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Title	A multidisciplinary understanding of news: Comparing elite press framing of 9/11 in the US, Italy, France and Pakistan
Authors	Archetti, C
Publication title	Journal of International Communication
Publisher	
Type	Article
USIR URL	This version is available at: http://usir.salford.ac.uk/id/eprint/2732/
Published Date	2007

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A Multi-disciplinary Understanding of News: Comparing Elite Press Framing of 9/11 in the US, Italy, France and Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Political Communications, International Communications, News Sociology, all claim to offer an explanation for what shapes the news, but provide extremely different, if not contradictory suggestions. Political communications almost takes for granted the fact that official actors have a major role in shaping news stories at the national level. International Communications points at several possibilities: structural economic imbalances lead to unidirectional news flows from rich countries towards poor countries; globalization causes news to become homogenised on a worldwide scale; news is geared to the tastes of local audiences by national news producers. News sociology, instead, argues that the news product of each media organization is the unique output of patterns of social interactions among media professionals. An international comparative study of the elite press framing of 9/11 in the US, Italy, France, and Pakistan reveals the limits of these approaches: none of them alone is able to explain the patterns of news contents that were detected in the empirical investigation. The analysis suggests that the content of press coverage in the newspapers under analysis is more effectively explained in terms of selection of newsworthy sources, guided by national interest, journalistic culture, and editorial policy. The study points to the benefit of adopting international comparative research designs and fundamentally argues that, if we want to explain news in the information age, we need to approach its study in a multidisciplinary perspective.

PROFILE

Ms. Cristina Archetti (BA Honours Kingston University, MA Leeds University, UK) is Lecturer in International Communications at the Institute of Communications Studies (ICS), Leeds University, where she is also completing her PhD. She has worked on research projects about media management during the 2003 Iraq War and the role of the media within the domestic management of terrorist attacks. Her research interests include the role of the media in international politics, particularly within the current war on terrorism, as well as exploring the application of new multidisciplinary theoretical and methodological approaches.

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Keywords: media, news, elite press, political actors, globalization, localization, media flows, news sociology, framing, 9/11.

EXPLAINING NEWS IN DIFFERENT FIELDS OF STUDY

If a scholar was respectively to approach the literature of Political Communications, International Communications and News Sociology with the same question -"what shapes the news?"- he or she would face completely different answers. Political Communications argues that political actors have a major role in shaping news stories at the national level. Not only politicians are essential to the news production process because they possess a 'news-making edge' (Bennett 1990, p. 103) and 'enable journalists to fill the daily "newshole" with a steady supply of economical, well-produced material' (ibid.). Politicians also deliberately use the media as a channel to reach out to their electorate. This leads to the refinement of spin techniques and attempts at managing the media (Kavanagh 1995; Pfetsch 1998; Bennett and Manheim 2001; Oborne and Walters 2004). Berkowitz (1992), writing about the ability of political actors to set the media agenda, writes for example:

> 'when policymakers attempt to influence public opinion, they often see the mass media as a convenient channel for transmitting their messages. Sometimes, they intentionally attempt to place stories, while other times, they position themselves as useful news sources whom journalists can come

to depend on. They also develop a sense of how to avoid the media agenda' (Berkowitz 1992, p. 88).

International Communications points at least at three possibilities. Media flows studies claim the existence of unidirectional and unbalanced news flows among countries (Nordenstreng and Varis 1974; Sreberny Mohammadi 1984; Sreberny-Mohammadi, Nordenstreng, Stevenson and Ugboajah 1985; Varis 1985; Ishii 1996; De Beer 2000; Elliott 2000). Boyd-Barrett, for example, wrote that 'while there is a heavy flow of exported media products from the US to, say, Asian countries, there is only a very slight trickle of Asian media products to the US' (Boyd-Barrett 1977, p. 117).

Advocates of globalization support the idea that news is becoming homogenised on a worldwide scale. The development of a global media network is often uncritically assumed to be a synonym with worldwide homogenisation of media contents (Giddens 1991; Robertson 1992; Lash and Urry 1994). Globalization of news is the ground for claims that the development of communications technologies and the multiplication of media channels is leading to a shrinking debate rather than a proliferation of views (Sparks 1998). Paterson, for example, suggests that 'the proliferation of television news is ultimately insignificant, and in fact, illusory, if the original source of most international news material is all the same' (Paterson 1997, p. 154).

Supporters of localization reject the idea of global news in favour of its diversification along national lines (Gurevitch, Levy and Roeh 1991; Clausen 2003, 2004). The advances of communication technologies and news agency access contribute to the worldwide diffusion of information about the same events, but the same information is framed differently at the national level by news producers who adapt it to the taste and interests of local audiences.

News Sociology, instead, argues that the news product of each media organization is the unique output of patterns of social interactions among media professionals and between them and the rest of society. News, as the old say goes, is 'what newspapermen make it' (Gieber 1964).

Why do the three fields of study present such different explanations for what shapes the news? What evidence exists supporting each approach? Finding an answer to these questions has important implications for the way we understand the role of the media in society: either as a powerful tool in the hands of political power; or the passive receiver of influences from agent-less global processes that appear to be out of the control of any single government or media organization; or an institution ruled by its own internal dynamics. It is important to understand what shapes media contents since there are extremely different views on what these contents can do to our societies: for example the media can either constructively contribute to democratic debate or, through the search for profits and the "dumbing down" of the information it delivers to the public, be a cause for 'civic decay' (Campbell 2004, p. 15-26). It is the assessment of the extent to which media organizations are in control of the news they produce that can tell whether it is meaningful to blame the media for the social problems it is believed to encourage (BMA 2000), or whether, by bringing more attention to international conflicts, it can perhaps awake the world's conscience (Seib 2002).

All these considerations support the need to assess what the nature of news really is and what are the factors that shape it. This can be done by simultaneously testing the different approaches that have been described in a multidisciplinary perspective that spans across three fields of study.

The article presents the results of a study that has explored the validity of the different approaches on the news coverage of 9/11 in 8 elite newspapers across the US, Italy, France and Pakistan. The study derives from each theoretical approach a prediction (hypothesis) of the way news should change across the four countries. It then proceeds to verify the congruence between the hypotheses and the actual contents of the news coverage, detected

through an in-depth content analysis. The analysis' central finding is that what shapes the news is neither the influence of political actors; nor international macro-processes; nor social interactions among media professionals *only*. Each theory alone is unable to explain what shapes media coverage beyond its narrow concern, respectively, with what happens either at the international, national or media-organizational level. What is needed, instead, is a deeper understanding of the way news is constructed, which can be achieved by analyzing the newsworthy sources within the news and the factors that shape their selection.

The argument will develop in four steps. The first identifies the different hypotheses about the way news should change at either the international, national or media organisational level across the countries and newspapers under study. The second will present the method for testing the hypotheses. The third and main section will illustrate the findings of the analysis. The article argues that none of the approaches alone is able to explain the news patterns identified within the empirical case study. News coverage, instead, is more effectively explained by three main factors, which cut across the three fields of study: national interest, journalistic culture and editorial policy. While by no means they constitute all the factors that shape the news, they were found to heavily affect the way the issue of 9/11 was covered across the different countries and newspapers under analysis. More specifically these factors affected news coverage by constraining the choices made by journalists and editors in selecting the newsworthy sources during the news-making process. The conclusions will spell out the theoretical lesson that can be drawn from the study: if we really want to explain news in the information age, we need to approach its study in a multidisciplinary perspective.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

The validity of the approaches from the three fields of study is assessed on the basis of the predictions each of them make in relation to news contents and the way they should change across countries and media organisations. A first step in testing the approaches is therefore translating them into hypotheses. Each hypothesis consists of two elements: a prediction of a news content outcome; and the level at which the content outcome should materialize (Table 1). There are five different hypotheses: one from Political Communications (indexing); three from International Communications (media flows, globalization, localization) and one from News Sociology (hierarchy-of-influences).

Within the field of Political Communications the extent to which political actors affect media discourse has historically been conceptualized in different ways. Hegemony studies, for example, have emphasized an almost exclusive influence by political power on the media (Gitlin 1980; Hallin 1984). While the view that media and politicians have an ambivalent relationship and can influence each other is not new (Cohen 1963; Sigal 1973; Gans 1979), more recent developments in the field have explored the circumstances or the conditions under which one party has more influence on the other. Several studies have indeed pointed out that, far from being a passive recipient of the influence by political actors, the press enjoys margins of independence (Callaghan and Schnell 2001; Althaus 2003; Bennett and Livingston 2003; Livingston and Bennett 2003; Entman 2003, 2004). The 'bottom line,' as Althaus (2003) puts it, is that: 'we simply don't know how independent news discourse might be from the parameters of official debate' (Althaus 2003, p. 388). Out of the many possibilities I selected the "indexing hypothesis" (Bennett 1990) because it is more manageable for analytical purposes as it establishes a correlation of contents between the debate of the political elite and the news. According to Bennett (1990, p. 106) 'mass media news professionals, from the boardroom to the beat, tend to "index" the range of voices and viewpoints in both news and editorials according to the range of views expressed in mainstream government debate about a given topic.' This means, in practice, that news at a national level reflects the views of the political discourse (Hypothesis 1)

News flow theory claims that an unbalanced and unidirectional flow of news runs from richer countries to poorer countries. This translates, given that the US is the richest country in the world (IMF World Economic Outlook Database), into an "Americanization" of news. The extent to which news in different parts of the world mirrors American news should vary. The expectation is that the poorer the country, the higher the extent to which its news reproduces the same contents of the American news. Developing countries' news should therefore be more "Americanized" than news in other Western countries (Hypothesis 2).

Scholars supporting the idea of globalization of media contents explain it with either technological advances of communications (McLuhan and Fiore 1968; Giddens 1991), or media convergence (McChesney 1998), the commonality of professional journalistic standards (Gurevitch, Levy and Roeh 1991; Josephi 2005), the use of the same news agencies' sources (Paterson 1997; Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen 1998b; Clausen 2003, 2004) or a combination of several, if not all, of these factors. They all agree on convergence and homogenization of news at the international level. In the literature globalization is often assumed to be the outcome of cultural imperialism: as Boyd Barrett (1997, p. 143) puts it 'globalisation is Westernization.' Globalization is also equated with Americanization: 'Is globalization another term for Americanization? The general pattern of media ownership indicates that the West, led by the USA, dominates the international flow of information and entertainment in all major media sectors' (Thussu 2000, p. 167). For the purpose of defining a third hypothesis for the study, however, international homogenisation of news is not taken to coincide necessarily with an Americanization of news. News coverage is rather expected to present common features all over the world (Hypothesis 3).

Localization of news along national lines is associated by Gurevitch, Levy and Roeh (1991) to cultural, political differences as well as diversities in the journalistic culture of each country. They explain that while the shared professional culture leads to commonality of media reporting across countries, news contents are not entirely the same:

> 'television news simultaneously maintains both global and culturally specific orientations. This is accomplished, first, by casting far-away events in frameworks that render these events comprehensible, appealing and "relevant" to domestic audiences; and second by constructing the meanings of these events in ways that are compatible with the culture and the "dominant ideology" of the societies they serve' (Gurevitch, Levy and Roeh 1991, p. 206).

In other words international news is "domesticated" through the news production process leading, in terms of contents, to distinctive national perspectives (Clausen 2003, 2004). This means that even different media organisations in the same country should present, in their respective coverage, the same ideas (Hypothesis 4).

News sociology engages directly with the questions of what is news and what are the factors shaping it. The general answer given by the field is that news is a social product shaped by the interactions among media professionals, media organisations and society. [1] This basic understanding is translated, in research terms, into multiple focuses within the field. The main levels of analysis are the individual, the organisational, and the societal. The way individual preferences and attitudes affect media contents are mainly covered by studies interpreting the role of the media professional as a "gatekeeper" (White 1950; Gieber 1964). Moving up to a broader perspective from the individual level is the study of the social environment in which

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[1] As Berkowitz (1997, pp. xi-xii) writes, there are also other ways of understanding news. News could be considered a "mirror" of society, a reflection of something that already exists out there, rather than the result of a social construction. He discards this perspective on the ground that it is 'not particularly productive for understanding the nature of news' (ibid.).

journalists operate and the constraints it places on them (Sigelman 1973; Bantz 1985; Soloski 1989). At the societal level different studies point at the importance of political/ideological (Hallin and Mancini 1984, 2004; Herman and Chomsky 1994), economic (Altschull 1995), and cultural influences (Köcher, 1986; Chalaby 1996; Martín Algarra and González Gaitano 1997; Esser 1998).

Within news sociology the "hierarchy-of-influences" model (Shoemaker and Reese 1996; Reese 2001) integrates the different levels of influence on media content in one single theoretical perspective. News content, according to Reese (2001), is the product of five successive levels of influence with each level subsuming the one(s) prior: 1) individual preferences, training and background of media professionals affect their news values, how they write and select stories. They are constrained, however by 2) routines: individuals 'do not have complete freedom to act on their beliefs and attitudes, but must operate within a multitude of limits imposed by technology, time, space, and norms' (Reese 2001, p. 180). But even the routines are shaped by 3) organizational aspects such as policies of the news organisation and the way power is exercised within it. The news organisation is, then, part of society at large and is subject to 4) extra-media influences: institutions such as the government or advertisers, other media organisations. All the factors mentioned contribute to supporting the status quo, serving to making the media an instrument of social control. The last level of influence is therefore the 5) ideological. All the variables identified by the model interact to produce a unique content outcome at the media outlet level. This means that news is expected to be different in each media organisation (Hypothesis 5)

FIELD OF STUDY	Approach	Content outcome	Level
POLITICAL COMMUNICATIONS	1. Indexing	News is indexed to the range of debate within the political elite	National
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS	2. Media flows	"Americanization" of news: the poorer the country, the greater the extent to which its news mirrors American news contents	International
	3. Globalization	Media organisations across different countries present all the same news	International
	4. Localization	Media organisations within the same country present the same news	National
NEWS SOCIOLOGY	5. Hierarchy-of-influences	News by each media organisation is different	Individual media organisation (sub-national)

Table 1 – Overview of the theories under testing

The hypotheses that have been outlined are at the same time obvious and extreme. In fact, on the one hand, even before conducting any empirical investigation, there is little doubt that each of the predictions is going to materialize *to some extent*. News coverage will certainly match at least some of the views within the political debate of a country: the link between 9/11, terrorism and security makes political authorities an extremely newsworthy source of information for journalists. It is reasonable to expect, since the world's attention focused on the US and its reaction to the events, that there will be unbalances in the level of reporting across countries. Thinking back about newspapers' first pages in the aftermath of the events and the presence of the very same pictures and titles reproduced over and over again in so many countries around the world suggests that there is most likely going to be some evidence

of a "globalisation" of coverage. [2] At the same time, while most of the world condemned the attacks, some voices framed the events in a radically different way. Iraqi news, for example, reported on 9/11 'the American cowboy gathers the results of its crimes against humanity.'[3] Media coverage could therefore also be expected to be shaped by "local" ways of interpreting the same global issues. Common sense suggests that news is going to present different characteristics in different newspapers. Left wing newspaper *Libération* did not write an editorial entitled "We are all Americans" in the aftermath of the events like *Le Monde*, [4] but published, instead, the slightly less sympathetic "The new global disorder: The day when America became vulnerable."[5]

On the other hand, none of the hypotheses is going to be confirmed in full. For example it is extremely unlikely that news, anywhere, is going to reproduce the contents of the political discourse only, or that news is literally going to be the same on a global scale across national borders and media organizations. The strength of the study lies in its capacity to test the different hypotheses *simultaneously* to assess their *relative validity* by actually measuring the extent of news coverage similarity and difference across the international, national and media-organizational level. In other words the study assesses the extent to which, for example, news is "globalised" rather than "indexed" to political discourse, or "nationalized" rather than being the product of each single media organization. The opportunity of analysing the variation of news across the international, national and media-organizational level on the same data ultimately enables outlining a hierarchy of relative influences shaping the news. This further leads the way towards refining existing theories, completing them and understanding their limits, eventually building new theory.

METHOD

The project explores the scope and validity of competing explanations for what shapes the news within the case study of 9/11 and its immediate aftermath. The case was chosen for having been the focus of massive media coverage worldwide. The context allows exploring both global dynamics of news reporting as well as local coverage features.

The hypotheses are tested on the content of national elite newspapers. As Benson and Hallin (2005, p. 5) argue, elite newspapers are not representative of the entire media discourse of a country but, they 'occupy similar positions in prestige and influence in each society, making them suitable for a controlled comparative analysis.' The international comparative research design involves a range of international embedded cases (Yin 2003): the US, Italy, France and Pakistan (Figure 1) over a period of two months following 11 September 2001.[6]
The sample includes daily first-page and editorial articles from two elite newspapers per country, respectively of a liberal and more conservative orientation: the *New York Times* (NYT) and the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) in the US; *Libération* (LIB) and *Le Monde* (LM) in France; *La Repubblica* (REP) and *Il Corriere della Sera* (CDS) in Italy; the *Dawn* (DAWN) and the *Nation* (NAT) in Pakistan.

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[2] For examples of front page pictures and titles from the US and the rest of the world see Newseum, *Archived Front Pages (12 September 2001)*, <http://www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/archive.asp?fpArchive=091201> (accessed June 2006).
[3] "Le journal télévise Irakien" in "Dans le monde musulman: rage et désolation," *Le Monde*, 14 September 2001, my translation.
[4] Jean Marie Colombani, Nous sommes tous Américains, *Le Monde*, 13 September 2001, my translation.
[5] Serge July, Le nouveau désordre mondial: Le jour où l'Amérique est devenue vulnerable, *Libération*, 13 September 2001, my translation.
[6] The time span for the study is 11 September 2001 to 14 November 2001. The period covers the 9/11 events, the first reactions to the terrorist attacks, the events leading to the intervention in Afghanistan (starting 7th October) as well as the military operation Enduring Freedom until the conclusion of its first phase culminating in the fall of Kabul (13 November). The scope, sixty-four days, is sufficient to capture both immediate, spontaneous reactions to the events, as well as more reasoned interpretations of the situation, within political and news discourses alike.

The choice of the embedded cases and the newspapers' selection meets the need to test, within the hypotheses, the relevance of different possible variables. In relation to Hypothesis 1 the embedded cases span from a country directly affected by the events, the US, to European countries with no direct involvement (France and Italy), to a case very close to the theatre of the military operations in Afghanistan (Pakistan). France and Italy at the time of the events had governments of a different political orientation: France had a centre-left PM while Italy was led by a centre-right government. This could lead to different levels of closeness between media organisations and governmental actors, possibly affecting the extent to which news in different newspapers is "indexed" to authorities' discourse. Overall the four countries provide different political cultures in terms of institutional practices: the US and France are presidential systems, Italy is a parliamentary Republic, Pakistan, run by General Musharraf who came to power in October 1999 following a military takeover, does not fit the Western definition of a democracy. The inclusion of a non-democratic country allows controlling for possible differences in the relationship between political actors and journalists.

The second hypothesis, particularly the role of economic imbalances on news flows, can be tested across countries with different GDPs. According to data from the International Monetary Fund World Outlook database the US is the richest country in the world, followed by France, then Italy and Pakistan. [7] The expectation, in cross-comparing the news among these countries is that news will be flowing out of the US towards all other countries; that France, while at the receiving end of the flow from the US, will export news towards Italy and Pakistan; that Italy will receive news flows from both the US and France and export to Pakistan. Pakistan should be at the receiving end of all flows. News from poorer countries will present more similarity to the news from richer countries than the other way around.
The choice of the embedded cases also allows controlling for variations in other factors regarded as particularly significant in shaping news flows: cultural (Galtung and Ruge 1965, p. 65; Johnson 1997) and geographical proximity (Sreberny-Mohammadi et al. 1985, p. 52; Kim and Barnett 1996; Van Belle 2000). The US, Italy and France could all be regarded as belonging to the same Western culture, while Pakistan, Asian and Muslim, represents a clearly distinguishable alternative. Within the same Western bloc, however, Italy and France are closer together in both geographical and cultural terms, which should further enhance the similarity of their news in comparison with both Pakistan and the US. [8]

The four countries, distributed across America, the EU and the non-Western world, enable testing whether homogenisation exists on a worldwide scale. This should appear in the form of news similarities across all eight newspapers' contents within the four embedded cases.

The choice of two newspapers per country allows testing the localisation hypothesis: the fact that newspapers from the same country present more similarities than with newspapers from a foreign country would constitute evidence that localisation is truly occurring.

Hypothesis 5, according to which news is mainly shaped at the level of the single media organization, would be supported by little similarity of news contents among newspapers, even within the same country. The further distinction between first page news and editorials allows assessing the impact of editorial policy (Schlesinger 1978). More specifically, a close correspondence between first page news and editorial line on the issue of 9/11 could suggest a

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[7] IMF, World Economic and Financial Surveys: World Economic Outlook Database, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2006/02/data/index.aspx> (accessed July 2006). The data about the gross domestic products (billions of US dollars, current prices) of the four countries is, for 2001, the following: United States 10,127.950; France 1,341.428; Italy 1,118.318; Pakistan 71.854.
[8] Hester (1973 cited in Kariel and Rosenvall 1983, p. 431) writes that a measure of cultural affinity 'might include a shared language, the amount of migration between nationals, the amount of travel between them, and statuses and past-statuses such as mother country-colony, or patronage.' The greater cultural proximity of Italy and France is rooted in the fact that, applying Hester's criteria of shared language, amount of travel and a common history, the two countries speak a Latin-based language, they both belong to the EU and have been part of its Economic Community founding members since 1957.

control on first page content by the newspaper's editor. This is not necessarily exercised personally by the editor, but could also be implemented through organizational routines and hierarchical arrangements within the news organization.

In order to assess the closeness of fit between political debate and the views expressed in the news coverage the study also content analysed political statements (interviews, speeches, press conferences) by governmental actors (presidents, heads of state, prime ministers, foreign and defense ministers) in all countries under analysis for the same time span as for the news analysis.
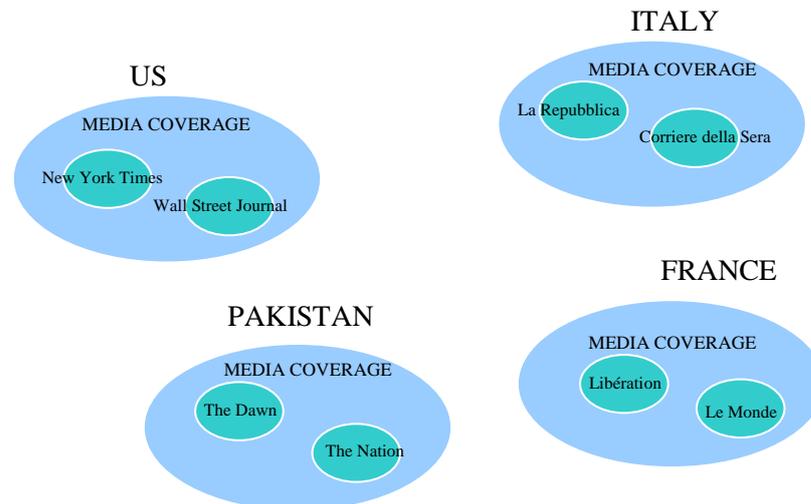
ITALY

US

MEDIA COVERAGE

New York Times

Wall Street Journal

MEDIA COVERAGE

La Repubblica

Corriere della Sera

PAKISTAN

FRANCE

MEDIA COVERAGE

The Dawn

The Nation

MEDIA COVERAGE

Libération

Le Monde

Figure 1 - The 4 embedded cases

The study faced the methodological challenge of approaching news stories in a way that made their contents comparable across the embedded cases. The way the study tackled the problem was by approaching contents in terms of a *framing* process (De Vreese 2003). The study used as a reference Entman's basic definition of frames.

A frame, according to Entman, fundamentally involves selection and salience:

> 'To frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described' (Entman 1993, p. 52, his emphasis).

As an example of frame the author mentions the Cold War: 'The cold war frame highlighted certain foreign events -say civil wars- as problems, identified their source (communist rebels), offered moral judgments (atheistic aggression), and commended particular solutions (U.S. support for the other side)' (Entman 1993, p. 52).

Taking Entman's problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation as a basic structure for approaching the way an issue is framed, the 9/11 events could be seen as terrorist act (problem definition) by evil people (moral evaluation) motivated by hate for freedom and for America's way of life (causal interpretation). In order to bring to justice the perpetrators the world should declare a war on terrorism (treatment recommendation). This, however, is the framing by a specific actor, in this case US President

Bush, at a specific time, the evening of 11 September 2001.[9] At a later stage, on 19 September, in occasion of a meeting with the Indonesian President Megawati, the same 9/11 events are framed slightly differently. The events are a 'crime' (problem definition) committed by 'evildoers' (moral evaluation) motivated again by hate for freedom (causal interpretation) against whom a coalition of freedom-loving countries should fight a global war on terrorism which involves not only eradicating terrorist organizations and punishing those who support them, but also freezing terrorists' funds (treatment recommendation).[10] On 11 September 2001 Secretary of State Powell framed the events as a 'tragedy' that has befallen 'all nations of the world' (problem definition). The events are the result of terrorists' attempt to achieve 'political purposes' (causal interpretation). People who 'believe in democracy' should bring them to justice (treatment recommendation).[11] As seen the contents of a frame, depending on the level of detail at which they are analyzed and on the time span under analysis, can change.

In order to capture small content changes over time within the framing process the analysis focused on smaller units of analysis than a whole frame: *idea elements* (*IE*s).[12] They belong, depending on their relationship to the issue being framed, to different sections of the frame (Problem Definition, Causal Interpretation, Moral Evaluation and Treatment Recommendation). IEs are simple ideas within the news text. For example, in relation to defining the 9/11 events, 'war,' 'attacks,' 'tragedy,' 'event.' In relation to the causal interpretation: terrorists are motivated by 'hatred for human life, 'hatred for America,' 'religious fanaticism,' 'ideology.' The idea of 'war,' depending on the context in which it is used, can be coded also as a Treatment Recommendation. President Bush says, for example, that we should wage a 'war against terrorism.'[13]

IEs are used both for quantitative and qualitative analysis within the study. They are indeed processed quantitatively ("counted") to establish to what extent coverage in two different newspapers, for example, present similarities, but they are also looked at as the building blocks through which social actors, in this case sources "speaking" within the news text, construct meaning (i.e. frame the 9/11 issue). In the following "Findings" section I will refer to the framing of 9/11 within the news stories by providing examples of IEs. In this way the content analysis within this study differentiates itself from more traditional empirical quantitative analyses of news texts.[14]

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[9] George Bush, "Remarks by the President After Two Planes Crash Into World Trade Center," 11 September 2001, *The White House News,* <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911.html> (accessed September 2003).

[10] George Bush, "President Building Worldwide Campaign Against Terrorism," 19 September 2001, *The White House News,* <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010919-1.html> (accessed September 2003).

[11] Colin Powell, "Statement at the Special General Assembly of the Organization of American States," 11 September 2001, *U.S. Department of State Website*, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2001/5260.htm> (accessed September 2003).

[12] This approach is different from Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards and Rucht (2002), from which the study borrows the label of "idea elements." Here the purpose is gathering IEs as a dynamic flow (the "framing process") developing over time. Ferree et al., instead, group the IEs into eight "frames" derived from the legal, political and social movements' context of the countries (US and Germany) involved in their study.

[13] A codebook was specifically designed for guiding the detailed content analysis of the news coverage. The codebook provided a "9/11 datalist." This is a list of ideas (IEs) actually identified within the news discourse during a pilot study preceding the creation of the codebook. The Access database used for the analysis also allowed adding new IEs to the list while the analysis was underway. The "9/11 datalist" eventually contained 599 IEs.
The coding of political statements by four different governments and media coverage of 8 different newspapers over sixty-four days generated 1058 entries into the database. They involved a total of 12,922 IEs recorded in relation to the issue of 9/11.
The codebook and examples of coding of both political statements and news texts can either be consulted at <http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/staff/c.archetti>, or obtained by contacting the author.

[14] The analysis also takes the distance from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), whose approach was deliberately not applied. Despite the fact that CDA focuses on the way relationships of power shape a text (Fairclough 1995) -contrarily to more traditional Discourse Analysis which regards the text as all that exists (Potter and Wetherell 1987)- its approach was judged to be excessively focused on rhetoric. CDA is most appropriate for a microanalysis of a very limited amount of texts. It is ideal to analyse the way power shapes a specific text. While the content analysis presented in the study is extremely detailed and in-depth, its purpose is drawing conclusions about more general trends affecting the shape of news. It aims answering questions such as: What shapes the news? Does news reflect the political discourse? Is news becoming "global" or "local"? Can news be regarded as mostly the product of each single media organization? The study also wants to differentiate among different possible factors shaping the news. Here the findings point at national interest, journalistic culture, editorial policy, each of them having an

The recording of IEs, rather than the frame as a complex whole is useful considering the possibility that different aspects of the frame are addressed at different points in time. It may be that new IEs appear in the news coverage besides already existing ones leading to their gradual replacement: with reference to the case study, the specific idea about an intervention in Afghanistan replaces the general notion of pursuing and punishing those responsible for the attacks. New IEs can be introduced to complement already existing ones: for example beside the idea that the war on terrorism consists in acting against Osama Bin Laden, the view that the war on terrorism is also about acting against all forms of terrorism. It can also be that new IEs are going to replace old ones from a specific point in time: the sudden change in US governmental discourse from "we are not into nation building" to "we are supporting the achievement of a political solution in Afghanistan" towards the end of October 2001.

The decision to record IEs reflects the inductive approach to framing analysis described by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000): the study records the IEs directly from the news stories, without assuming the existence of any specific frame a priori.

The content analysis also records *sources*: they are all actors (politicians, commentators, international organizations spokespersons, media organizations like newsagencies…) who, within news stories, contribute to framing the issue under analysis, 9/11, with at least one IE. They do so either through a statement ('President Bush said: "[quote]"') or through an attribution ('BBC reported that …'). It is important to note that sources are here understood as newsworthy actors making a statement *in the news text*, not as sources of information approached by journalists in the newsgathering process.

Testing the hypotheses consisted in making multiple comparisons of the IEs within the news coverage of 9/11 across or within the embedded cases to verify to what extent the similarity or difference of news contents met the predictions made by the initial hypotheses (Table 1). Testing the indexing hypothesis, for example, involved a comparison of the IEs detected within news coverage in each country with the IEs recorded within the governmental statements of the same country. Testing the globalization hypothesis meant comparing news coverage among all newspapers to assess the extent to which they presented common IEs.

FINDINGS

The indexing, media flows, globalization and localization hypotheses were not supported by the data. What the analysis of the 9/11 coverage contents patterns pointed to was that news is different in each single newspaper, as Hypothesis 5 predicted. The reason for this, however, is more complex than the social interactions among media professionals within each media organization suggested by News Sociology. The simultaneous testing of the different hypotheses and the comparative research design enabled to draw further important observations about what shapes the news. The result of the testing of the hypotheses will be briefly illustrated, before describing the three main variables that were found most effectively to explain the differentiation of news coverage across the newspapers under study: national interest, journalistic culture, editorial policy.

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influence on news at either the international, national, or media-organizational level. CDA could have led to conflating such distinctions into the same "power" box.

The Failure of the Hypotheses in Explaining the Data

News discourses in the four different countries presented some sensitivity to governmental discourse but no "indexing": news tended to report about official reactions to the events, although the extent to which the official framing was reproduced in the media coverage could range from a 66.67% in the NYT to a 27.78% in REP. In all cases this did not mean that the news was merely reflecting the ideas expressed by national politicians. For example, even in the case of the US, where attention to official reactions to the 9/11 events was the greatest among the countries under study, the "official" framing coexisted within the news coverage with inconsistent IEs: in the WSJ, for instance, the governmental idea that the country should fight a military war on terrorism coexisted with the notion that a military action could encourage more terrorism and would not be a solution to the problem.

As far as media flows are concerned, there was no empirical backing for the idea that an "Americanization" of news was taking place across the countries under study. The news discourse in Pakistan which, as the poorest country among the cases, was expected to show the highest degree of similarity to American news coverage, was instead broader than the American news discourse and at least 65% of the ideas contained within it were different from those contained in either the NYT or WSJ. Some examples of ideas showing that no "Americanization" of contents was taking place are the notion that the war on terrorism should be fought through international law; that the crisis following 9/11 should be solved by mediating with the Talibans; and that the effort against terrorism should be targeting governments who support it, with a specific reference to India.

News was markedly different in each single newspaper: this ruled out both the globalization and the localization (national "domestication") hypotheses. By comparing newspaper discourses among each other it was possible to observe that there were just 6 IEs shared by all newspapers which could be termed "global." They only covered the Problem Definition and Treatment Recommendation sections of the framing of 9/11: a 'terrorist attack' (1), if not more generally an 'attack' (2), took place on 11 September 2001; it was orchestrated by Osama Bin Laden (3); the way to deal with the situation is making an effort (4) against terrorism (5), waging a war against it (6). Waging a war on terrorism is intended generally, not in military terms. Considering that the narrowest discourse (NYT) had at least 22 IEs and the broadest (REP) 59, even the presence of the 6 "global" IEs within the coverage did not support the conclusion that a real homogenisation of news was taking place. Not only the framing of the events suggested by the "global" contents is quite general, but its meaning is also changed by the addition of other IEs specific to the coverage of each newspaper. Going back to the example of the NYT, the "global" framing is distorted by the presence of other 18 ideas. Among them are the questioning of Osama Bin Laden's responsibility; the recommendation of eradicating terrorism; and to face the terrorist threat through improved security.

Only 3 newspapers out of 8 showed a higher similarity of contents with national media outlets rather than with foreign newspapers. They are LIB, having 87.1% of its contents in common with LM; CDS sharing 66.04% of its coverage with REP; NAT presenting 82.61% content commonality with the DAWN. What is interesting to notice -and this severely undermines the idea that "national perspectives" exist on the issue under study- is that such higher degree of content commonality with the other national newspaper than with foreign media outlets is not reciprocal: LM shares a higher degree of IEs with REP; REP with LM (here is one reciprocal commonality of contents, which cuts across the border); DAWN with LM.

The Factors Shaping the News

News was found to be strongly shaped by *sources* who frame issues, in this case 9/11, *within the news*. News contents are not created by the "media" as if they were an actor with a will of

its own. News coverage is, instead, constructed. It is the result of a framing competition among the different sources. News, more precisely, is doubly constructed. It is physically put together by editors and journalists during the news-making process and it is further constructed, in meaning, by the sources framing each specific issue within news stories. At this point understanding what shapes the news involves explaining which constraints affect media professionals' choice of the newsworthy sources in the first place.

The factors that were found most to contribute to the selection of sources are national interest, journalistic culture and editorial policy. They act as multiple filters on who is allowed to "speak" within the newspapers pages. I am going to explain more in detail how these factors shape news contents by referring to the 9/11 coverage. In doing so I will explain why they illuminate the reasons for similarities and differences among news in the countries and newspapers under analysis better than the approaches within Political Communications, International Communications and News Sociology currently do.

National Interest

Sources are selected according to their newsworthiness (Gans 1979) and this, according to the analysis, follows each country's national interest. National interest is understood here as a country's level of attention towards foreign countries. As Nye (1999, p. 23) puts is:

> 'In a democracy, the national interest is simply the set of shared priorities regarding relations with the rest of the world. It is broader than strategic interests, though they are part of it. It can include values such as human rights and democracy, if the public feels that those values are so important to its identity that it is willing to pay a price to promote them'

The interest of a country towards the rest of the world can be motivated by a range of different reasons. It can arise from the need to defend a country's security, as in the US; it can be rooted in a foreign policy agenda that wants to promote, as in France, specific cultural values (Rioux and Van Belle 2005, pp. 485-486); or, as in the Pakistani case, can be explained by the dependency on foreign aid and the sense of belonging to a worldwide Muslim community.[15] National interest, in this view, is not, as in the realist tradition of international relations, shaped by a country's resources and fixed (Morgenthau 1967), but it is flexible and constructed over time (Wendt 1992).

Wu argues that less powerful nations are naturally interested in more powerful ones:

> 'the phenomenon of the press' concentration on the world elites perhaps is not entirely unexpected. After all, powerful players set up the game rules and dictate the repertoire of actions performed on the world stage, thus affecting the rest of the less powerful countries....Thus, it makes a lot of sense for most countries to monitor closely the moves of the few elites. In so doing, they could take necessary steps to protect their own national interests should something emergent or threatening occur' (Wu 2000, p. 127).

The author uses the argument to explain why media flows exist. The analysis of the sources' categories which were most frequently found to contribute to the framing of 9/11 confirms the fact that national interest does contribute to the selection of the newsworthy sources, but its effect is entirely opposite to that of media flows. Rather than making a poor country's news more exposed to news imperialism (Galtung 1971, pp. 91-93) by rich countries, a peripheral

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[15] President Pervez Musharraf: Government of Pakistan Info Portal, *Presidential addresses and speeches*, http://www.infopak.gov.pk/President_Addreses/presidential_addresses_index.htm (accessed February 2004).

position in the international system leads to a greater variety of IEs within the coverage. National interest, in fact, shapes the range of sources quoted on newspapers' pages in terms of their country of origin. It also defines their relative importance over time. This is indicated by the frequency with which a source appears within the coverage. The closer to a country's interest, the higher the newsworthiness of a foreign country's sources. As it is possible to observe by comparing Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5, in the US there is far less interest in the outside world than in the rest of the cases. France, Italy and Pakistan reveal greater interest in European, Middle Eastern sources and international organizations. It is the interest in a greater variety of sources that explains the higher diversity of ideas in these countries' news: US discourse presents overall only 26 IEs, against 47 in France, 53 in Italy and 29 in Pakistan.

Another important point to note is the presence of news agencies among Pakistani sources (Figure 5). Over the whole period of analysis they constituted 17% of the overall sources. The reliance on news agencies by developing countries is, in the literature, one of the common explanations for poor countries' news "dependency" on the West (MacBride 1980; Boyd-Barrett 1997) and globalization (Paterson 1997, 1998; Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen 1998a). Poor countries, because of the lack of economic resources for gathering news through their own structures, rely on Western news agencies and this, so the argument goes, leads to news that reflects the perspective of the richer countries. This was the reasoning behind the New World Information and Communications Order (NWICO) debate in the 70s and 80s: 'Concern about news agencies within academe was always associated with the dominance-dependency model and the NWICO debates which it fed….Unable to control their external image, developing nations had even less control over other people's representations of them' (Boyd-Barrett 1997, p. 141).

Pakistani news coverage in the study really appears to be affected by economic constraints. DAWN's Foreign correspondent in Washington at the time of the 9/11 events Tahir Mirza, for example, explicitly writes that:

> 'No Pakistani news organization has an office in downtown Washington, which means that commuting time has to be taken into account. So, sometimes these days [after 11 September 2001], you are forced to work from home, unshaven, ungroomed, and divide your attention between your computer and the television and the telephone' (Mirza 2001)

Pakistani news marginally relies on non-Western news agencies such as APP (Associate Press of Pakistan), AIP (Afghani Islamic Press), the Chinese Xinhua, PPI (Pakistan Press International). It is, however, precisely the fact that Pakistani coverage relies mostly on Western news agencies -AFP (Agence France Presse), AP (Associated Press), Reuters- that both throws doubts on the explanatory power of a number of International Communications studies about news agencies' effects on news and confirms the importance of national interest as a guiding criteria for selecting newsworthy sources. News agencies readily provide huge amounts of information about what many national and international actors have said or done all over the world. It is media professionals, in this case Pakistani journalists and editors, who actively select those sources and the pieces of information which are most relevant to the interest of their country.

This point is confirmed by the fact that if there is a shift in national priorities, as it happens to some extent for all countries involved in the study over the crisis following 9/11, also the newsworthiness of the sources changes (Figures 2, 3, 4, 5). In the US, for example, after the beginning of the war in Afghanistan (7 October 2001) interest in EU media sources is replaced by interest in Pakistani sources (Figure 2). This reflects the joining of the international coalition against terrorism by the Pakistani government in the aftermath of the attacks. France, after the beginning of the war, also widens its interest in foreign sources. The

reporting of international organisations, Asian and Middle Eastern sources (Figure 3) mirrors a series of meetings by foreign minister Védrine with diplomats from a range of Arab countries.[16] The greater detachment from the issue of 9/11 by the Italian political discourse - the passing of the budget law takes a good share of the political actors' attention at the time-[17] is conversely mirrored by a shrinking of the range of sources in the news (Figure 4).

At this point it would seem like news is different depending on the country we look at: if news is constructed by sources and the selection of sources is shaped by national interests, then newspapers in the same country should present the same news. We should be able to see a clear cut differentiation between American, French, Italian and Pakistani news coverage of 9/11. This, however, was not the case. The analysis suggests that there are more dynamics, and this time related to the journalistic culture of each country as well as to the news-making process at the level of the single newspapers, that need to be taken into consideration.

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[16] Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Hubert Védrine): Ministère des Affaires étrangères (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs), *Declarations françaises de politique étrangère depuis 1990* (French Foreign Policy Statements since 1990), http://www.doc.diplomatie.gouv.fr/BASIS/epic/www/doc/SF (accessed January 2004).

[17] Prime minister (Silvio Berlusconi): Governo Italiano – Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri (Italian Government – Presidency of the Ministers' Council), *Interviste ed interventi* (Interviews and interventions), <http://www.governo.it/Presidente/Interventi/index.asp>; *Comunicati stampa* <http://www.governo.it/Presidente/Comunicati/index.asp> (accessed December 2003).
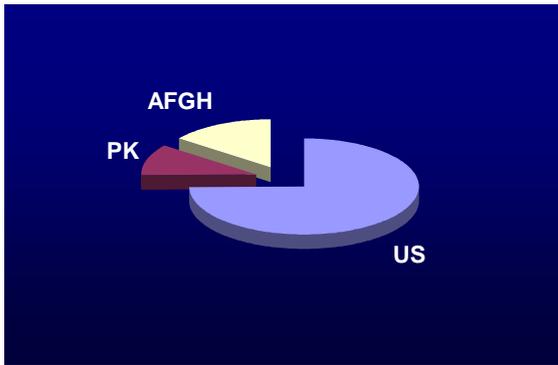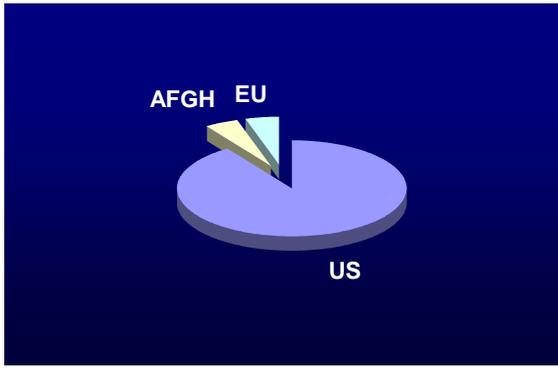
Figure 2 – Sources in US media coverage before and after the beginning of the war in Afghanistan
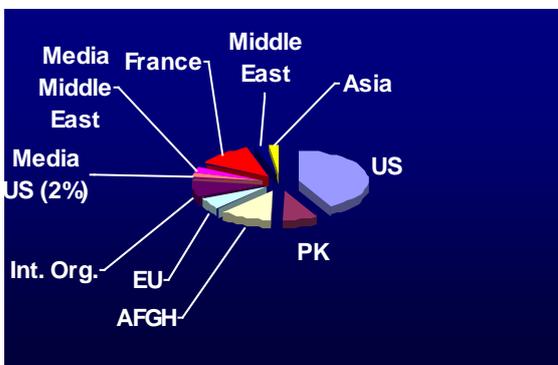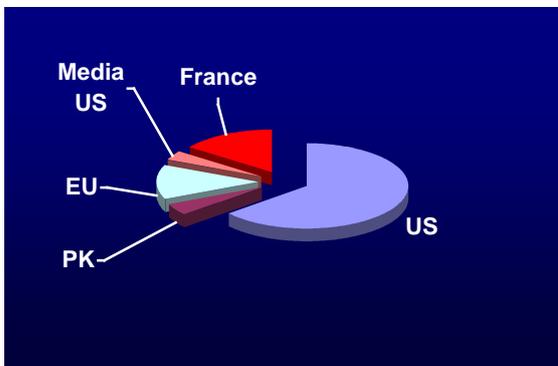

Figure 3 – Sources in French media coverage before and after the beginning of the war in Afghanistan
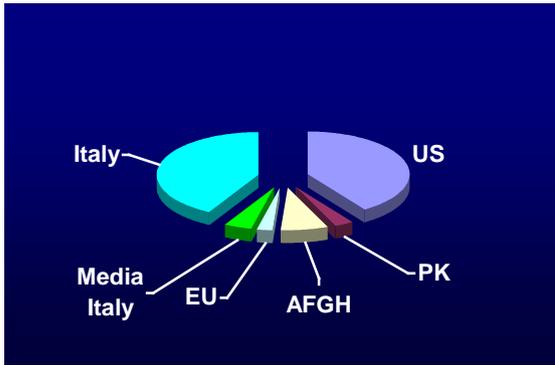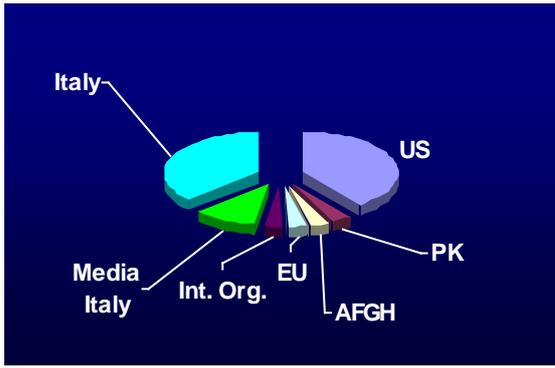
Figure 4 - Sources in Italian media coverage before and after the beginning of the war in Afghanistan
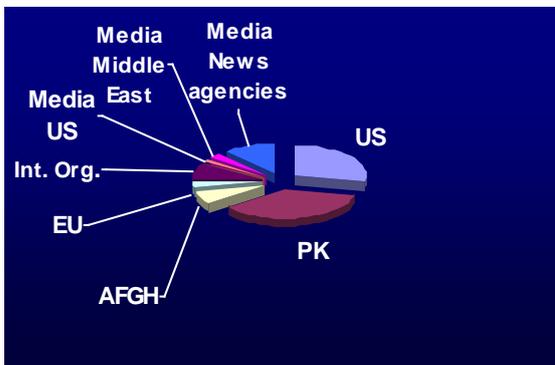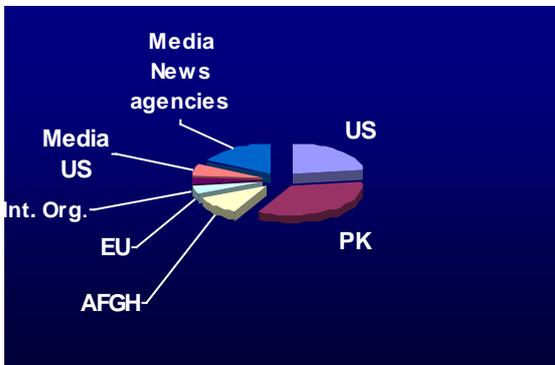

Figure 5 - Sources in Pakistani media coverage before and after the beginning of the war in Afghanistan

Journalistic Culture

If national interest shapes the ratio between national and foreign newsworthy sources, national journalistic culture affects the newsworthiness of political vs. non-political actors.

American journalistic culture is characterized by its aspiration to objectivity (Chalaby 1996; Hallin and Mancini 2004; Josephi 2005). This means that news, understood as fact-oriented information, is kept distinct from comment. Under this respect Pakistani elite press fitted the model of objective journalism. French and Italian journalism, instead, belong to a different model of journalism, characterized by political partisanship and commentary-oriented reporting (Hallin and Mancini 2004).

News in objective journalism countries, like the US and Pakistan, was found to report more political sources than in Italy or France. This observation could be partly overemphasized by the methodological choices of the study. The sample selection involved, apart from editorials, all articles starting on the first page. This led to coding, in the cases of Italy and France, a large number of first page comment pieces written by intellectuals, columnists and free-lance journalists. It is, however, also true that that the very fact that comment and analysis articles were on the first page, reflects specific editorial choices and the journalistic culture of the country. As Gopnik (2004) puts it, in describing the difference between reporting by Le Monde in comparison to American journalistic culture, 'French journalists tend to think that there are more interesting things to do in life than pester some politician or official who has never said anything interesting in the first place for one more quote.'

Comment articles, apart from containing a very high number of IEs when they are relevant to 9/11, also allow communicating more coherent interpretations of the events. For example, on 3 November 2001 the NYT first page contained 3 IEs from 3 sources (the US Congress, a Democrat, and a Republican): the 9/11 events were generally defined as 'attacks' (1), a way to respond to them was improving security (2) and freezing terrorists' funds (3). *Le Monde* presented, instead, 25 IEs from a range of 7 different sources. Apart from political actors' statements, both French and foreign, the news also contained a lengthy article by philosopher Jean Baudrillard.[18] The piece illustrated a sophisticated interpretation of the 9/11 events as "globalization falling on itself," a unique framing that did not recur anywhere else across the sample.

Interpretative journalism in Italy and France was therefore found to produce a greater variety of ideas within the news discourse than the "who-what-where-when and how accounts" of US and Pakistani news. This overall affected the scope of the news discourses and was found to better explain what would otherwise be referred to by the "indexing hypothesis" as "more" or "less" indexing in each of the countries under analysis. The relative impact of political actors on the news –their capacity to frame an issue in their own terms-, in fact, decreases when the scope of the news discourse increases, as in interpretative journalism's countries France and Italy. The framing by political actors there, in fact, shares the stage with framing by other, possibly non-political, sources. For example the NYT reported 47.06% of the contents of the American political discourse, but this constituted 66.67% of the news. 54.84% of the contents of French political discourse were reported (apparently "more indexing") on LM, but this constituted a mere 29.82% of its overall coverage, because the news scope was greater and more varied thanks to reporting of views from many different foreign countries as well as from commentators. The difference in the variety of sources can be observed in Figures 6 and 7.

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[18] 9/11 is defined 'a clash neither of civilizations nor of religions,' 'the triumphing globalization coming to terms with itself,' 'the world itself that resists globalization.' What we are experiencing, according to the philosopher, is a 'fourth World War.' Jean Baudrillard, "L'esprit du terrorisme [The spirit of terrorism]," *Le Monde*, 3 November 2001, my translation.
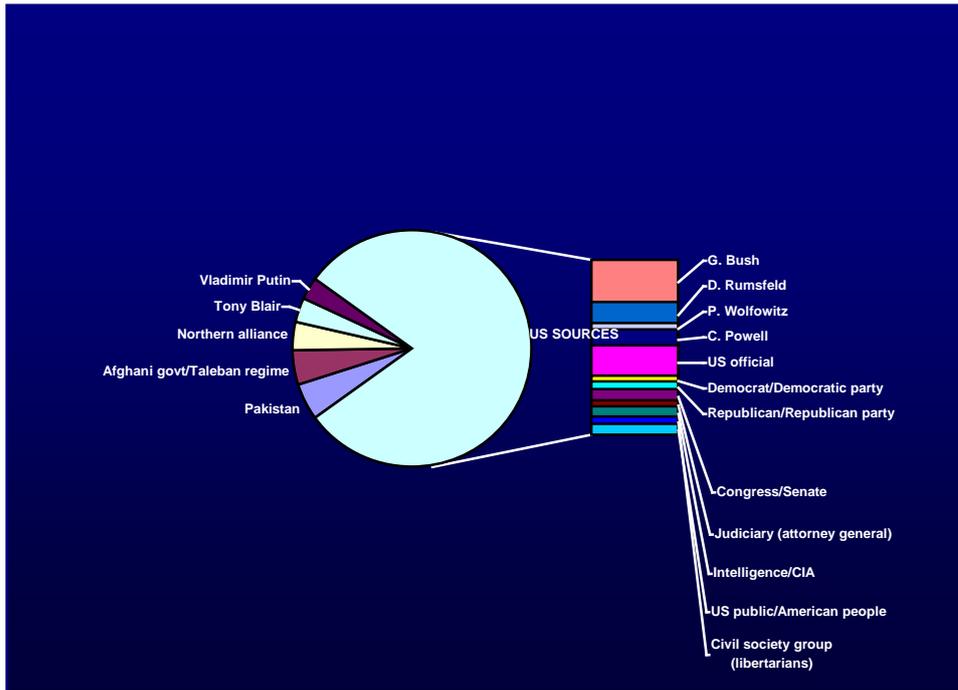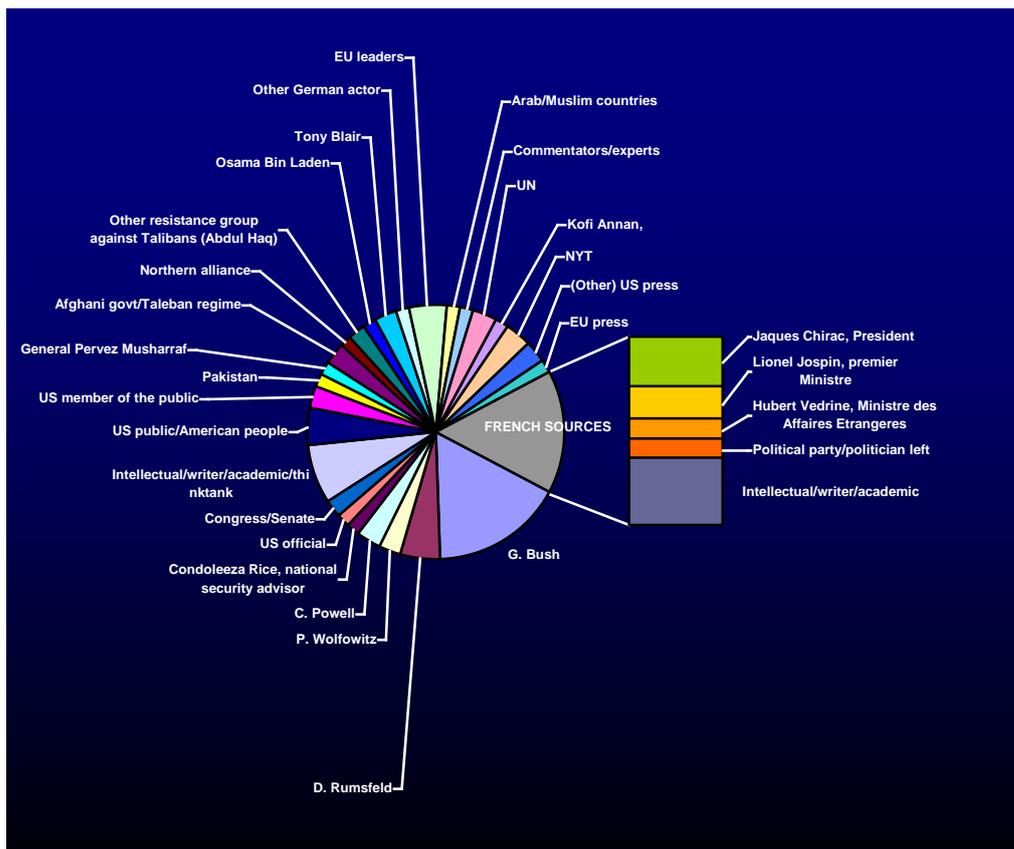
Figure 6 – *New York Times* **sources**

Figure 7 – *Le Monde* **sources**

Editorial Policy

National interest as a factor shaping the selection of sources helps explaining why the NYT news, as the analysis suggests, has more ideas in common with all other Western newspapers (especially LM, CDS, REP) and less with the DAWN: Western newspapers tend to quote the same Western leaders, particularly American political actors. The DAWN and NAT share more ideas within their coverage because they quote more Afghani, Asian and Muslim sources than newspapers in the US, Italy or France.

National interest, however, does not explain the strong differentiation of news contents at the level of the single newspaper. Indeed a closer look at the ideas shared by newspapers coverage within the same country does not reveal anything specifically "national." For example the IEs in common between the news of LM and LIB cannot be regarded as uniquely "French." The shared idea that terrorism should be fought through financial measures also appears in coverage by the NYT, WSJ, CDS, REP and DAWN. The idea of improving security in order to tackle the terrorist threat is also present in NYT, WSJ, CDS. Why don't newspapers within the same country present IEs from the same range of sources?

The analysis of the sources reveals that a factor contributing to a further selection of voices in the news, besides national interest and journalistic culture, is editorial policy. This is particularly expressed in setting the focus of interest of the single newspaper and, consequently, the relative size of the newshole devoted to international crises. Within each country some newspapers were found to be more internationally oriented than others: NYT more than the WSJ, DAWN more than NAT, LM more than LIB, REP more than CDS. The former, allocating more space to covering the issue of 9/11, tended to present a wider range of IEs from more sources than the latter. For example when, on 31 October 2001, *Le Monde*'s main story was "*La conduite de la guerre alarme l'Europe* [The conduct of war alarms Europe]" *Libération*, not only did not mention the topic, but presented as a main title "*Un kimono pour Renault* [A kimono for Renault]", a piece about car-manufacturer Nissan acquiring 15% of Renault. As an illustration it is possible to compare the sources in internationally-oriented LM (Figure 7) with the more domestically-focused LIB (Figure 8).
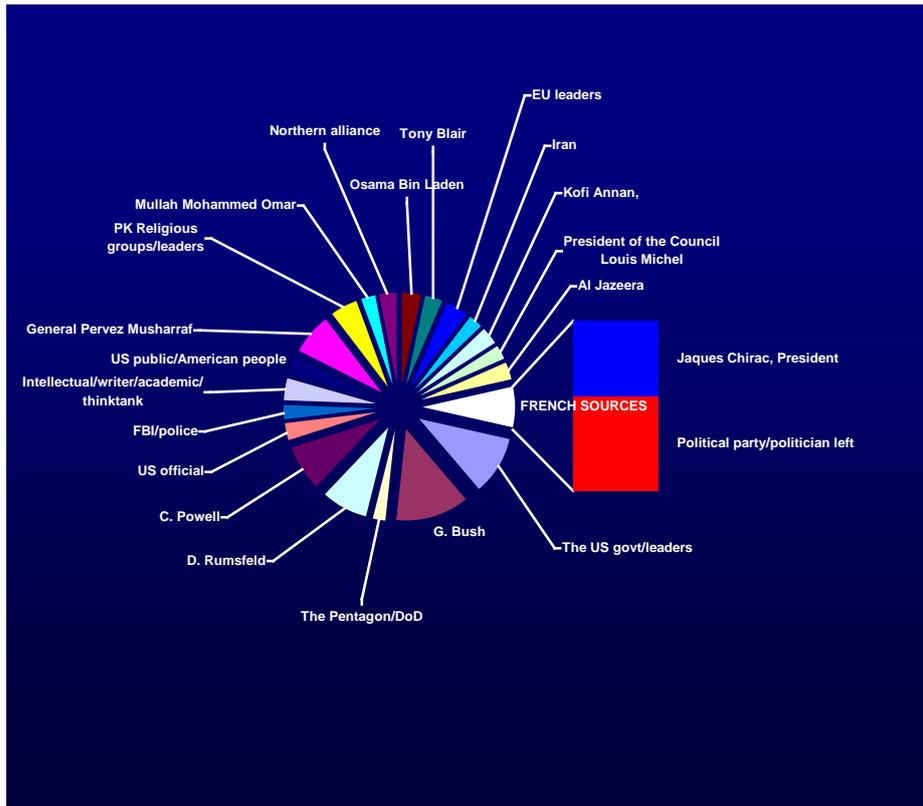
Figure 8 – *Libération* **sources**

CONCLUSIONS

The variation of news coverage at either the national, international or media-organizational level can be more effectively explained through an understanding of the way newsworthy sources are selected by editors and journalists during the news-making process rather than through the individual approaches within Political Communications, International Communications and News Sociology the study started with.

Simply put, national political actors are newsworthy in every country. This particularly applies to issues of security and foreign policy for which political actors do not face competition from alternative national sources. What is regarded as "indexing" by American scholars (Bennett 1990; Livingston and Eachus 1996; Zaller and Chiu 2000; Billeaudeaux, Domke, Hutcheson and Garland 2003) is, in reality, political actors' newsworthiness in relation to foreign policy issues. The reliance on national political actors by American newspapers is made more extreme in the US firstly by the country's relatively lower interest in foreign countries than in France, Italy or Pakistan. Secondly by the country's objective journalistic culture: news stories are mostly reliant on what a small range of newsworthy sources, mainly national politicians, say happens. Commentators are not allowed to introduce a variety of views within the news discourse. All these elements contribute to keeping the scope of the US media discourse narrow and generally reliant on political elite discourse. The relative impact of political actors is lower where the scope of the media discourse is wider -as in Italy, France or Pakistan- because the framing by political actors there faces competition by alternative sources.

Media "flows" exist in the sense that different countries have different levels of interest towards the external world. As the media flows hypothesis would predict poor countries are

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more interested in rich countries than the other way around. This, however, translates exactly into the opposite of the news agenda from a rich country just being reproduced in the news coverage of a poor country and somehow limiting the latter's scope for alternative views. A weaker position in the international system, as the comparison between Pakistani and American coverage suggests, leads to reporting a wider variety of sources. The variety of sources, in turn, contributes to broadening the scope of the news discourse–which in practice means more varied IEs within the news- therefore making, if anything, the news of a poor country more insulated from the possibility of a "domination" of contents from a rich country.

Globalization exists not as a homogenisation of contents, in this case the same framing of 9/11 shaping the coverage of all newspapers across borders, but as an overcoming of space and time barriers. Statements by virtually all sources are available in all countries almost instantaneously, as the usage of news agencies confirms. News in each newspaper, however, is the result of different combinations of different IEs coming from different sources. The study suggests that, even if space and time are flattened during the news production process - and we might all read, as in the case of 9/11, about the very same issues- instead of a universal global way of interpreting them, there are varied combinations of ideas leading to extremely different news accounts. A study conducted by Gerbner and Marvanyi in 1977 on 60 daily papers coverage in 9 countries from capitalist, socialist and third-world countries analysed the dimensions of foreign news coverage and the distribution of news-events locations around the world. They observed that attention to foreign countries was different depending on the standing point: there were indeed 'many worlds.' The same world looked, in other words, different for US newspapers than for Western or Eastern European media outlets, the Soviet block or the Third World. This led the authors to physically drawing different maps of the world on the basis of their results (Gerbner and Marvanyi 1977, pp. 58-59). This study, although more limited in scope, certainly confirms the existence of different worlds not only at a national, but also at a newspaper level.

News is really different in each media organization but this is not due to the social interactions among media professionals *only*. It is the result of media professionals' progressive selection of sources influenced by a combination of national interest, journalistic culture and editorial policy. What the analysis of the coverage of 9/11 at the international, national and media organizational level has revealed is that the five initial approaches were all too limited because of their exclusive focus on single levels. Political Communications suffers from being confined at the national level (Gurevitch and Blumler 2004), International Communication relies too much on macro-approaches (Hjarvard 1995), News Sociology is mainly concerned with micro-interactions. The study confirms that the cage mentality that pervades each of the disciplines heavily limits the understanding of their very objects of research. Each field of study just looks at one corner of the whole picture. This also leads to misled (if not plainly wrong) conclusions when it comes to identifying the variables that explain media coverage and what their effects should be. As seen, what is interpreted as "indexing" of media content to political elites' debate, mainly as a result of the influence by political actors on the media, by US scholars is in reality the outcome of other variables, the effect of which (such as journalistic culture or national interest) simply cannot be detected by those researchers because they have no comparative perspective to develop a sensitivity towards them. These considerations point firmly to the benefits of international comparative research designs and multi-disciplinary approaches: integrating Political Communications, International Communications and News Sociology broadens the range of theoretical and methodological tools at the researcher's disposal for truly understanding what shapes the news in the communications age.

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