

Books

The books pages are edited by Tor Clark. If you have a book you would like to review or have come across a new book we should know about please get in touch. Also if you have recently had a book published and would like to see it reviewed or promoted, please contact Tor on tor.clark@leicester.ac.uk or ajejournal@gmail.com

Welcome to the reviews section

Tor Clark, University of Leicester, UK, Journalism Education reviews editor

This edition's reviews section takes a suitably global look at journalism, with four fascinating recent books which will inform students and their tutors about how journalism is developing all around the globe.

2021 began with the storming of the US Capitol, provoked by US president Donald Trump using the media, broadcast and social, and those events, and the presidential election which preceded them, are covered in detail and with supreme knowledge and insights into the journalistic craft in *Unpresided* by BBC North America editor Jon Sopel.

This book is enjoyed by Sara McConnell of the University of Sheffield's respected Journalism Studies Department, who recommends this not only as a rip-roaring good read, but also as a rare and fascinating insight into the journalistic practice of a top foreign correspondent.

The bedrock of all journalism across the world used to be the local media, but it has suffered terribly in recent decades because of the impact of the rise in use of the internet.

The state of local journalism in the UK, US, Australia and a host of other countries is examined in detail in a collection of 46 chapters edited by Agnes Gulyas of Canterbury Christchurch University and David Baines of Newcastle University in *The Routledge Companion to Local Media and Journalism*. Local journalism is an under-examined part of the media landscape and this edited collection goes a long way to shine a light on important aspects of it across the world.

Finally, the third volume in a trilogy, *Populism, the Pandemic and the Media: Journalism in the age of Covid, Trump, Brexit and Johnson*, edited by John Mair, Tor Clark, Neil Fowler, Raymond Snoddy and Richard Tait, aims to examine how global political events and themes have impacted journalism since 2020.

Reviewer Alan Geere of Guandong University of Foreign Studies recommends this latest instalment to students and their tutors, especially for what it has to say from big name UK journalists about the events on the US from November 2020 to January 2021.

Students of Journalism can learn a lot to inform their own knowledge and practice by looking further afield than their own immediate environs and this edition's featured books encourage a wider worldview, which is always a good thing for a student of Journalism or any other subject.

Finally professor Rex Li of Liverpool John Moores University looks at *The Image of Africa in Ghana's Press: The Influence of International News Agencies* by Michael Yao Wodui Serwornoo, a book he finds ideal to add to the reading lists of his International Journalism programmes.

If you would like to review a book or suggest a book for review please contact reviews editor tor.clark@leicester.ac.uk

UnPresided by Jon Soper

Review by Sara McConnell, University of Sheffield, UK

A year on from the 2020 US presidential election, Donald Trump's bizarre one-term presidency and its chaotic ending seem like a bad dream for his many detractors. But as Trump threatens (or promises, depending on your point of view) to run again in 2024, the saga of the reality TV show host turned president is far from over.

So *UnPresided*, the new book from BBC North America editor, Jon Soper, is a reminder of what US voters might be in for in three years' time. But it is also a personal, behind-the-scenes account of an election campaign conducted with unusual viciousness (even by US standards), against the backdrop of a deadly pandemic which had taken the lives of more than 400,000 people in the US by the time Trump left office in January 2021.

Soper's original intention was to finish his book with a blow-by-blow account of election day on November 9, 2020. But like everyone else, he was unprepared for Trump's refusal to concede and his increasingly desperate attempts to demand recounts as he saw Biden overtake him.

This was too good a story for an experienced journalist like Soper to leave out, so the paperback has an extra chapter on the events leading up to the storming of the Capitol on January 6 2021. This is in some ways the most interesting chapter in the book, as Soper describes the grim gathering of tens of thousands of Trump supporters outside the White House and the shift from celebration to aggression.

Soper reports: "These people bought totally the assertion that the election had been stolen from Donald Trump. When you asked for evidence, they said it was everywhere but couldn't point to a single specific that would have altered the outcome of the election."

But reflecting on the start of Joe Biden's presidency after the drama of Trump's departure, Soper is honest enough to admit that journalistically, Trump had been a gift. "With Donald Trump, I was outside the White House nearly every night. It was a TV journalist's version of a daily blow-out meal." And Soper's verdict on Biden? "Dull, dull, dull."

The campaign diary itself starts in June 2019 as the rival candidates criss-cross the country in a bid to win their party's nomination for President and Trump rallies his supporters in state after state, while at the same time fighting impeachment proceedings. Soper has a front row seat at the latter, but only after battling against some of the tightest security he has ever experienced and being instructed: "No phones. No talking. No standing. Go where you are told."

These descriptions of the reality of being part of the Washington press pack are what makes Soper's book so interesting. Yes, he has dinner with ambassadors and interviews Steve Bannon and is told by Trump that he is 'fake news', but less exotically, he is forbidden from going to the toilet by security at Trump's first campaign rally, is forced to leave hotels at unearthly hours of the morning to catch a plane out of obscure parts of the Mid-West, and struggles to work out how to record a podcast on his phone with Emily Maitlis. Wi-fi breaks down mid-broadcast in ill-equipped hotels. He is apart from his family because of Covid, eating TV dinners in his rented Georgetown flat with a box set, permanently exhausted from constant travel, keeping up with Trump's Twitter feed and listening to the President recommending bleach to stop the spread of the corona virus.

Fortunately, none of this stops Soper's continuing sense of excitement at having a ringside seat when news is breaking and his fascination with the country he has been covering since 2014. Many trainee journalists and broadcasters in particular should find his enthusiasm infectious and be relieved that even high-profile journalists have their low moments.

***UnPresided* by Jon Soper, published 2021 by BBC Books, pp368, £9.99 PB.**

The Routledge Companion to Local Media and Journalism, edited by Agnes Gulyas and David Baines

Review by Tor Clark, University of Leicester, UK

For 300 years a combination of print and broadcast journalism kept the world informed of what they needed to know from the grassroots up.

That information ranged from late-opening chemists and cinema times to the actions of politicians on our behalf. That information also formed the grassroots of the whole news ecosystem, with large numbers of national and international stories originating as local stories.

Now there is growing concern about the demise of local journalism and its impact on the quality of information on which the public can base their choices and opinions.

If local people can't find the information they need to make informed choices locally then local societies will lose cohesion. If local news is not reported it will not be picked up and developed by national publications.

People will always be able to find news they want, but local journalism always also, and importantly, supplied news they needed – especially in coverage of local government and also in campaigning for local issues and investigating local wrong-doing.

An absence of trusted local news helps create a local credibility vacuum into which misinformation and disinformation can grow and prosper. The triumph of Leave in the 2016 UK EU Referendum and the election of Donald Trump in the USA that same year are suggested as examples of where populism thrived in the absence of widespread reliable local information to counter or challenge some of the populists' wilder claims.

At the same time, coverage of 'the media' has usually been focused on the national and international, on national newspapers and broadcasters in the UK, for example, with very little attention paid to local media by scholars or commentators, with a few heroic exceptions.

So this new collection of articles, edited by two respected Journalism academics, well known to AJE members, Agnes Gulyas of Canterbury Christchurch University and David Baines of Newcastle University, is both timely and useful.

Gulyas and Baines have assembled a huge range of useful and interesting contributions from every corner of the globe, featuring well-known contributors from all over the world, but among them plenty with long AJE and UK credentials, including Tony Harcup, Rachel Matthews, Lily Canter and James Morrison.

The book is helpfully broken up into sections covering histories and legacies of local media and journalism; local media policies; local media, publics and politics; ownership and sustainability of local media; local journalism and journalistic practices; communities and audiences of local news; and local media and the public good.

The various contributors cover the UK, US and Australia in good depth but their individual studies also feature the Pacific Islands, Columbia, Ghana, Japan, Belgium, Bulgaria, New Zealand, Russia, France, the Czech Republic, China, Sweden, India, Poland, Kenya, Spain, Norway, Brazil and the Caribbean, so whilst not systematically comprehensive, it's probably about as wide a global coverage as you are likely to ever find in one volume and the editors are to be congratulated for casting their net wide enough to ensure the world's diversity of local media is properly represented.

So in a book of so many different chapters it is impossible to distill central arguments, but a central theme is very apparent – local journalism is crucially important across the globe and lacks sufficient coverage and perhaps even recognition from government and even the publics it serves.

This collection goes a long way to point out how important local media is to all our communities and starts to right the imbalance of coverage. It is to be hoped it can find its way onto as many reading lists as possible so as to bring this vital sector to the attention of more scholars of Journalism and Media.

The Routledge Companion to Local Media and Journalism, Edited by Agnes Gulyas and David Baines, Published by Routledge, 2020, pp498, £152 HB, £31.99 ebook.

Populism, the Pandemic and the Media, edited by John Mair, Tor Clark, Neil Fowler, Raymond Snoddy and Richard Tait

Review by Alan Geere, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies

Perhaps the key to this latest engaging quick turnaround from Mair et al is in the title's

subdeck: *Journalism in the age of Covid, Trump, Brexit and Johnson. Two divisive characters and two disruptive events on the global stage at the same time that gave journalism an unexpected jolt and brought our brave industry back into the popular spotlight.*

If journalism is famously ‘the first draft of history’ then books by journalists about current affairs journalism must surely qualify for a position on the grid in that historical grand prix.

Credit to the book’s editors who have cajoled and inveigled 44 heavyweight authors to submit a chapter. From broadcast A-listers Clive Myrie and James Mates through the ex-editor common room of Alan Rusbridger and David Banks to academic heavyweights Professor Julian Petley and Sir John Curtice, every page earns its place.

The book starts with a blockbuster of a section, portentously entitled ‘January 6 and the end of Trumpism?’ which is a vehicle for, among others, the reporting and reflections of ITV News US correspondent, Robert Moore, and BBC North America Editor, Jon Sopel, who both suddenly became the face of America in the UK living room.

Moore, famously embedded inside the Capitol when the January 6 outrage kicked off, thoughtfully suggests that segments of the media should, at a minimum, examine their coverage and ask some difficult questions of themselves. Beneath the subhead ‘Inside the mob on January 6’ Moore writes: “ITV News had seen the signs of the rumbling volcano of white supremacist sentiment in America because we were looking, listening and newsgathering, and not studio-based.” Ouch! 1-0 to boots on the ground journalism.

Moore concludes with another dig at the strident, personality-led genre of TV news that is currently making stately progress across the Atlantic to home-grown UK output. “Facing a crisis of trust in television news, organisations need to revert to first principles, showcasing editorial balance and listening to people with diverse perspectives far beyond the studio, voices which may sometimes be the softest-spoken,” he writes.

“Above all, we must remember we are newsgatherers or we are nothing but noise.”

Over at the BBC Sopel has just finished his six-year stint as BBC North America Editor. Perhaps the defining day of his assignment was November 7, 2020, as the US election result became clear. “What a day. Tumultuous and astonishing don’t begin to describe it,” he writes. It is a day that unfolds in multiple locations at different times and his inside scoop – minute by minute from 8am until midnight – is as meticulous as it is revealing.

Away from Trumpism and on to Covid-19, Prof Curtice looks at public reactions to Brexit and Covid-19, Mark Easton, BBC Home Affairs Editor, investigates how Covering Covid reveals uncomfortable truths and a man who should know, Dr Julian Barwell, Clinical Geneticist and Honorary Professor in Genomic Medicine at the University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust, explores ‘The view from the hospital frontline’.

In a welcome section entitled ‘Outside the metropolitan elite’, Scotland (via John McLellan), Wales (Martin Shipton) and Northern Ireland (Gail Walker) all get a look in as well as honourable mentions for the provincial press. The ‘Boris and Brexit’ section does a worthy job of deconstructing the major media interests of the very recent past, but the latter phenomena of the US election plus aftermath and Covid are rightly given pride of place up front.

This book is the third in a trilogy after *Brexit, Trump and the Media in 2017* and *Brexit, Boris and the Media in 2020*. It is John Mair’s fortieth book as an editor and the fifth he has put together with Messrs Clark, Fowler, Snoddy and Tait over the last five years.

Academic librarians are notoriously snifty at ordering publications that are not, er, publications. But I exhort anyone in any position of influence to ensure this one takes its place on the shelves as a valuable resource to students, academics and anyone who values journalism’s position in a historical context.

Populism, the Pandemic and the Media: Journalism in the age of Covid, Trump, Brexit and Johnson. Edited by John Mair, Tor Clark, Neil Fowler, Raymond Snoddy and Richard Tait. Published by Abramis Academic Publishing, 2021. Pp330. £19.95 and by Routledge as an ebook.

The Image of Africa in Ghana's Press: The Influence of International News Agencies by Michael Yao Wodui Serwornoo

Review by Professor Rex Li, Liverpool John Moores University

The representation of Africa in the international news media has been an area of intense debate for many years. However, much of the extant literature tends to look at the reporting of Africa in the Western media. This book examines the coverage of Africa in the African press, focusing specifically on the influence of international news agencies or actors on the portrayal of the African continent in the foreign news reporting in Ghana.

The author argues that 'sources play a significant role in news construction' because 'the ideology of news rarely permits receiving journalists to make major changes to what their fellow journalists have communicated' (p3). Yet, the 'deeply-rooted questions' relating to sources have often been overlooked in the literature. This study raises the issue of 'whether African journalists writing for their local newspapers are capable of any resistance towards the influences of the international press' (p3). Through a systematic and in-depth analysis of the reporting of Africa in the Ghanaian press, the author seeks to investigate the level of Western dominance in the foreign news coverage of developing nations and African countries in particular. This, it is argued, would help us gain a better understanding of the persistent 'inequalities and imbalances in international news flow'.

The book is organised around seven chapters. Following a brief Introduction, Chapter one provides the historical background to the study looking at the political and academic contexts of the debate. It considers some key literature on Africa's media image with special reference to the media environment in Ghana from the pre-independence years to the post-independence era. Chapter two offers a critical review of the scholarly literature on the coverage of Africa in the Western press. This is utilised to support the argument that 'continuing hegemony of foreign news production have contributed significantly to how Africans view themselves' (p29).

Chapter three reviews the theoretical literature on the postcolonial theory and the theories of newsworthiness and intermedia agenda-setting. The discussion is used to inform the development of a theoretical framework for the analysis of the empirical data in this study. Chapter four covers the chosen methods for the research project and the related methodological issues. The following two chapters present the research findings from the ethnographic content analysis of the Ghanaian newspaper articles and the interviews with selected journalists and editors in Ghana. The final chapter discusses the findings in response to the research questions outlined in the Introduction. The author concludes that 'the coverage of foreign news in the Ghanaian press reinforces existing postcolonial trajectories and relationships that contribute to the existing imbalance in international news flow in the world' (p8).

Based on the author's PhD thesis, the book presents a meticulous review of a wide range of studies in the field and shows how it contributes to this body of literature. The analysis of the foreign news coverage in Ghana's newspapers is underpinned by the relevant theoretical perspectives. Perhaps it is not surprising that the BBC World Service plays a dominant role in shaping the news coverage in Ghana given its colonial links with the UK. But the empirical evidence from the study indicates that Ghana's media representation of the African continent is no longer driven entirely by the Western press. It reveals a potent Chinese influence in Ghana's newspaper industry as a result of China's active soft power and public diplomacy activities on the African continent. The frequent use of material from Xinhua News Agency in the news reporting by various Ghanaian newspapers is cited as a prime example of this 'unequal power dynamics' (p182).

All in all, the analysis of Africa's image in the Ghanaian press in this study is rooted in the pertinent literature and fully integrated with various theoretical arguments. It has made a significant contribution to the ongoing academic debate on news coverage of Africa. This is an important contribution from a researcher who has demonstrated an ability to draw together the extensive debate on media representation of Africa with empirical analysis of the reporting of the continent in Ghana's newspapers. Scholars and students of international journalism and global media will benefit considerably from reading this book. I will certainly put this on the reading lists for my MA and PhD students.

The Image of Africa in Ghana's Press: The Influence of International News Agencies by Michael Yao Wodui Serwornoo, published by Open Book Publishers, 2021, pp242 ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800640436