


Chapter 2

Working to Produce Consensus: Journalistic Work and Hegemonic Values in Mainstream Media

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents an interdisciplinary model involving journalism studies and political economy of communication to understand why news published in mass media reproduces hegemonic values. From this interdisciplinarity approach, the author raises what he calls the critical theory of journalism that has, as its core, the Marxist category of labor. The chapter presents a brief exposition of the epistemological ground of the critical theory of journalism and then demonstrates the specificities of journalistic work under monopoly capitalism. The author then criticizes phenomenological sociology and its use in journalism studies, and concludes his argument by criticizing the ideology of professionalism among newswriters and its influence on the hegemonic character of news values.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars such as Chomsky and Herman (1988/2002), Hallin (1994), Gittlin (1980/2003) and Rachlin (1988) point out that news media convey hegemonic values in the news. In those researches, the causes for news bias are the socialization of journalists in newsrooms, social origins of journalists, the ownership structure of mass media and their oligopoly character and preferential contact with government sources. I agree with the hypothesis that news content is immersed in hegemonic values and reproduces them. However, the meanings of news content are contradictory, and not ideologically unidirectional, as some authors believe in what I call the hegemony hypothesis. These contradictions are related to the contradictory character of newswork, an intellectual work which limits to capital subsumption are narrower due to its subjective character (Bolaño, 2002). Understanding the reproduction of hegemonic values in the news requires an interdisciplinary approach to journalistic work.

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Working to Produce Consensus

I propose in this chapter a multifaceted analysis of three theoretical approaches: organizational studies in newsrooms, studies of hegemonic meanings in news, and the political economy of communications. I seek to unify these theoretical strands under the Marxist labor category. Researches carried out from newsroom ethnographies (Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1980) are reports on the process of news production within news organizations, on the daily work of journalists. Research like Tuchman's (1978) takes as a theoretical approach the phenomenological sociology of authors such as Berger and Luckman (1966/1991) and Schutz (1970), and support the hypothesis that journalists' daily work and the typifications they use to deal with facts and sources lead them to build a reality that reinforces the reproduction of the status quo. According to both Tuchman (1978) and Fishman (1980), news content is immersed in hegemonic values due to the naturalization of work routines that are established to allow journalists to deliver a product on time. These studies opened the door to understanding various blind spots about why news is as it is, but naturalize assumptions from theoretical approaches that analyze the everyday lives of groups or individuals. Thus, I seek to evaluate the findings of these researches from a Marxist analysis of daily life supported by writings of theorists such as Lukács (1957/1970, 1963/1965) and Heller (1970/1972).

Another group of authors who support our theoretical approach are those who consider the news to be immersed in hegemonic values (Chomsky & Herman, 1988/2002; Rachlin, 1988; Hallin, 1994; Gitlin, 1980/2003). These theoretical works make valuable contributions to the way news reproduces hegemonic values and, apart from the work of Chomsky and Herman, starts from Gramsci's hegemony concept. However, these theorizations do not explain how mediation built by journalists is performed. To fill this gap, I turn to the Political Economy of Communication (PEC), especially to the writings of Brazilian Marxist César Bolaño (2002, 2000/2015a), for whom the construction of this mediation is carried out by journalists (reporters, photographers, editors, etc.) whose work is subsumed under the capital. According to Bolaño (2000/2015a), Culture Industry comes with the advent of monopoly capitalism and fulfills two central functions for the system: the propaganda, which purpose is to mediate between state and citizens, and the advertising, that mediates between market and consumers. However, communication in liberal democracies cannot be authoritarian, but must necessarily be persuasive. This central characteristic of communication in a capitalist society makes necessary a third function, a programming one, which task is to bring the determinations of the lifeworld and all its stock of cultural practices into the mediating structure. Thus, the intellectual worker is the one capable of collecting cultural aspects present in daily life to construct the mediations that interest the state and the market.

I present in this paper a critical theory of journalism. The term critical theory in this text has the same meaning given by Horkheimer (1937/2002a), i.e., a theory which aim is to propose ways for human emancipation, starting from the concepts that are part of the political economy critique elaborated by Karl Marx (1867/2013). To achieve this goal, I begin by presenting some of the epistemological assumptions of the Critical Theory of Journalism. Then, based on the specificities of journalistic work, I propose two concepts to understand the journalism practiced under monopoly capitalism: manufacturing journalism and flexible journalism. To finish my argument, I seek to clarify how the Critical Theory of Journalism faces the presence of ideology in the news. Another two important approaches for my purposes are to criticize research on journalistic organizations based on ethnography and phenomenological sociology and to appropriate the criticism made by researchers such as Hardt (1995, 1996) and Solomon (1995), who claim that journalists should be viewed as workers rather than professionals, to analyze the idea of journalists' professional identity.

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