 – 142) has stated that the amount of news about developing countries is diminutive when compared with that of the amount of news about industrialized nations, and that news about developing countries in international news agencies is usually negative.

The US was the most covered nation in *Eritrea Profile* resonating Galtung's assumptions that the periphery countries read more about the Center countries and that they do not read much about each other. Stories about the US and UK were given prominence in the newspaper, as 79 percent of the news stories placed in the top of the international newspaper were about these two countries.

Another finding in the study is that most of the stories about the US and UK in *Eritrea Profile* were non-political. 50 % of stories about these countries were about different issues in Science and Technology. Yet, when it came to news with political content, dominantly negative news were presented. Of the remaining 50 % stories, 14 percent were business related, usually negative news like economic crises, or stories about nongovernmental companies like Google. 18 percent of the stories about these countries were crime stories that involved different scandals and fraud. Only 11 percent of the news about these countries were political, which were usually negative (eg. a story about leaks about US government by Edward Snowden.) Thus although, news about the US and UK were given prominence in the newspaper, news about these countries were selectively presented based on their content. Most of the stories about these countries were non-political, and the few political stories were those that gave critical accounts of these countries.

It can be inferred from this finding that although the newspaper depends for international news on Western media agencies, it is not a passive receiver of news flow. Such media, like *Eritrea Profile* are active receivers in the sense that they select only favorable news both from Western and non-Western sources.

One limitation of this study is that the stance on negativity or positivity of some news articles could not be simply decided without subjective interpretation. This is due to the fact that many of the stories hold content carriying denotated meanings. This made it difficult to quantitatively classify all the news stories based on their stance by the methodology used in this study. Similarly, classifying which country is covered in certain stories was problematic because the particular event may be related to another country which is not directly involved in the story. For example, news stories about turmoil in Iraq denote the role of the US although it is not directly mentioned in the story. Such cases often make the neat categorization of deciding to which country certain stories refer difficult.

Future studies employing qualitative analysis of news stories would shed more light on how media in the Third World select and present international news. Besides, studies in Television foreign news also hold potential for understanding the selection and filtering process of both words and images in the news rooms of Third World countries that have conflicting political views with dominant news channels.

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