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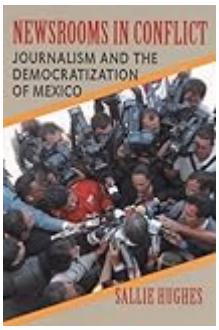

Sallie Hughes. *Newsrooms in Conflict: Journalism and the Democratization of Mexico.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006. 256 pp. $22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8229-5928-1.

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On March 18, 2006, as Mexico geared up for the first presidential election since the toppling of the Institutional Revolutionary Party's (PRI) seventy-one-year-old hold over the presidency, Televisa morning talk show host Victor Trujillo introduced a special segment that aired on Mexico City's Channel 4. The taped segment, entitled "*Si yo fuera presidente*" ("If I were president"), allowed "everyday" women and men to state what they would do if they were elected as the country's chief executive. The network's decision to include the voices of "everyday people" represented a dramatic departure from its news programming nineteen years earlier, when biased broadcast news leading up to the election favored elite ruling party officials such as PRI presidential candidate Carlos Salinas Gortari and negatively framed opposition candidate Cuauhtemoc CÃ¡rdenas from the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD).

In *Newsrooms in Conflict: Journalism and the Democratization of Mexico*, Sallie Hughes examines the changes that took place in Mexico's newsrooms in this period between 1980 and the 2006 election. She argues that changes in television news coverage were triggered by a market-driven strategy initiated by Televisa's new president, Emilio AzcÃ¡rraga Jean, who took over a few months before his father, Emilio AzcÃ¡rraga Milmo's death in 1997, as well as political and economic changes that began in the mid-1980s (p. 177). In her ambitious analysis, Hughes endeavors to trace both how and why Mexican journalism changed during this period of broad societal transformation.

Hughes, who worked as a journalist in Mexico between 1993 and 2005, argues that, as Mexican society challenged the country's authoritarian regime, so-called civic journalism became the country's dominant form of newspaper journalism (p. 12). She uses the word "civic" to describe those journalists who played a vital role in the larger process of democratization. She also argues that, as the country's political and economic systems liberalized, key "change agents" (such as Roberto Rock, editor of Mexico's *El Universal*) worked to transform the news media from a primarily authoritarian institution to a hybrid system of civic; inertial and adaptive authoritarian; and market-driven newsrooms. According to Hughes, the main differences between the various forms of journalism relate to how and what stories are covered in a newsroom as well as a newsroom's relationship to the government. For example, civic journalists tend to be more assertive, cover a diversity of political viewpoints, and remain autonomous from the government. In general, inertial and adaptive authoritarian journalists remain politically and economically tied (through government subsidies and advertising) to the government. Market-driven

journalism tends to prioritize generating profit and consumers for advertisers over informing the public.

The evidence presented in Hughes's work parallels what Silvio Waisbord (*Watchdog Journalism in South America: News, Accountability, and Democracy*, 2000) found in South America during roughly the same period. Hughes adds that in contrast to civic newspapers, television news generally moved away from an authoritarian model (characterized by close political and economic ties to the government and biased news coverage in favor of the ruling party) to one based on the market. Gabriel GonzÃ¡lez Molina's "The Production of Mexican Television News: The Supremacy of Corporate Rationale" (1990) and this reviewer's "*Tele-visiones* (televisions): The Making of Mexican Television News, 1950-1970" (2006) also offer evidence to demonstrate that capitalistic interests drove television news production long before the political and economic openings of the late twentieth century.[1]

For Hughes, the transition from authoritarian to civic journalism and market-driven models emerged differently and at distinct times at Mexico's leading dailies and television news stations. More important, the diverging approaches that emerged in this period put newsrooms and those who ran them at odds. Indeed, for Hughes, while the political, economic, and social environment may have helped shape the model that predominated in the late twentieth century, the primary locus of transformation was the newsroom itself; and the changes that took place there depended in large part on the actions of "institutional entrepreneurs" such as Alejandro Junco of *El Norte* (p. 32). Moreover, she constructs convincing arguments and conclusions based on solid evidence to demonstrate that economic pressures alone could not explain the decision to newsrooms and the news media.

Indeed, where Chappell Lawson's *Building the Fourth Estate: Democratization and the Rise of a Free Press in Mexico* (2002) sees marketplace competition as the important factor in initiating change, Hughes finds power in the individual innovations of civic-minded newspaper owners and editors who ran newspapers such as *El Norte*, in Monterrey, in the northern state of Nuevo LeÃ³n. The values and practices of this first wave of journalism innovators influenced other newsrooms, leading to a second stage of transition marked by an increase in more assertive, autonomous, and diverse news coverage (pp. 127, 128). For example, in the 1970s, Alejandro Junco worked to transform *El Norte* and later inculcated the same journalistic values among journalists who worked at *Reforma*, which he established in 1993 (pp. 110, 111). Similarly, editors from *La Jornada* , which was established in 1984, influenced *El Sur*'s news coverage, which was established in 1992 (pp. 110, 111).

Theoretically, Hughes approaches the subject much like a sociologist by examining four levels of what she calls institutional domains: the environment (society, politics, and economics); the news media; newsrooms; and mental models (way of viewing the world) of journalists (pp. 39, 197). The interaction among these four domains influenced the transformation of news media.

In the qualitative sections of her study, Hughes uses content analysis to study newspapers at five-year intervals between 1980 and 2000, in 2000 leading up to the presidential election, and in 2003 during the midterm elections. A content analysis also was conducted of local television newscasts in four states (Baja California, Tabasco, Tlaxcala, and Guanajuato) and of national television news coverage in 2003. In addition, the author employed deep ethnographic techniques, based on interviews with 126 journalists in 1999 and 16 in 2003, to explain the transformation in journalism practice and production (pp. 13-16).

Hughes's decision to conduct a content analysis of local television news stations along with the four national newspapers during the 2000 campaign seems somewhat illogical. (Why not compare national dailies with national news coverage at this critical point in the political transition?) But she suggests that "while national networks produced relatively balanced news coverage by the 2000 campaign, local coverage remained slanted in ways that suggested linkages to local political elites rather than the influence of audience preferences" (p. 147). Juxtaposing national television news with national newspapers, rather than local news coverage, may have provided additional valuable information about the differences between television news coverage and newspapers. The Mexican Academy of Human Rights recorded television reports during that period, making that data available. Furthermore, because she decided to only include newspapers and not television news in her "civic journalism index," which describes where on the continuum between authoritarian and civic journalism a media outlet lies, the results might appear to be somewhat skewed (p. 68). Her index for 2000, for example, described *El ExcelsiÃ³r* as authoritarian, *La Jornada* and *El Universal*leaning toward the civic, and *Reforma*well within the category of civic journalism. The omission of national television news coverage in 2000 from her

very detailed content analysis leaves the reader somewhat perplexed.

Still, one of the most valuable elements of *Newsrooms in Conflict* is the author's ability through detailed analysis and engaging prose, to explain how, over the span of two decades, the news media transformed from primarily authoritarian practices to an increasing number of civic journalism publications. Her content analysis of the four leading capital city dailies, *El ExcÃ©lsior*, *El Universal*, *Reforma*, *La Jornada*, helps to demonstrate that as a whole the newspaper industry moved toward civic-minded journalism; but when looked at specifically, each paper moved in that direction at distinct moments in time. In general, the figures, tables, and graphs work well to illustrate the transformation. Ethnography allows the author to explain the logic behind the divergent paths within each newsroom. Hughes's study is one of the few in English to provide such valuable empirical data for this period regarding the nature of change within and among the news media in Mexico.

An explanation of the limits of civic journalism represents another strength in the work. She provides useful data regarding a new group of "untouchables." Big business and those connected to drug trafficking often remained off the news pages and television screens. While journalists in the 1990s tended to be more assertive when interviewing elected officials, they became passive when covering the country's most wealthy individuals and drug traffickers. Threats of losing advertising revenue from Carlos Slim (reportedly the country's most wealthy individual) or losing one's life by the actions of a drug lord replaced the government's carrot-and-stick approaches to influencing news coverage.

Hughes does a more than adequate job explaining the political and economic milieu in which journalism transformed, but ignores technological advances such as the Internet and the related growth of civic-based websites, such as *Periodistas de InvestigaciÃ³n* (*Investigative Journalists*) whose online site aided in the acceleration of civic journalism. Through the Internet some innovative news editors and reporters gained national as well as international respect, and the same technology facilitated the ability of journalists to connect with their counterparts abroad. As Hughes explains, both international respect and exposure to foreign news journalists and paradigms influenced the civic journalists' decisions to alter their newsrooms (pp. 125, 127).

Scholars of Mexico might be annoyed slightly by a few oversights regarding important dates in the nation's past. Hughes states that President Miguel AlemÃ¡n officially inaugurated television during his "third State of the Nation Address in 1949" (p. 166). The official inauguration actually happened a year later during AlemÃ¡n's fourth *informe* (address) on September 1, 1950. In addition, she misstates the beginning of the early twentieth-century revolt as "the outbreak of the 1917 Revolution," which began in 1910.

But the wealth of data included in Hughes's work, and her exhaustive study about the transformation of journalism in Latin America's second-largest country, far outweigh any of the book's shortcomings. Hughes's study offers scholars valuable empirical data to conduct future research within Mexico as well as sets the groundwork for additional comparative study. An insightful examination of newsrooms and those who ran them, her study demonstrates that by the early twentieth century the news media moved beyond what has been described as a "culture of collusion."[2] Correctly, Hughes concludes that it is up to key newsroom change agents to ensure that in the future civic-minded journalists play an active democratic role, in a country whose citizens struggle to overcome daunting political, social, and economic challenges.

[1.] See Gabriel GonzÃ¡lez Molina, "The Production of Television News: The Supremacy of Corporate Rationale," (Ph.D. diss., University of Leicester, 1990); and Celestine GonzÃ¡lez de Bustamante, "Televisiones (televisions): The Making of Mexican Television News, 1950-1970," (Ph.D. diss., University of Arizona, 2006). [2] See William A. Orme, Jr., ed. *A Culture of Collusion: An Inside Look at the Mexican Press* (Coral Gables, FL: North-South Center Press, 1997).

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