

Barkho, Leon

*News from the BBC, CNN, and Al-Jazeera: How the Three Broadcasters Cover the Middle East.*

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Objectivity and neutrality are hallmarks of news journalism—especially when covering polarizing events like the Iraq War. Ethics dictate that reporters “tell it as it is,” however social, economic and political forces demand an “it is as we want to tell it” orientation. Although, one would assume that “telling it as it is” would be preferable, this orientation removes the human element (i.e., the opinions, perceptions and ideologies of reporters, editors, broadcast decision makers and their audiences) from the human experience of war. In *News from the BBC, CNN, and Al-Jazeera: How the Three Broadcasters Cover the Middle East*, Leon Barkho explains how three broadcast institutions use “lexical items with expressive and loaded meanings” to answer two questions: Are media creators detached observers or involved participants? And, if the latter, to what extent?

This book is based on an article published in the [\*American Communication Journal\*](#) in which the author speculated on the success of Arabic Al-Jazeera. Here, Barkho uses a triangulated approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA) to support and extend prior claims. Traditionally, CDA would entail studying one set of texts on the micro and macro levels in order to reveal something about the producers or consumers of those texts. That is, it focuses on how language structures in one set of texts (e.g., online news reports of the Iraq War) analyzed within a historical or cultural context shape perceptions of the creator(s) of those texts (e.g., BBC, CNN and Al-Jazeera). *News from the BBC, CNN, and Al-Jazeera*, emphasizes on how specific uses of loaded labels and verbs shape targeted public perceptions of the Iraq War. The essence of Barkho’s triangulated approach is the analysis of multiple texts—online news reports of the Iraq War guided by newsroom briefings, internal guidelines, and directives from editors and informed by outside media reports and field visits. Through comparisons of BBC and CNN reporting to Al-Jazeera reporting and English services reporting to Arabic services reporting, the author reveals how BBC, CNN and Al-Jazeera use cultural and religious signs to speak one “language” across services or two “languages” between English and Arabic offices in order to identify the benign and malignant forces fighting in the war.

One of the weaknesses of this book may be the constant reminder that the author’s analysis brings something “new” to CDA. Barkho’s approach to CDA offers an interesting ethnographic twist to understanding the competing conversations about the Iraq War, but it is still micro and macro analysis. Additionally, his approach shifts the emphasis away from understanding media institutions and toward accepting Middle Eastern and American cultural and political realities. Granted, the analysis of multiple sets of texts can be more illuminating than the analysis of one set of texts, but Barkho’s approach seems to use those additional resources to validate the social and political realities that shape the discourse about the war rather than using them to illustrate how

pervasive a particular usage of language might be within the BBC, CNN and Al-Jazeera media structures.

*News from the BBC, CNN and Al-Jazeera* could be a good source text for practitioners and scholars. Practitioners (i.e., reporters, editors, documentarians, and news media executives) can benefit from reading about the linguistic techniques necessary to capture a target audience and make a station or network more profitable. Scholars (i.e., graduate students and professors in mass communication and journalism programs) could benefit from learning how to incorporate Barkho's form of triangulation into CDA. Readers who are purists about objective reporting may not like discovering that media bias is a sanctioned activity in respected news organizations. But, those who appreciate the elegance and complexity of human symbolic interaction will enjoy Barkho's exploration into the ways that broadcasters manage their messages and audiences.

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