

how Sendero's efforts to influence the younger generation resonated strongly among certain sectors of Peruvian society, leading to a movement that at its height numbered 25,000 militants. She concludes that greed had nothing to do with the outbreak of conflict, even though Sendero later moved into the coca trade in order to finance its military operations. More importantly, the evidence shows that 'at no time did the control of resources become an objective in itself' (p. 83); rather, the purpose of the insurgency was always to create a revolutionary society. Once again, a detailed case study reveals how elite-led discourses, economic, political and social grievances, and weak state structures combine in historically unique circumstances to create the conditions necessary for sustaining organized civil violence.

In the end, *Rethinking the Economics of War* confirms that intrastate war is a highly contingent and complex form of social activity. Its origins are always rooted in a unique historical confluence of social, economic, and political structures – in particular, the debilitating structures of weak statehood – and a set of willing and capable agents – political and military elites who promote violent discourses and organize the material and human resources necessary for sustained civil violence. In this sense, structures and agents are interdependent and co-constitutive; intrastate war is unlikely to erupt unless both are present. Given the centrality of human agents and the role of discursive processes in war initiation, it can be argued that more than anything else, war is a social and political construction. Such a formulation has profound implications, not least because if war is constructed by human beings, it can also be deconstructed by human beings.

### *Paul Smith: Politics and the Media*

J. Hart, *Technology, Television and Competition: The Politics of Digital TV*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, 262pp., hardback £40.00, ISBN 0 521 82624 1; paperback £22.99, ISBN 0 521 03355 1.

F. Esser and B. Pfetsch (eds), *Comparing Political Communication: Theories, Cases, and Challenges*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, 436pp., hardback £40, ISBN 0 521 82831 7; paperback £18.99, ISBN 0 521 53540 9.

Albeit in different ways, both of these books adopt a comparative approach in order to examine the complex relationship between politics and the media. Hart's study examines the different policy approaches taken to the development of High Definition Television (HDTV) and digital television services (advanced television services) in the United States, Japan and Europe during the 1990s. Here, the author's main focus is on understanding the making of media policy and, in particular, on highlighting how the different

approaches of the policy makers were shaped by nation-specific institutional traditions and political interests. By contrast, Esser and Pfetsch's edited collection of essays examines the media's coverage of politics in advanced democracies, such as the United States and Western Europe. The book includes contributions from some of the most eminent scholars of this field, and its stated intention is to assess the state of the art of comparative research in political communication and to consider ways in which political communication research could and should develop. Taken together, these books provide some valuable insights into our understanding of how politics shapes the media and how the media shapes politics.

### THE POLITICS OF TELEVISION POLICY

Based on a combination of documentary sources and extensive interviews, the value of Hart's study is first and foremost that it sheds some much-needed light on an important area of contemporary public policy. Indeed, given the central role played by television in the cultural and political lives of people throughout the world, the making of television policy is surely a subject worthy of study in its own right. As Hart points out, in the United States, for example, the average household views over seven hours of television programming per day and voters are increasingly reliant on television news for information about political candidates and elections (p. 4). Moreover, given the focus of this study, it is also worth noting that the television industry is of particular economic importance in advanced industrialized economies, such as the United States, Japan and Western Europe. For instance, in the UK, a recent survey by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the government department chiefly responsible for television policy, estimated that the UK television industry produces annual revenues of around £6.7 billion and provides employment for over 100,000 people.<sup>1</sup> It almost goes without saying, therefore, that any major changes to the television industry are likely to affect, for good or bad, the leisure and working lives of millions of people.

Hart's study analyses the international television industry during a period of rapid technological change, namely the development of HDTV and digital television services. The development of advanced television services can be traced back to rivalry between Japanese, European and US consumer electronics firms over the development of a new high-definition (1000+ lines) analogue television technology (HDTV). During the mid- to late 1980s, firms within each of these regions were actively encouraged by their respective

<sup>1</sup> Department for Culture, Media and Sport, *Creative Industries Mapping Document*, London, HMSO, 2001, p. 13.

national/regional governments to develop and promote distinct HDTV technical standards in order to preserve/promote their 'home' electronics industries. The unintended result was that, in 1990, when attempting to find a way of squeezing the increased amount of information needed for HDTV into the narrow frequency bandwidth (6 MHz) specified for HDTV terrestrial broadcasting by the US broadcasting regulator, scientists and engineers at the US laboratory of the General Instrument Corporation discovered that television pictures could be encoded and transmitted digitally, in the form of a 'bit stream' (a series of noughts and ones) and then compressed so as to allow the transmission of much more information. This discovery marked the beginning of the end for HDTV as a commercially viable technology. From around the early 1990s, broadcasters and governments (some quicker than others) began to turn their attention away from HDTV and towards the opportunities and challenges posed by digital transmission technology.<sup>2</sup> Hart's study examines how policy makers within each region developed and then readjusted their advanced television policy strategies to take account of both changes in the technology and the actions of their rivals.

The most significant aspect of Hart's study is the implicit, if not explicit, undermining of the notion of policy convergence.<sup>3</sup> Given that policy makers in Japan, the United States and Western Europe were facing the common challenge of rapid technological change, a significant degree of policy convergence between the regions might have been expected. In reality, however, the 1990s witnessed the development of three very different approaches to the introduction of advanced television technologies. The first factor identified by Hart to explain this lack of policy convergence is 'the role of institutions'. Most notably, Hart stresses the key difference between the public service broadcasting traditions of Europe and Japan and the commercially oriented broadcasting culture of the United States. According to Hart, this key difference explains why the development of satellite HDTV, by NHK in Japan and under the auspices of the EU in Western Europe, was, at least initially, seen as a means for public broadcasters to maintain their national dominance. Just as importantly, Hart also highlights how the early preference for digital over analogue HDTV technology within the United States owed much to the legislative mandate of the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) to consider consumer interests, as well as those of broadcasters and the consumer electronics industry.

The second key factor cited by Hart to explain the different policy approaches adopted by the United States, Japan and Europe is the role of

<sup>2</sup> See Alan Cawson, 'High Definition Television in Europe', *Political Quarterly*, 66: 2 (1995), pp. 157–73.

<sup>3</sup> Colin J. Bennett, 'What is Policy Convergence and What Causes It?', *British Journal of Political Science*, 21 (1991), pp. 215–33.

'organized interests'. Specifically, Hart highlights the key role played by Japanese consumer electronics manufacturers, including Sony, Toshiba, Hitachi, Matsushita, Sharp and Sanyo, in funding initial research and development on HDTV and also forming, along with NHK and the Japanese Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MPT), what might be regarded as a HDTV policy advocacy coalition.<sup>4</sup> The main objective of this advocacy coalition was to oversee the adoption of their favoured HDTV technical standard – Hi-Vision – in Japan and throughout the rest of the world. Unsurprisingly, this objective was not shared by 'organized interests' in Europe and the United States, who viewed Japan's HDTV initiative as an attempt to preserve Japanese hegemony in the consumer electronics industry. In response, leading European electronics manufacturers, such as Philips and Thomson acted in partnership with the European Commission DGXIII (Telecommunications, Information Industries and Innovation) to develop a rival European HDTV standard (the MAC standard). In the United States, computer industry interests, such as Compaq, Intel and Microsoft, played a key role in persuading the Clinton administration and the FCC to support the adoption of a digital television standard over analogue HDTV. In short, the different policy approaches adopted towards advanced television in each region were, to a greater or lesser degree, shaped by the relative strengths of regionally specific 'organized interests'.

Finally, Hart's study also highlights the key role played by policy ideas in the making of advanced television policy, most notably the prospect of digital convergence. Digital convergence is the notion that the digitalization of audio and video signals will produce a convergence across traditionally separate (and separately regulated) industries, namely broadcasting, telecommunications and computing. Hart argues that the idea of digital convergence – 'digitalism' – was a defining feature of the advanced television policy agenda and, perhaps most interestingly, highlights how the idea was viewed and used in different ways by rival policy stakeholders in order to further their own political interests. For example, European pay-TV broadcasters argued that digital convergence meant that the deregulation of the European television industry was both desirable and inevitable. Whereas, by contrast, public service broadcasters argued that the impact of digital convergence was unlikely to be anything like as rapid or complete as the digital enthusiasts implied and that only minor amendments would be required to the existing regulatory structures.

Taken together, the three key factors highlighted by Hart – institutions, organized interests and policy ideas – serve to illustrate how nationally specific institutional factors and political interests remain vital in the shaping of

<sup>4</sup> Paul Sabatier, 'Towards Better Theories of the Policy Process', *Political Science and Politics*, 24: 2 (1991), pp. 147–56.

policy-making and in explaining policy differences between different countries. However, a key issue neglected by Hart's study is the extent to which many of the developments examined, such as the ever-increasing internationalization of markets and the expanding jurisdiction of intergovernmental bodies, have undermined the power of national governments to control the policy-making process and determine policy outcomes. Such developments have been widely described as part of the emergence of a much more complex system of public policy-making, incorporating numerous new policy actors and political institutions, 'a shift from government to governance'.<sup>5</sup> There is little agreement, however, over the impact that such changes have had on the sovereignty of national governments. For example, on the one hand, Rod Rhodes has coined the phrase, 'the hollowing out of the state', to describe how UK membership of the EU has seen power flow upwards from the central state to a supranational tier of government, whilst, at the same time, privatization of state-owned industries and wider reforms to the public sector have seen power flow downwards, from the central state to a myriad of subsidiary bodies.<sup>6</sup> According to Rhodes, the British state is 'being eroded or eaten away'.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, however, as part of the emergence of what Giandomenico Majone terms 'the regulatory state' it has been argued that nation-states have, with some success, attempted to compensate for losses in some areas (e.g. control over market entry) by enhancing control in others (e.g. competition policy).<sup>8</sup> As put by David Richards and Martin Smith in their analysis of UK public policy-making, the shift from government to governance has not so much changed 'what the state does' but rather 'how it does it'.<sup>9</sup>

In terms of the making of digital television policy, research on the impact of the shift from government to governance on state sovereignty is just as divided. For example, Hernan Galperin's comparative analysis of the introduction of digital television in the United States and Britain contends that, 'nations retain key instruments to direct the evolution of their media sector,

<sup>5</sup> Jeremy Richardson 'Doing Less by Doing More: British Government 1979–1993', *West European Politics*, 17: 3 (1994), pp. 179–97; John Pierre, *Debating Governance*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000. John Pierre and Gerry Stoker, 'Towards Multi-Level Governance', in Peter Dunleavy, Andrew Gamble, Ian Holliday and Gillian Peele (eds), *Developments in British Politics 6*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2000, pp. 29–46.

<sup>6</sup> Rod Rhodes, 'The Hollowing Out of the State', *Political Quarterly*, 65: 2 (1994), pp. 138–51.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 138.

<sup>8</sup> Giandomenico Majone, 'From Positive to the Regulatory State: Causes and Consequences of Changes in the Mode of Governance', *Journal of Public Policy*, 17: 2 (1997), pp. 139–67.

<sup>9</sup> David Richards and Martin Smith, *Governance and Public Policy in the UK*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 281–2.

whether in terms of market structure, technology or content'.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, however, other researchers have highlighted the key role played by the EU in the regulation of pay-TV conditional access systems,<sup>11</sup> and more recently, one might also cite the intervention of the EU's Competition Commission in the selling of the rights to broadcast English Premier League football, despite support from the UK government for the status quo.<sup>12</sup>

## COMPARATIVE POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Esser and Pfetsch's collection of essays on comparative political communication is divided into three main sections. The first part discusses key themes and concepts related to the modernization and globalization of political communication. The second section, the heart of the book, provides a number of examples of contemporary comparative political communication research, ranging from a discussion of the impact of commercialization on local media and local politics to an analysis of how politicians in different countries have responded to the growth of the internet as a potential new medium for political communication. The final part of the book offers some thoughts on the way forward for comparative political communication research. Taken as a whole, this book addresses two key themes. First, it considers how various technological, social and political changes have prompted debate on the homogenization and convergence of political communication across different nations. Second, it seeks to analyse whether the domination of contemporary political communication by the media has had a dysfunctional impact on modern democracies.

The first of these themes is most fruitfully tackled in an early contribution to the book by Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini. Hallin and Mancini detail how increasingly common features of contemporary political communication, such as personalized and media-centred election campaigning, have often been regarded as evidence of the Americanization or modernization of political communication. However, they rightly argue that to conceptualize convergence in political communication in terms of just one country exporting its model of political communication to all others, or as a linear process of evolution, is seriously to underplay the complex set of interactions and interdependencies among different countries and their systems of communications. On this basis, they conclude that the trend towards convergence

<sup>10</sup> Hernan Galperin, *New Television, Old Politics: The Transition to Digital TV in the United States and Britain*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 6–7.

<sup>11</sup> Sophia Kaitatzi-Whitlock, 'The Privatizing of Conditional Access Control in the European Union', *Communications & Strategies*, 25: 1 (1997), pp. 91–121.

<sup>12</sup> Dan Milmo and Jane Martinson, 'Brown's Role in TV Football Negotiations', *Guardian*, 21 October 2005, p. 3.

within political communication is best seen as the product of the global commercialization of the media and the increased secularization of modern societies. They are also careful to note, however, that structural and cultural differences between different countries remain relevant factors when considering a country's political communication system.

To a large extent, this discussion mirrors an on-going debate within Media Studies about the structure and impact of the international trade in media products. To begin with, writing mostly during the 1960s and 1970s, media/cultural imperialists emphasized how media ownership, distribution and content within poorer nations can often be susceptible to domination by large Western, and particularly American, media corporations. On this basis, it was argued that the West, and particularly America, uses the media to spread cultural values, ideas and practices that provide ideological support for global capitalism and consumerism.<sup>13</sup> More recent research, however, has questioned this 'one-way street' model by highlighting how the international trade in media is, in reality, far more complex than the media/cultural imperialism thesis suggests. Perhaps most notably, in their research on the international trade in television programmes, John Sinclair, Elizabeth Jacka and Stuart Cunningham cite the importance of geolinguistic regions and programming exchanges between countries and communities that share cultural, linguistic and historical ties.<sup>14</sup> With such findings in mind, it has been argued that the concept of globalization offers a more accurate description of the complex process of global integration that is fostered by multi-directional media flows both within and between geolinguistic regions.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, taking this argument a step further, Roland Robertson coined the term 'glocalization' to describe the way in which the modern media is shaped by the overlapping of globalizing, regionalizing and localizing forces.<sup>16</sup> Thus, global media companies customize their formats, channels and products to appeal to differentiated local markets, while, at the same time, local producers draw on the codes and conventions of the global to make their own

<sup>13</sup> Herbert Schiller, *Mass Communication and the American Empire*, Boulder, CO, Westview, 1969; Oliver Boyd-Barrett, 'Media Imperialism: Towards an International Framework for the Analysis of Media Systems', in James Curran, Michael Gurevitch and Janet Woollacott (eds), *Mass Communication and Society*, London, Arnold, 1977, pp. 116–35.

<sup>14</sup> John Sinclair, Elizabeth Jacka and Stuart Cunningham, *New Patterns in Global Television: Peripheral Vision*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996.

<sup>15</sup> John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction*, London, Pinter Publishers, 1991.

<sup>16</sup> Roland Robertson, 'Globalisation or Glocalisation?', *Journal of International Communications*, 1: 1 (1994), pp. 33–52.

product, channel, or distribution network appear 'professional' and appeal to audiences and advertisers.<sup>17</sup>

There is something to be taken from this debate for researchers within the field of comparative political communication. In fact, definite parallels exist between Robertson's concept of glocalization and some of the ideas and concepts explored in the final section of the book. Most notably, in their concluding chapter, Esser and Pfetsch stress the importance of hybridization for understanding trends in contemporary political communication (p. 406). Specifically, they argue that the results of comparative research do not support the notion of directional Americanization or global standardization. Instead, they point to the existence of a myriad of hybrid styles of political communication formed from a combination of modern media-centred techniques – influenced by the American standard model – with the specific traditions of a nation's own political and media culture. The value of this approach is illustrated in several contributions to the book. For instance, in her comparative analysis of modern election campaigns, Christina Holtz-Bacha concludes that, while many similarities can be found in campaign communications across different countries, there is still plenty of room for national variation, and that national specifics in terms of political culture and media system strongly affect the design of campaigns and their effects. Just as interestingly, David Swanson's analysis of transnational trends in political communication uses the example of Al-Jazeera, the international satellite news broadcaster, to illustrate how complex interactions between global and local forces can shape the nature of international political communication. In this instance, Swanson argues that Al-Jazeera is best understood as a hybrid of Western-style journalistic values and an Arab perspective on international politics.

The second key theme addressed by the book is the impact of political communication on the health of modern democracies. This issue has already been the subject of lengthy discussion within political communication research, much of which has argued that modern democracies have been undermined by a whole host of recent developments, including the rapid growth in the number of media outlets available for use by political actors, the increased commercialization of the media and the news/image management strategies adopted by the main political parties.<sup>18</sup> All of which,

<sup>17</sup> For an up-to-date and in-depth discussion of how these forces shape the international trade in television programming see Jeanette Steemers, *Selling Television: British Television in the Global Marketplace*, London, BFI Publishing, 2004.

<sup>18</sup> Bob Franklin, *Packaging Politics: Political Communications in Britain's Media Democracy*, London, Arnold, 2004; Ivor Gaber and Steven Barnett, *Westminster Tales: The 21st Century Crisis in British Journalism*, London, Continuum, 2001; Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch, *The Crisis of Public Communication*, London, Routledge, 1995.



it is argued, has contributed towards widespread public disengagement with politics and a corresponding downwards trend in voter turnout at national and local elections. In short, in most Western democracies, there is, as put by Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch, a 'crisis of civic communication'.<sup>19</sup>

Many of the developments cited above are considered in detail in the second section of the book. One of the most interesting essays is Hanspeter Kriesi's discussion of the link between 'symbolic politics' and the political decision-making process. This essay makes the important point that, rather than being limited to the main political parties at election times, virtually all political actors, ranging from policy makers to oppositional groups such as pressure groups, are adopting media-centred strategies in order to influence the political decision-making process. On a similar note, Sabine Lang discusses how political communication at the local level, as well as at the national level, can be seen as dominated by 'commercial media and public-relations fixated elites', although she does suggest that the local democracies have the scope to act as valuable testing grounds for experiments in participatory democracy. On a positive note, by adopting a global comparative approach and classifying quantitative information on the media systems of over 100 countries, Pippa Norris contends that a combination of press freedom and widespread access to the media is vital for good governance and human development. Amidst the often-expressed concerns over the 'crisis of publication communication' in Western democracies, the global approach adopted by Norris serves to highlight the positive role that the media can play in fostering the development of democracies. With this in mind, it can perhaps be argued that one of the greatest challenges facing comparative research is to go beyond comparisons between Western mass democracies and extend the focus of analysis to a wider range of nations with more varied political and media systems.

As well as widening the scope of international comparisons, comparative political communication research could also benefit from an increased focus on the historical development of political communication systems. The value of this approach is illustrated particularly well by two studies on the rise of political marketing in British politics. Margaret Scammell and Dominic Wring analyse the adoption of marketing techniques by the Conservative Party and the Labour Party respectively.<sup>20</sup> Both researchers stress how many

<sup>19</sup> Blumler and Gurevitch, *The Crisis of Public Communication*, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Margaret Scammell, *Designer Politics: How Elections are Won*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1995; Dominic Wring, *The Politics of Marketing the Labour Party*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2005.

of the marketing strategies and tactics associated with modern electioneering are far from new, and can, in fact, be traced back to the birth of mass democracy, if not before. This point suggests that we should not be too hasty in our condemnation of the impact of political communication on the health of modern democracies.