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N. Freedman

Southern Cross University

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Indonesia In Australian Media
A Literature Review

This article reviews the literature analysing, or closely related to the analysis of, Australian media representations of Indonesia. It is argued that there are three broad perspectives discernable in the literature: the liberal-pluralist, the “culturalist” and the “political economic”, and these perspectives are critically assessed. It is argued that the liberal-pluralist perspective provides important insights into the specific mechanics of journalists work in this area, but lacks a broader social and historical analysis. The “culturalist” perspective uncovers many of the recurring codes and myths that inform the Australian media, but also has an inadequate or inaccurate accounts of social structures. Work in the “political-economic” perspective takes into account social and economic factors shaping the media, but often lacks a theory of ideology as socially produced knowledge and discourse.

Nick Freedman
Southern Cross University

Current conditions of economic crisis, social upheaval and rapid political change in Indonesia have engendered a substantial and expanding discourse in the Australian media. However, within Australian media studies, little attention has of yet been given to this discourse. As a contribution towards this work, this article will review literature analysing, or closely related to the analysis of, Australian media representations of Indonesia. This field being a relatively narrow one, the scope for this article has been widened to include analyses of film, literature and general cultural productions and meanings, and also discussions of Australian representations of South East and East Asia. The different approaches used in such work will be outlined and critiqued. I will argue that a number of insights can be gained from the various approaches, but also a number of criticisms can be made. Through this process of critique I will put forward some ideas on the theoretical approaches and methodologies that can usefully be applied towards an understanding of this important discourse within the Australian media.

Tony Bennett has pointed out that any theory of the media is also a theory (or assumes a theory) of society, and that “the
sorts of assumptions made about the broader structures of society within different bodies of theory have determined both the sorts of questions that have been posed in relation to the media and the ways in which those questions have been pursued” (Bennett 1988: 31). In the literature dealing with media representations of Indonesia, or Asia more generally, there have been broadly three types of perspective: the “liberal-pluralist”, the “culturalist” and the “political-economic”. Inevitably no piece of research or analysis will be a pure type of a particular perspective, but I hope to show, with the following examples, that these demarcations are valid and useful, and also what some of the advantages and shortcomings of each of the paradigms are.

One set of accounts is generally within what Bennett calls the “liberal-pluralist tradition”. In this view the media have a critical “fourth estate” role as part of an open, diverse and equal clash of interests and opinions in a society that shares basic values. Thus the media in liberal societies are seen as being a functional part of liberal democratic societies “through which governing elites could be pressurized and reminded of their dependency on majority opinion” (ibid.: 40). Bennett also argues that the belief of liberal-pluralist writers in the inherent diversity of the media leads to a focus on the production process, the factors affecting it and the “complex heterogeneity” within it (ibid: 41).

The assumptions and preoccupations of a number of texts discussing the Australian media and Indonesia closely fit Bennett’s description of the liberal-pluralist tradition. Texts subscribing to this perspective include a number of reflections by journalists on their own and their colleagues’ experiences, for example the Sydney Morning Herald’s David Jenkins, who sees the Australian media as “confrontational and combative” (Jenkins 1986: 159, see also Jenkins, 1987). Peter Rodgers, who like Jenkins was expelled from Indonesia, sees censorship by the New Order regime as adversely affecting content but does not discuss any constraints that might result from the nature of the Australian media themselves (Rodgers 1982). Angela Romano, in a study of Australian correspondents in Indonesia, refers to the “adversarial role allotted to the western ‘watchdog’ press” (Romano 1996: 20).

As Bennett suggests would be the case, these accounts make broader liberal-democratic assumptions about the nature of society. There is criticism of the repressive nature of the New Order, the regime headed by Suharto from 1967 when he was installed as President until his ousting in 1998. Jenkins as well as Rodgers detail the repressive character of the New Order’s treatment of the Indonesian and international media. But such criticism of authoritarianism and censorship is often tempered by references to the complexity of the Indonesian political situation, the
supposed cultural issues involved, and a need to understand Indonesia’s “national interest”. For example, Rodgers points to the complexity of “Indonesia’s” situation, seeing the role of the media as providing accurate accounts of how “Indonesia wrestles with the enormous tasks of developing its considerable economic potential and overcoming its massive socioeconomic problems” (Rodgers 1982: 34). A liberal view of a singular national interest abounds in this perspective, with “Australia and Indonesia” seen as homogenous entities. For example Cunningham and Jacka, in their discussion of Australian television products for Asia, see Australia as practically a single organism, in the sentence “Australia as a whole is realising that, at a political, economic and cultural level, it must integrate more effectively into the Asia Pacific region” (Cunningham and Jacka 1996: 619). Jenkins argues that journalists should consider Australia’s “national interest” in forging better relations between Australia and Indonesia, for example by editors meeting “key civilian and military leaders” (Jenkins 1987: 60). Note that this proposal also implies that such leaders are synonymous with “Indonesia”.

If the media are seen functionally as information providers and as adversarial “watchdogs” of liberal democracy (within the limits of the “national interest”), important questions would be normative ones of how well the media are performing these roles, and a discussion of the nature of factors inhibiting the functioning of the media. There is in these texts an emphasis on normative analyses of the production process. As mentioned above, Jenkins and Rodgers discuss the effects of New Order censorship and discuss how Australian journalists can provide “better” coverage.

In a 1995 lecture, then foreign minister Gareth Evans gave his opinion that the main issues for Australia media coverage of Asia were the need for “accuracy” and “professionalism”, and also “civility” (Evans 1995: paragraphs 216-298). The last point refers to the fact that Evans, like some liberal commentators, criticises the view that “culture” in itself is a major determinant of or excuse for authoritarianism, but still argues that media coverage should be less brash and direct when discussing “Asia” (Evans 1995: paragraph 191).

Two Indonesian writers have also analysed Australian media representations from such a normative stance. Goenawan Mohamad argues, like Evans, against the view that simple cultural or racial differences can explain much about media representations, but suggests that there is a certain deficiency in background knowledge, a “naivete” and “lack of perspective” (Mohamad 1992: 68). Dewi Anggraeni has similarly assessed the “performance” of Australian media: “Radio Australia has always tried to be comprehensive”; however many ABC journalists are “not
sufficiently briefed”; a number of recent documentaries have “presented Indonesia in a more rounded manner” and so on (Ahggraeni 1998: 50-51).

It is true, as the sources referred to above demonstrate, that there are specific issues of lack of access to information and lack of background knowledge and language skills, which would operate as real constraints on journalists reporting foreign affairs. Lack of knowledge and language skills should not be overstated however, for example in a survey of Australian correspondents based in South East Asia, Alan Knight found that 25% of respondents claimed fluency in Bahasa Indonesia (Knight 1995: 11). A methodology which seeks to ground an understanding of media representations in the materiality of their construction, which any rounded media analysis should do, must take such issues into account. But an analysis which remains at this level cannot explain why there are, as many of the analysts examined below point out, commonly occurring values and assumptions within the discourse of Australian media representations of Indonesia.

Angela Romano’s study is perhaps the most nuanced and sophisticated example of the normative and functionalist approach, in that she examines how the specific political/cultural framework within which correspondents in Indonesia have to learn to operate, such as the need to forge “intimate contact with senior sources”, encourages a more subtle and less critical style than is the norm in the Western media (Romano 1996: 23). However the study shares with others broadly within the liberal-pluralist paradigm a focus on the production process and normative questions of the “performance” of Australian journalists, and an avoidance of any systematic analysis of the politics and ideology of the Australian media. It could be argued that a short study such as this necessarily focuses on one aspect of a complex phenomena, but, as mentioned above, Romano’s study is framed within a liberal understanding of the “watchdog” press.

As Bennett points out, liberal-pluralist accounts lack any critical view of how relations of ownership and control in the media and society generally affect media texts, and any analysis of how media text produce meaning (Bennett 1988: 41). Rodney Tiffen’s work in this area has looked more closely at media institutions and broader political questions, but also essentially within the liberal-pluralist paradigm. Tiffen has examined how western news about Southeast Asia is affected by the structures and roles of different types of news organisations, by “news values” such as objectivity, balance, accuracy, the use of “stereotypes”, and by the domestic political situation. But he
rejects the view that there is any systematic ideology in the media, an analysis which he interprets as seeing direct “conscious intention”, “conspiracy”, and “bias”, seeing no ideological role for news values or the “organisational processes and bureaucratic politics” of news organisations (Tiffen 1978: 185). However the hierarchical structure of news organisations, with rewards and sanctions depending on acceptable performance, and the pressures of the values of “professionalism” and “objectivity”, tend to constrain media output to safe and acceptable channels, which happen to be in accord with the views of media owners and other elite interests (Schulman 1990). Tiffen has also related Australian media coverage of South Asia from the 1940s to the 1990s to Australian relations with the region and to domestic politics, but not to any particular interests in Australian society (Tiffen 1990). He also here has a typically liberal-pluralist view of the role of the media and of the national interest, focusing on the need for “accuracy”, a “responsible” media with a “rounded perspective on their problems of nation-building” (Tiffen 1990: 215).

A second perspective on media coverage of Indonesia and Asia has focused on questions of culture. Frost (1996) has outlined a number of ways that culture as an explanatory factor has been used by Australian commentators to define Asia and Australia-Asia relations, and how these representations of culture have often been mobilised for particular political purposes. He argues that there is a range of political positions involved, but also some important similarities in the understanding and use of the concept of culture.

I have identified two streams in what we might call the “culturalist” perspective on Australian representations on Indonesia, quite divergent in their premises and aims, but, as I will argue, lead by their foregrounding of culture to sometimes similar conclusions. The first stream has a view of culture as a straightforward “repository of difference”, as Frost puts it (1996: 31). This is a traditional, and conservative, understanding of culture, which is often used quite simplistically to explain a range of differences between countries, such as political systems and ideologies, and to explain “problems” in media representations of other lands. Richard Woolcott, former Australian ambassador to Indonesia and regular contributor to the press on matters Indonesian, sees a basic cultural misunderstanding among media practitioners in Australia.

According to Woolcott, most commentators do not understand the intricacies of Javanese culture, as they “tend to see Indonesia through the prism of our own experience, which is rooted in Western liberal democracy, relative affluence and a benign transition from colonial rule to independence”, and so
cannot understand “Indonesia’s continuing preoccupation with national unity and stability” (Woolcott 1992: 88). Woolcott’s own understanding of Indonesia culture is put into question by his prediction in a 1992 talk that “political change is unlikely to be rapid in countries like Indonesia” (Woolcott 1992: 90). Events since make Woolcott’s statement appear somewhat ludicrous: an escalating labour movement, increasingly mobilised students, protests at the banning of liberal publications in 1994, formation of new opposition groups, a revolt from within one of the legally sanctioned parties, the Indonesia Democratic Party (PDI), the riots and crackdown in 1996, the economic collapse in 1997, and the rather rapid overthrow of Suharto in 1998. Things have preceded somewhat differently from the assumption that Indonesian politics is determined by an intricate but unified cultural code, with a passive populace ruled over by inscrutable Javanese princes. Goenawan Mohamad, as mentioned above, sees an educational lack in Australian journalists, but sees this as at least partly resulting from cultural factors. He describes the “culture shock” for Australian journalists, quoting Christopher Koch that “we become children when we visit the slums of Asia” (Mohamad 1992: 69).

A second stream in the “culturalist” perspective does not assume difference but aims to “deconstruct” cultural representations, that is, uncover their underlying meanings. This work has produced a number of important insights into the form of and processes underlying particular representations. For example David Reeve has analysed Australian novels of the 1980s and 1990s dealing with Indonesia, and a series of cartoons that appeared at the time of the 1995 security treaty between Australia and Indonesia (Reeve 1998). He finds striking similarities with similar texts from the around the turn of the century. A number of novels appeared from the 1880s to early 1900s that had as a theme sensational accounts of Asian invasions of Australia, and featured representations of Asian people as cunning, sensuous, cruel and vicious, opposed by virtuous and sturdy white Australians. While the more recent novels have more developed and varied representations of Asian characters, many of the stereotyped codes re-occur: brutal soldiers, mad generals, apocalyptic invasions. Cartoons from around the turn of the century, in which the pure, white “little boy from Manly” is menaced by fiendish orientals, are also reflected in the 1995 texts that Reeve analyses, in which a abject Paul Keating (Australian Prime Minister 1991-1996) is dominated by Suharto, represented variously as an enormous buffoon, a bear and a dog.

Reeve briefly reviews some of the explanations for why racist representations occur and seem to be historically resilient:
concerns for security; working class fears of competition; ruling class “divide and rule” tactics; “cultural baggage” coming with settlers from Europe and US gold-fields; an Australian “orientalism”, spurred on by the dispossession of the indigenous people. Reeve seems to think that there are some social factors which work to reproduce specific representations, but is cautious about making general conclusions. He does seem to, somewhat sadly, argue against the idealist notion that education alone will change people’s preconceptions, remarking that “what little effect our decades of teaching and advocacy have had” and “perhaps we had been too hopeful that the negative emotions of the past were ebbing away” (Reeve 1998: 9).

Many commentators in the field of cultural representation, have applied the method and terminology developed by Edward Said in Orientalism, writing of and analysing the stereotyped “orientalist” myths that Western culture has constructed of the Eastern “other” (Said 1985). But many of the works in this perspective do not even make the cursory attempts of Reeve to “deconstruct” culture itself, instead taking the term for granted in a similar manner to the conservative “culturalists”. As Frost notes, a number of commentators repeatedly switch from denying real cultural difference to asserting the explanatory relevance of such difference (1996: 32-33). This, I would suggest, allows an apparently critical analysis of cultural representations, without the need to uncover the roots of such representations.

Analysing culture per se is inadequate, as this reifies the concept as an unchanging monolith, abstracted from social and historical conditions, intra-cultural conflicts and inter-cultural relations. For example, Alan Knight set out to test Said’s thesis with respect to Australian correspondents in Southeast Asia, and stated from his analysis of the sources used that there was a danger of correspondents being “trapped in a cycle of preconceptions created by their predominantly Western sources” (Knight 1995: 14). This may indeed be true, but without an analysis of the historical background and ideological content of such preconceptions, we are left with the simple assertion that there is such a thing as a clearly “Western” as opposed to “Eastern” preconception. The immutability of cultures is suggested a number of times by writers who have contributed to a collaborative series on Australian perceptions of Asia and Asian perceptions of Australia: for example, in the extremely strong claim that it is “impossible to transport and transplant words and concepts from one culture to another without changing their meaning” (Miller 1994: 74).

Alison Broinowski has also followed Said in her examination of the construction of stereotyped representations of
Eastern culture in Australian art history (Broinowski 1996). A number of writers have interrogated Broinowski’s text in terms of her social and political position as a leading cadre of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, who was not just interested in deconstructing orientalist myths but also in ideologically supporting the Keating government’s “Push to Asia” crusade of the early 1990s (for example Frost, 1994 and Frost, 1996). A purely cultural analysis of orientalist representations reduces the question to one of misunderstanding, and poses the solution merely in terms of a new type of understanding. This neatly mystifies both the social and economic basis of racism, and the social and economic basis of the “Push to Asia” which sought more favourable relations with Asian rulers for the benefit of Australian big capital while the majority of Asia people remained repressed and exploited.

Some accounts, while lucidly describing recurring cultural myths, tend to reify individual psychology as well as “culture” itself. AH Vickers has examined some of the key codes and myths in Australian writing on Indonesia pre-dating more well-known works such as Koch’s Year of Living Dangerously (Koch 1978). The allure of the mysterious “other”; the excitement of “dangerous” physical, psychological and sexual explorations; racist stereotypes which sometimes have complex shades of ambiguity and hybridity; and feelings at being in the “margins” between the metropolis and the colonised world (Vickers 1998). He finds strong echoes of these codes operating in more recent novels and films. Vickers’ account, which explicitly draws on Said (the other) and Homi Bhabha (hybridity), is heavily psychologised. He writes that one novel represents the Indonesian islands as if “their allure and dangerous exoticism invites physical journeys which are also explorations of the inner nature of mankind” (Vickers 1998: 23).

Of racism he writes that it is “in one sense a repulsion from a racially-defined Other, but its obverse is an attraction to that Other” (Vickers 1998: 25). Vickers presents virtually no historical, social or political context (of either Australia or Indonesia), making these representations simply psychological reflections of an abstract “culture”. His view that “most Australians were reassured in their view of Indonesia by the recent [July 1996] riots in Jakarta, since we are more comfortable with menacing, amok-running Asians than with economic prosperity and lairy batik shirts” is not only unsubstantiated but meaningless (Vickers 1998: 21). As analyses of the recent Asian economic crisis show, “economic prosperity” was just as mythical a construction as the propensity of Asians to “riot” (Cheng 1998) — and both myths serve the ideological purpose of masking the real social processes at work.
In an analysis of Australian novels that have Australian characters and Indonesia as a setting, Paul Tickell has argued, in fairly general terms, that an understanding of Australian representations of Indonesia requires an examination of the social reality of both countries (Tickell 1998). Rory Barnes’ and James Birrell’s *Water From the Moon* deals with Australian business consultants, and the Indonesian characters are one-dimensional cyphers that serve to signify stereotypes such as corruption or sensuality (Barnes and Birrell 1989). Gerard Lee’s *Troppo Man* is the story of an Australian seeking more “authentic” interactions with Indonesians, but cannot escape his own, liberal and “culturally sensitive” but patronising, fantasies and preconceptions (Lee 1990). Tickell argues that the novel that most successfully engages with Australian experiences of Indonesia is Inez Baranay’s *The Edge of Bali*, which describes how several characters realise and to some extent transcend their own varied mythical constructions of Bali (Baranay 1992).

The novel’s aesthetic success comes from Baranay’s recognition of the validity of various Australian and western perceptions, and crucially from developing fully-fledged Indonesian characters from a range of backgrounds and perspectives. Tickell frames his survey with a discussion of economic and social factors such as immigration, tourism, education and investment that highlight increasing Australian/Indonesian interaction. He concludes that for aesthetic success in texts dealing with this subject matter, the reality of both Indonesia and Australia has to be honestly examined, pointing out that “to question the stereotypes [of Indonesia] may lead to a questioning of oneself — and that is frequently not all that comfortable” (Tickell 1998: 37).

David Hannan looks at the newsreel films of Mel Nichols in the 1930s and Fred Daniels in the 1940s, and places the representations of Indonesians in these texts in historical and institutional contexts (Hannan 1998). He refers often to the work of Said, but criticises Said for overgeneralising from an analysis of European-Middle Eastern relations, and argues that to understand the meanings of cultural representations, a close examination of historical and political specifics are needed. For example, he seeks to explain why Daniels closely followed orientalist myths of docile, child-like natives ruled over by the benevolent Dutch, while Nichols’ work tended to oscillate between this code and representations of Indonesians as active, intelligent and interesting in their own right. Daniels’ film company was consciously working for the allied war effort and was closely tied to the Dutch government in exile, while Nichols had a general aim of educating Australians about their neighbours. Hannan also
contrasts the myths of Dutch colonial rule with the harsher reality. But, despite arguing that “the Australian regional position needs to be theorised” (Hannan 1998: 15), he does not discuss in any detail how specifically Australian interests affect the representations in these films, beside noting Menzies’ strong support for the Dutch and a general faith in British imperialism.

Work within the culturalist perspective has brought to light a number of recurring myths and representations in Australian discourses on Indonesia and Asia. But analyses in this perspective have ignored, or at least undertheorised, the historical and social conditions under which cultures are formed and undergo change. The theoretical background to this is a particular reading of Said. Said himself, particularly in later works, does not see culture in itself as explaining that much, for example writing that “culture is a sort of theatre where various political and ideological causes engage one another” (Said 1994: 31). That is, we cannot understand culture, and the signs, texts, representations and discourses that constitute culture, without grounding it in politics and ideology.

An extensive analysis of the political context in which Australian journalism on Indonesia was produced in the period 1975-93 has been undertaken by Damien Kingsbury (Kingsbury 1997). He outlines relevant aspects of Indonesian history and politics, developments in the global communications and media industries, especially as they relate to “developing” countries, and aspects of the Indonesian media such as mechanisms of control and censorship. Kingsbury also examines the nature of the Australian media, and the influence on content from “news values”, and the structural differences between different types of media. He specifically takes issue with simplistic “culturalist” perspectives, arguing that perceived cultural differences are really about “conflicts between different political systems”, between authoritarianism and liberalism (Kingsbury 1997: viii). But he still sees a fundamental “clash of cultures” as the key determinant of Australian media representations of Indonesia, even if culture is understood as a battleground of politics and ideology (ibid: 144-150).

In a review of Kingsbury’s text, Hirst suggests that Kingsbury however takes for granted the “free” nature of the Australian media, and ignores ideological similarities between Indonesian and Australian journalism, such as support for the “national interest” (Hirst 1998). While Kingsbury’s intervention provides very useful data and analysis in understanding the background to the subject at hand, in a manner similar to Tiffen he does not overcome many of the limitations of the liberal-pluralist paradigm. We need first of all to be clear about the ideology and politics that constitutes the “culture” of the Australian media.
A third discourse on media representations lies within what is often referred to as the “political economy” perspective in media and communications research. This perspective is defined by McChesney (2000) as one that critically examines both how media and communications systems affect the broader structures of society, and how ownership patterns and government policies affect media behaviour and content. McChesney (2000) puts forward a spirited defence of political economy as an approach that is vital to ensuring the relevance and independence of media and communications studies in a society in which both research and communication systems are increasingly dominated by the needs of big capital. Geoffrey Gunn has discussed Australian journalism on East Timor, explaining it in terms of the history of the Australian government’s relationship with Indonesia (Gunn 1994). Jefferson Lee has looked at the themes of the Australian media’s coverage of Asia, using as an example the extensive coverage of the “Push to Asia” rhetoric of the former ALP government in 1992 (Lee 1993).

Both Gunn and Lee, in their methodology, refer to Herman and Chomsky’s “propaganda model” of the media. Herman and Chomsky (1998) argue that media content is determined by “inequalities of wealth and power and its multilevel effects on mass-media interests and choices” (p. 2). They suggest five filters interrelating “filters”: the size, concentrated ownership and profit orientation of media organisations; the need to attract advertising; the use of “flak” (boycotts, publicity campaigns, libel suits) by business and government to attack media outlets they do not like; and the ideology of anti-communism. These combine to generally “filter out” content that is not in corporate and state interests (pp. 1-35).

Herman and Chomsky stress direct “propaganda campaigns” and the media’s system-supporting function by reliance on market forces, internalised assumptions and self-censorship” (p. 306). They imply a very direct, uncontradictory and conscious (apart from the reference to “internalised assumptions”) working of ideology. They stress direct economic determinants, without a general theory of ideology in capitalist society that affects the discourse of, for example, academic and non-commercial media. Gunn and Lee show some of the gaps in this method. Lee sees the commercial media as largely following the government agenda but does not seem to see an ideological role for the ABC and SBS, claiming that they have “fought vigorously to maintain their fourth estate role” (Lee 1993: 28).

Gunn sees an important role for academic discourse and the influence of the “Indonesia lobby” of business people, academics and politicians in shaping media discourse (Gunn 1994: 28).
but without an analysis of an underlying ideology. It is clear, however, that there are direct economic constraints on the media, the Australian press being a good example. The need for advertising revenue played a crucial role in killing off much of the radical press and encouraging increased concentration of ownership through the twentieth century (Bonney and Wilson 1983).

The post-1986 media laws, which were supposedly aimed at the facilitation of more diverse ownership patterns, resulted in, after several years of turmoil and buyouts, News Limited and Fairfax controlling nearly 90% of press circulation (Schultz 1997). Sometimes the effects of the commercial interests of media owners can be very clear, as when The Australian’s Patrick Walters gave, in 1993, a glowing account of the New Order’s achievements, followed in his next dispatch by an interview with his boss, Rupert Murdoch, over the latter’s plans to expand Star TV into Indonesia (Pilger 1994: 316). It is clear that there is the possibility of quite direct propaganda campaigns. Lee discusses the 1992 “Push to Asia” media campaign, pointing out the strongly interventionist and conscious role of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in directing the agenda through means such as conferences, briefing papers and frequent articles by government figures (Lee 1993: 22-23).

An analysis of the specific political economy of the mass media, of their structures and their place as commercial enterprises or bureaucratic institutions with strong ties to the state and national and international markets, is hence a vital framework for understanding many of the pressures and constraints which contribute to the meaning of mass media texts. But journalists and media workers are not tabula rasa when they begin their careers, ready to be programmed by the owners of media corporations. The producers of media texts have been influenced from birth by the ideas prevalent in society, ideas that have developed historically and are expressed in various codes and myths. The texts produced by media workers interact not just with the structures of particular media institutions, but with the structures of and discourses produced by government, academia, business, and so on. This suggests that a theory of ideology as socially produced knowledge and discourse is vital to any analysis of media representations.

I have argued that the three broad perspectives within the analysis of Australian media representations of Indonesia all present useful insights, but also display some methodological limitations. The “liberal-pluralist” perspective contains much useful data on the specific institutional constraints on journalists, however can ignore or mystify the broader social meanings of media representations. Within the “culturalist” perspective the
important myths and codes that re-occur within the Australian media are analysed, and their historical antecedents traced, but again there are often inadequate accounts of social structure. The political-economic perspective usefully concentrates on the structures of media institutions, and how social and economic forces shape media products, but undertheorises the role of discourse and ideology. So we return to Bennett, and the observation that a theory of the media is a theory of society. In my view the analysis of media texts needs a clear understanding of the social relations within which the texts are produced, and one that is clearly stated to the extent necessary for a particular analysis. Part of this needs to be an understanding of the role of ideology within particular social relations. Within such a framework, we can fruitfully utilise and integrate many of the insights of the writers discussed above.

References


Gunn, Geoffrey (1994) A Critical View of Western Journalism and


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Notes

1. See also Milner 1993 and Milner 1995.
2. He seems to have missed the irony of himself reducing a multi-faceted political struggle to a “riot”.
3. This view echoes an earlier article by Hurst (1987), who also sees Australian media representations of Indonesia in terms of a clash between a critical media and a “developmentalist” culture.
4. Anti-communism perhaps being less relevant in the western (but not Indonesian) media, but an interesting generalisation of this idea would be the role of representations of Islamic fundamentalism, militant nationalism etc in the western media. See for example Semati, 1997.

NICK FREEDMAN is a PhD candidate at the School of Humanities, Media and Cultural Studies at Southern Cross University, Lismore in New South Wales, Australia. Email: nfredm10@scu.edu.au