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## The pattern of international news in Australia's mainstream media

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### Abstract

What are the factors that determine the pattern of international news coverage in the Australian media? This paper addresses this question via a detailed analysis of international news over two one-week periods in *The Australian*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and the ABC 7pm news bulletin. The data was collected as the Australian contribution to an international study of news flow involving 45 countries. However, the data is of significant interest in its own right. The paper analyses the relative prominence of various countries and regions in Australian international news coverage as well as the differing 'topic profiles' of news from different regions. Comparisons are made with British data and earlier Australian studies.

### Introduction

Some time ago a team at the University of Canberra analysed international news coverage for two one-week periods (3<sup>rd</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> September 1995 and 17<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> September 1995) in *The Australian*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and the Sydney edition of the ABC's 7p.m. bulletin. The resultant data set of 1947 international stories, each coded in terms of 26 variables, was our contribution to the international study 'Foreign News and Global News Flows in the 1990s' involving 45 countries, each of which had research teams coding international stories for these same two weeks (Sreberny & Stevenson 1999). The findings of the international study are scheduled to be published by Hampton Press in 2001 and 2002 in a five-volume book series entitled *Rethinking International*

*News: Theory and Research at the End of the Millennium.*

The primary rationale for the Australian data-collecting exercise lay in the contribution it would make to the international study's goal of constructing a new 'global snapshot' of international news coverage. The new 'snapshot' could be compared with earlier studies, in particular, the Unesco commissioned research conducted in 29 countries, including Australia, in 1979 (Sreberny-Mohammadi, Nordenstreng, Stevenson, & Ugboajah 1985). The new study, like previous ones, was motivated by concerns, voiced most strongly in the 1970s and 1980s via the call for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), about Western domination of international news. It also sought to assess the impact of the major geopolitical changes, economic shifts and technological developments of the late 1980s and the 1990s on 'global news geography' (Sreberny & Stevenson 1999: 66).

It is clear that the value of the Australian data is primarily as a contribution to the global data set. Nevertheless it carries significant interest as a 'snapshot' in its own right. Its value as a benchmark is somewhat limited by the sampling method set down for the international study — specific weeks rather than constructed ones — which fails to minimise the impact of individual major events. However, such is the detailed coding for each story that the effect of particular events and their relation to the overall pattern of coverage can be discerned.

This paper presents an overview of the Australian data. It discusses the portrayal of major news events in the sample period and analyses the data set as a whole. It does not purport to present a full descriptive analysis of the data set. There are, of course, very many ways of 'mining' the database created out of the quite massive coding task involved in this project. This representation of the data considers the Australian data set as a whole and focuses on two sets of variables — those relating to countries prominent in each story and in the set as a whole and those relating to the topic/s of each story and the distribution patterns with respect to these topics amongst countries and global regions. The analysis is designed to elicit answers to the following two questions:

1. To what extent were various countries and regions represented in Australia's international news map and how did the quantity and prominence of representation vary from country to country and region to region?
2. What range of topics was dealt with in the stories relating to particular

countries and regions and were there significant differences in the 'topic profile' of stories amongst regions?

In addition, comparisons are made with respect to prominence of countries and regions between the Australian data and the British data. Some further comparisons are also made between the 1995 Australian data and that gathered in Australia as part of the 1979 Unesco study (Noble & Noble 1980-81).

#### The 1995 Australian Sample

The Australian sample comprised Monday to Saturday editions of two newspapers and one television news bulletin for the designated two-week sample period. *The Australian*, owned by News Limited, is the major national daily newspaper and, at the time of the study, had a week-day circulation of about 125,000 and a Saturday circulation of about 310,000. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, owned by John Fairfax Limited, is the most important daily of Australia's largest city and had a week-day circulation of about 230,000 and a Saturday circulation of about 400,000. The ABC's 7 pm 30-minute national news bulletin is the most authoritative bulletin in Australia and was viewed, in the sample period, by about 16 per cent of the 7 pm television audience.

The three media chosen, while clearly mainstream media with large audiences, cannot be taken as representative of the total news media output presented in Australia in the period. Both newspapers are elite rather than tabloid products; the government-funded ABC takes a rather more serious interest in political and world affairs than commercial news organisations. Taken together, however, the three media do constitute a fair representation of the more serious (and more internationally oriented) Australian media and provide a reasonable indication of what was presented in the period by way of international news to a very large group of generally better educated Australians.

The ABC and these two newspapers are each committed to substantial and original international news coverage as evidenced by their international news bureaux.<sup>1</sup> ABC bulletins work within a broad editorial framework of one third international news, one third national news and one third local and State news. Both *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* have specific international news sections as well as substantial international coverage in other sections such as business and sport. These three media were also chosen because they figure in the Australian sample for the 1979 Unesco sponsored study (Noble

& Noble 1980-1981; Sreberny-Mohammadi, Nordenstreng, Stevenson, & Ugboajah 1985). While the 1979 and 1995 samples are not strictly commensurate because of significant differences between the methodology of the earlier study and the current one (most importantly, the earlier study used one chronological week and one composite week and sampled general news pages only), some comparative observations are nevertheless possible.

The 1947 stories in the sample were selected and analysed using the procedures set down for the international study.<sup>2</sup> All items judged to have a clear foreign or international element which appeared in each newspaper issue or television news edition were included. This comprehensive approach meant that items of all sizes, including brief one paragraph stories, were included as were items on all topics (including, notably, sport which had been excluded from some major previous similar studies). The selected stories were each coded in terms of 26 variables including prominence (with each story classified as being either major, medium or minor), source (up to two sources per story), gender of correspondent, countries prominent in the story (with the possibility of indicating up to three countries per story scaled as 'most important country', 'second country' and 'third country'), topic (up to three topic areas per story scaled as 'main topic', 'secondary topic no 1' and 'secondary topic no 2' selected from 24 topic areas) and variables relating to the status and gender of the main actors in each story.

### Major Stories

The three major international news stories in the sample period were, in order of prominence, the French nuclear test at Mururoa Atoll, the war in the Balkans, in particular, NATO's bombing campaign against Bosnian Serbs, and the UN Conference on Women in Beijing.

The French nuclear testing in the Pacific caused outrage in Australia and accounted for 161 (8.3%) of the 1947 stories in the total data set of international news. The event was more than twice as prominent in the Australian media than in the British media in the same period, a finding consistent with expectations regarding regional bias in international news priorities (Putnis 1998). The most newsworthy events occurred in the first sample week (4-9 September) and included the French seizure of a Greenpeace ship which had been heading towards Mururoa, the explosion itself, and demonstrations and

riots in Tahiti which followed the test. However, only about 20 per cent of the stories were 'event focused' in the sense that they were primarily concerned with describing an occurrence. The other 80 per cent were concerned with interpretation, commentary and opinion. The vast majority of stories were written by the Australian media's own correspondents either stationed in the South Pacific or in Australia. 'Own correspondent' figured 87 times as either the first or second credited source while wire services figured 29 times. The perspective of a very large majority of stories was 'anti-test', reflecting the community outcry against them within Australia. French perspectives did nevertheless manage to get through quite strongly particularly in European correspondent and agency reports. The use of global news sources ensured the presence of French perspectives beyond those presented by French government representatives in Australia (Putnis 1988).

The war in Bosnia produced 74 or 3.8 per cent of international news stories. These were largely relegated in the newspapers to foreign sections though NATO's resumption of bombing raids was the major front page story in *The Australian* on 6 September 1995. There was little in the coverage that was specifically Australian in orientation. NATO perspectives predominated and much of the coverage was supplied by wire services. Wire services figured 51 times as either first or second credited source while 'own correspondent' figured 35 times.

The UN Conference on Women in Beijing accounted for 65 stories or 3.3 per cent of the sample. All three media had their own correspondents in Beijing who provided a distinct Australian focus via interviews with Australian delegates, supplemented by reports of reactions to the conference in Australia itself. 'Own correspondent' figured 46 times as either first or second source while wire services figured only 10 times. The Australian media viewed the conference as a major story with both *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* publishing large features as well as daily news reports. In the first sample week, which directly overlapped with the conference, five of the six editions of *The Sydney Morning Herald* and three of the six editions of *The Australian* featured the story on the front page. Reports emphasised the alleged harassment of delegates and linked this to human rights abuses in China. Hillary Clinton's comments on human rights in China made front page news in both *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* with both papers featuring the same Reuters-sourced picture of Mrs Clinton speaking at the conference.

Australia's International News Map: Prominence of Countries

The data set was analysed to determine the frequency of representation of various countries in Australia's coverage of international news. In the first instance the data was analysed in terms of a ranking of country frequencies by Most Important Country. Table 1 shows the first 30 countries by this criterion.

**Table 1: Number of Stories by Most Important Country: Australian Data**

Rank		No of Stories	% of Total
n = 1930			
1	Australia	495	25.4
2	United States	319	16.4
3	United Kingdom	160	8.2
4	France	114	5.8
5	China	73	3.7
6	Japan	61	3.2
7	Bosnia/Herzegovina	53	2.7
8	India	36	1.8
8	South Pacific	36	1.8
10	New Zealand	32	1.6
11	Indonesia	31	1.6
12	Russia	26	1.3
12	Hong Kong	26	1.3
14	Israel	24	1.2
15	Papua New Guinea	21	1.1
16	South Africa	19	.98
17	Germany	17	.87
18	Canada	15	.77
19	Sri Lanka	14	.72
19	Vietnam	14	.72
21	Malaysia	13	.62
22	Spain	12	.62
22	Italy	12	.62
22	Philippines	12	.62
25	Europe	11	.56
26	United Nations	10	.51
26	Argentina	10	.51
26	Somalia	10	.51
26	Thailand	10	.51
30	Algeria	9	.51

Relatively few countries dominate the 'Most Important Country' ranking in this set of international news stories. Four countries — Australia, United States, United Kingdom and France — account for 55.8 per cent of stories. If we exclude stories where Australia was the most important country the pattern of news dominance by few countries remains apparent. Three countries (the United States with 22%, the United Kingdom with 11% and France with 8%) account for 41 per cent of all stories. It is also noteworthy, however, that 10 of the top 30 countries are Asian, a matter that will be considered further later in this paper.

A large range of factors appear to have been at play in generating this pattern of prominence, some relatively constant, others peculiar to the sample period. Though it is not possible to attach relative weights to these factors, they include:

- a 'home country effect' — not surprisingly, international stories involving the home country rate highly. A flow-on effect of this is that countries with whom Australia has newsworthy relationships (i.e. ones which generate stories where both countries are important) also rate relatively highly;
- traditional cultural ties, in Australia's case particularly with the United Kingdom;
- economic, military and cultural power of nations (so called 'elite nations') most obviously reflected in the prominence of the US;
- effect of regional proximity — as will be shown later Asian nations are more prominent in the news map of Australia than in that of the UK;
- effect of specific events — the count for France was inflated by the French nuclear tests at Mururoa Atoll in the South Pacific, which is also the main source of the fairly high count for the South Pacific itself. The China count is inflated by the Beijing Women's Conference.
- nature and distribution of international news gathering resources of the three media (see note 1).

In order to gain a more complete measure of the prominence of various countries and, in particular, to be able to take into account the three levels of importance allowed for in the coding scheme a prominence measure was created whereby three points were awarded if a country was rated as the Most Important Country in a story, two points if it was the Second Most Important Country mentioned and one point if it was the Third Most Important Country. This measure was applied to both the Australian and British data. The British data set used for this purpose comprised 3,855 international stories in the two

sample weeks appearing in four daily newspapers — *The Express, The Guardian, The Telegraph* and *The Daily Mail* — and in two evening television bulletins — the BBC nine o'clock news and ITN news at ten.

Prominence scores achieved by countries were aggregated for the Australian data set and the British data set. The country scores in the two sets were then aligned by adjusting the British totals down to take into account the overall greater size of the British data set as against the Australian one — 3,855 stories as against 1,947. This yielded Table 2.

**Table 2: Country Prominence Measure: Top 30 Countries**

Australian data		British data	
Country	Total Score	Country	Total Score
Australia	2047	United Kingdom	2594
United States	1478	United States	1525
United Kingdom	776	France	628
France	550	Germany	340
China	357	Europe	332
Japan	285	Ireland	206
South Pacific	231	Bosnia-Herzegovina	199
Bosnia-Herzegovina	194	Australia	187
New Zealand	182	Italy	173
India	140	South Africa	160
United Nations	123	China	160
Indonesia	118	Russia	159
Russia	113	Spain	155
"WorldC'ty" nations	109	EU	150
Hong Kong	108	United Nations	148
Papua New Guinea	106	India	127
Germany	101	Japan	127
Israel	93	NATO	92
South Africa	83	New Zealand	82
Canada	79	Belgium	69
Asia, in general	77	Sweden	64
Italy	74	Pakistan	60
Europe	64	Israel	57
NATO	57	Hong Kong	54
Croatia	55	Canada	50
Sri Lanka	55	Switzerland	50
Vietnam	53	Serbia	40
Malaysia	52	South Pacific	38
Pakistan	47	Croatia	34
Ireland	46	Sri Lanka	34



As indicated earlier, in the preparation of Table 2 the raw prominence scores in the British data set were adjusted to the size of the Australian set. Hence, while the numbers given against individual countries in Table 2 are in themselves a somewhat arbitrary construct, they provide a sound basis for comparing relative prominence of countries in the two sets of data.

A comparison of Table 1 and the Australian data in Table 2 reveals relatively little difference in the rankings of countries. However, it is noticeable that there is a marked rise in the prominence of international organisations: the UN jumps from 26th in Table 1 to 11th in Table 2; the category 'World community of nations' and NATO appear in Table 2 but not in Table 1. It is clear that the significance of international organisations in news is more fully represented by the measure used in Table 2 than that used in Table 1.

A comparison of the Australian and British data in Table 2 sheds significant further light on the factors determining Australia's international news map. Both the similarities and differences between the two sets are noteworthy. The broad 'prominence pattern' in the two sets is strikingly similar, suggesting a similar general distribution of international news in which a relatively few countries (including the home country) dominate and in which, after the top 20 or so countries, prominence falls away rapidly. The United States scores a similarly high rating in both Australia and Britain as does France. However, though France ranked highly for both British and Australian news stories, a more detailed analysis of story topics has demonstrated that they were covered in very different terms. While the Mururoa nuclear test dominated Australian coverage of stories in which France was prominent, the British coverage included a much greater percentage of routine stories on topics like sport (Sreberny, Putnis, Penhallurick and Bourk 1998). Table 2 also indicates that the United Kingdom is much more prominent in the Australian media than Australia is in the United Kingdom's.

Table 2 also shows that regional proximity affects patterns of news coverage. In the United Kingdom sample, nine Asian/South Pacific countries or regions rank in the top 30 while in the Australian sample 14 Asian/South Pacific countries or regions figure. Utilising the relative weightings given to countries in Table 2, Germany is 3.37 times more prominent in Britain than in Australia, Europe is 5.19 times more prominent, Ireland is 4.5 times more prominent, Italy is 2.3 times more prominent. On the other side of the ledger Japan is 2.2 times

more prominent in Australia than in Britain, China is 2.2 times more prominent and Indonesia (not in the British top 30) is some 7.4 times more prominent. Interestingly the prominence of India is similar in the UK and Australia suggesting perhaps an 'equalising' effect, which cuts across region as a determinant of prominence, in the case of major Commonwealth countries.

#### Prominence of Regions

The Australian data set was also analysed by region using the country groupings constructed in the design of the international study. This analysis is regarded as particularly important given the potential use of the international news map as a gauge of Australia's position in the world given its cultural ties to Europe and its geographical proximity to Asia.

Table 3 indicates the prominence of regions as measured by the number of stories for which countries from the particular region were judged as most important.

Table 3: Prominence of Regions

Region	Australian Data	
	No of Stories	Percentage
Western Europe	359	18.6
North America	338	17.5
Latin /South America/ Caribbean	45	2.3
Central/Eastern Europe	107	5.5
Africa	62	3.2
Middle East	44	2.3
Asia/Pacific (inc Australia)	937	48.5
Other	38	2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1930</b>	<b>100</b>

In Table 3 the Asia/Pacific region accounts for 48.5 per cent of stories thus highlighting the privileged position given to one's own region in international news representation. This is in part a 'home country effect' since in Table 3 Australia is included in the Asia/Pacific region. However, the importance of the region is still evident if Australia is removed from the data set. Table 4 shows the prominence of regions disregarding those stories where Australia is most prominent.

**Table 4: Prominence of Regions excluding Australia**

Region	No of Stories	Percentage
Western Europe	359	26.6%
North America	338	25.0%
Latin /South America/ Caribbean	45	3.3%
Central/Eastern Europe	107	7.9%
Africa	62	4.6%
Middle East	44	3.3%
Asia/Pacific (exc Aust)	442	32.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1352</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4 indicates that North America, Western Europe and the Asia/Pacific regions loom large in Australia's international news map each with 25 per cent or more of stories while Latin America and Africa are of peripheral interest each having less than 5 per cent.

This pattern of regional prominence is similar to that identified by Noble and Noble in the 1979 study which used very similarly constructed regions. Their findings, summarised in Table 5, are most properly compared with the results in Table 3 since in both these tables Asia includes Australia.

**Table 5: Prominence of Regions - 1979 Study**

Region	No of Stories	Percentage
Western Europe	226	21.9%
North America	201	19.5%
South America	21	2.0%
Eastern Europe	40	3.9%
Africa	101	9.8%
Middle East	92	8.9%
Asia (inc Aust)	333	32.3%
Other	18	1.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1032</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Noble & Noble, 1980-81

The high relative prominence of Western Europe and North America in Australia's 1979 news map is very similar to that in 1995. The very low score for South America is also common to both. Africa scored more highly in 1979 than in 1995 (9.8% as against 3.2%) largely because the 1979 sample period included elections in what was then Rhodesia and fears of African political instability which were prominently reported in Australia (Sreberny-Mohammadi, Nordenstreng, Stevenson & Ugboajah 1985). The increase in stories from the Asia/Pacific region (32.3% in 1979 and 48.5% in 1995) is to some

extent accounted for by the prominence of the South Pacific in 1995 due to the Mururoa tests. However, it also reflects a strengthening of links between Australia and its Asian neighbours between 1979 and 1995.

It was noted earlier that the 1979 and 1995 samples are not strictly commensurate. As well as the differences in sampling methodology already noted, the 1979 study surveyed a greater range of media than the 1995 one, including radio news. Noble and Noble note, however, that while there are some variations in emphasis amongst the different media there is in general a pattern of conformity with respect to regional prominence. This suggests that the comparison of 1979 and 1995 results has acceptable validity despite the sampling differences.

As well as identifying the relative prominence of different regions in Australia's news, Noble and Noble also investigated the 'images' of the regions as reflected in the topic areas of news from the region. They noted that in the Australian media "North America's image is one of science, followed in turn by crime, international politics, economics and diplomatic activity with personalities and human interest stories bringing up the rear. The image of South America, given the fact that it is largely invisible, is one primarily of military and defence and of natural disasters" (Noble & Noble 1980-81: 55). They also note that while news from Western Europe and Asia is diversified, reflecting the whole spectrum of news events, that from the Middle East and Africa is highly selective reflecting political and military crises. The 1995 data yields similar results overall but with an important variation with respect to Asia. In the current analysis a 'topic profile' was constructed for the stories from each region which was then assessed against the 'topic profile' of the total international data set, excluding stories where Australia was most prominent. The total international data set, excluding Australia, was seen as the most appropriate standard of comparison for study of biases in the representation of regions (see Putnis, Penhallurick & Bourk 1997 for a more detailed statistically-based account of this analysis). This analysis revealed North America as significantly higher than average for domestic politics, domestic economics, sports and entertainment/ human interest categories while low for international conflict, domestic conflict and natural disaster categories. Western Europe and Central/Eastern Europe were high for international conflict due to involvement in the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, while

Central and Eastern Europe figured low in 'non-conflict' categories, Western Europe was higher than average in culture, entertainment, human interest and sports categories. Latin/South American scores were too low on most topics to be able to confidently suggest a pattern other than one of relative absence of news, though the highest number of stories, nine each, were for sports and natural disasters/accidents/weather. The numbers for Africa are also very small, though the highest number of stories, 11, was in the civil wars/political violence category.

These patterns of representation are similar to those identified by Noble and Noble. There is a diversity of reporting of North America and Western Europe not evident in the reporting of Central and Eastern Europe, Africa and South America. The Asia/Pacific region, as noted earlier, is also prominently reported. However, the pattern of reporting from Asia that emerges in the 1995 study is somewhat less diversified, in the sense of reflecting the whole spectrum of news events, than Noble and Noble found. In the 1979 study stories where Australia is most prominent were included in the topic analysis and this is likely to have been the source for a considerable component of the perceived diversity. For the analysis of the 1995 data it was decided to exclude stories where Australia was not prominent so as to be able to focus specifically on the portrayal of Asia in Australia. For this purpose it was also useful to exclude stories from the South Pacific region since the count for the Pacific largely arose from the Mururoa nuclear tests and hence did not reflect more usual patterns of representation.

This Asian data set, while still reflecting considerable diversity, is heavily weighted to economic topics. It shows notably higher scores than the all-nation average for international economics/globalisation categories (16.21% versus 8.97%); domestic economics (13.46% versus 7.88%); and social issues categories (13.76% versus 7.22%) — though this last statistic is largely an artefact of the Beijing Women's Conference. Asia's percentage scores are noticeably below the average for all nations in relation to sports (6.12% versus 15.03%); entertainment/human interest categories (2.75% versus 7.29%); science related categories (1.83% versus 5.25%); and culture/history categories (5.50% versus 8.17%). Overall, this analysis suggests that Australia, and the Australian media, view Asia as very important, and that there has been an increase in this perception since 1979. However, in the media view of Asia, economic and business issues rate relatively more highly than broadly cultural ones.

### Discussion

We can no longer speak sensibly of any single or even representative Australian 'international news map' no matter how extensive the data collection or careful the sampling technique. Perhaps we never could. But certainly we were more likely to be able to do so when international news was a scarce commodity, when the 'tyranny of distance' still reigned, and available distribution technologies determined (and restricted) access. In 1908-09, 2,457 press cable messages, comprising 211,263 words, were cabled from Britain to Australia (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia 1909: 389). At the time all world news cabled to Australia came via London and cable technology was the only way of transmitting up-to-date news internationally. One could fairly say that these 211,263 words largely comprised the international news menu for Australians of the day. We can contrast this with the contemporary situation where anything like a total word count is untenable and where end user initiated Internet access to global information tends to undermine the very idea of an 'international news menu'.

Yet international news flow studies and the national 'news maps' they generate remain important if only because there still is, despite the Internet, a mainstream media with very large audiences and hence great capacity to inform and influence.

The Australian international news map described in this paper is significant in a number of respects. Firstly, while admittedly representing just a fleeting glimpse of international news (and a somewhat arbitrarily framed one at that), it does represent a point (just as Noble and Noble's 1979 study did) in the evolving narrative of Australia's engagement with the rest of the world, a narrative in which the media both reflect and construct relationships.

Australia's communication links to the outside world developed in the 19th and early 20th centuries within the framework of the British links of the majority of its people and of Australia's position as a part of the British Empire. It was London, not the world, with which Australians then wanted to communicate. The agencies which developed for the gathering and distribution of world news reflected the structures of Empire. Even by the 1930s the vast majority of news coming into Australia came from London (Ball 1938). In the 1930s Melbourne political scientist William McMahon Ball argued that Australian coverage of international events was marred by a lack of news from

the Pacific region, including Asia and the USA, and was dominated by British perspectives (Osborne 1997). Of course, since world War II there has been a 'turn to Asia', though in the media, as well as in other circles, there has been a tension between the need for greater links (including media links) with the region and the traditional pull of old cultural ties. Writing in the early 1960s researcher Sprague Holden commented that "Among top-echelon editors ... I observed a general dissatisfaction with Australia's coverage of Pacific news" and that "it would appear imperative for Australians ... to be up-to-the minute on Asian politics". However, the reality was that "the pull is towards London. Peiping [Beijing] gets noticed, but a cold in a royal head at Buckingham Palace may get more news play than a *démarche* by the People's Republic of China" (Holden, 1961, 131-132). The 1995 international news map described in this paper suggests that the 'turn to Asia' has progressed significantly since then, albeit in a way weighted towards economic rather than more broadly cultural frames.

Secondly, the international news map is significant as a 'stocktake' which can contribute to the ongoing important debate about media coverage of Third World countries and events. The global structure of news gathering and dissemination continues to follow the global flow of economic and political power, selectively producing news visibility and invisibility and creating imbalances in news flow.

Continuing coverage of the global centres of the industrial world can be contrasted with intermittent images from a Third World characteristically presented as being in crisis (Sreberny & Stevenson 1999: 60). Consideration of these global issues position the news maps of individual countries within a normative framework. While there can be no objective yardstick of newsworthy events or, indeed 'ideal coverage' against which to measure any particular map of international news it is nevertheless an important task of criticism to assess international coverage against values such as 'balance', 'diversity', 'comprehensiveness' and 'fairness'. These can be applied to the global system as a whole, to national systems, to particular sectors (e.g. television) or to particular publications, though in an increasingly fragmented media marketplace issues of comprehensiveness become even more problematic with respect to whole sectors let alone individual publications.<sup>3</sup>

Most studies of overseas news in Australia have taken this approach. Henningham's (1988) description of Australian television news coverage of

different regions of the world appears to be informed by a notion of imbalance. He comments: "There is great disparity in the attention given to different parts of the world" (p.160) and, later, "whole regions of the world are invisible on some channels" (p.161). Overton's (1989) analysis of Australian television news argues that Australian media have failed to provide comprehensive and balanced coverage of world affairs despite the vast amount of international news available via satellite. Lindley (1993) suggests that there is 'spatial bias' in Australian newspaper coverage of natural disasters. Gerdes and Charlier (1985) suggest that financial considerations have led to an over-dependency by Australian television stations on US-produced news: "what is true of television drama may also be true of television news: the production cost to the Americans is offset by sales to other countries where it is cheaper to buy American reports than produce at home or send correspondents all over the world" (p.20). The present study confirms the prominence of US stories and the relative lack of attention given to news from Africa and South America in Australian coverage. The numbers of stories from the Latin American/South American and African regions in the data set, 45 and 62 respectively, were too small to formally calculate the significance of the variation between their 'topic profiles' and the all-nation average but the available data tended to confirm a pattern of intermittent crisis-oriented coverage.

Thirdly, the international news map is significant as a demonstration of particular patterns of representation, which pose a challenge to our understanding of the determinants of 'news geography'. How can we account for this map? In part, of course, it is a function of the particular sample both with respect to the time period selected (the influence of specific news events) and the media selected (the influence of, for example, a particular publication's editorial policies and international news gathering resources). Yet we can discern other more systemic factors at work as well, even if we cannot determine their relative weight. The comparison between the news maps of Australia and Britain suggests that there is a 'global news system' and that both countries are part of it. It is a system which reflects the structure of global economic and political power. At the same time there are differences in the news maps of the two countries which reflect regional and national priorities.



Notes

1. *The Sydney Morning Herald* has correspondents in Beijing, London, Tokyo, Washington and New York while *The Australian* has correspondents in Bangkok, Beijing, Honiara, Jakarta, London, Los Angeles, New York, New Zealand, Tokyo and Washington. *The Australian* also uses material syndicated from other Murdoch newspapers such as London's *The Times* and *The Sunday Times*. In addition, both papers make extensive use of wire services via AAP. AAP is a major vehicle for the flow of international news to Australian newspapers. It maintains editorial staff in Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Jakarta and London. However, it functions less as a source than as a distributor of international news services including those of Associated Press, Reuters, the Press Association of the United Kingdom, Knight Ridder, the New Zealand Press Association, Agence France-Presse, the Press Trust of India and the Asian news agencies Kyodo, Xinhua, Antara and Yonhap. Its ownership structure reflects that of the major metropolitan newspapers with the News Limited Group owning 43%, the Fairfax Group 43% and Western Australian Newspapers 8%. In 1995 the ABC maintained 19 overseas news bureaux in the following locations: Amman, Bangkok, Beijing, Brussels, Hanoi, Hong Kong, Jakarta, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, London, Moscow, Nairobi, New Delhi, New York, Port Moresby, Santiago, Singapore, Tokyo and Washington. It also subscribed to Reuters Television through which it received a package of feeds including BBC, NBC and Reuters' own feeds. It also subscribed to CNN. Subsequently, the ABC's configuration of both international bureaux and international feeds has changed somewhat. A number of international bureaux have closed and APTV has become a major supplier of television news feeds.
2. The project 'Foreign News and Global News Flow in the 1990s' is coordinated by Professor Robert Stevenson of the University of North Carolina and Professor Annabelle Sreberny of the University of Leicester. A description of the project, its methodology and a full list of participants is available from the project web site: <http://sunsite.unc.edu/newsflow/>
3. It is relevant to note that Australia's 1992 Broadcasting Act saw the removal of the long-standing requirement of television licensees to provide an 'adequate and comprehensive' service in their own right. The 1992 Act merely requires them to contribute to the overall range of services in the license area. The old provisions were interpreted by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT) as requiring commercial television licensees to provide their communities adequate news services. Licensees were subject to periodic performance appraisal and were required to provide the ABT with monthly breakdowns of their bulletins by local, national and international stories. The Tribunal noted: "In assessing whether a news service being provided to a particular community is of adequate quality, the tribunal will look at the sources of news, the range of issues presented, and the overall division between local, national and international coverage" (Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, 1992, pp.84-85). By

contrast, under the new Broadcasting Act, the scope of bulletins and, indeed, the decision whether to have them at all, is largely a matter for the licensees themselves (Putnis 1996).

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