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Book Review: Savage Frontier: Making News and Security on the Argentine Border

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Ieva Jusionyte, *Savage Frontier: Making News and Security on the Argentine Border*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015.

Savage Frontier: Making News and Security on the Argentine Border is a landmark ethnography about the overlap between news and security in the triple border of Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil. What the author, Ieva Jusionyte, does so well is shed light on how competing discourses about the region are constructed and contested. The book tacks gracefully across interlocking geographic and social scales using fine grain ethnography, discourse analysis, and participant media production, a novel methodology in which the author and a collaborator began an investigative news program of their own.

Jusionyte focuses her attention on the Argentine side of the border. With the Iguazú waterfalls, the region circulates in the international imaginary as a zone of tourism, even as it has been accused (without any substantive proof) of being a haven for terrorism ('a global village of outlaws', according to a *Los Angeles Times* reporter (p. 101)). Beneath the veneer of tourism and terrorism lies a layered world in which journalists are threatened by mafia bosses and where local reporters work to ensure that their region not be defined by the criminal networks that operate through this quintessential borderland.

One of the strengths of *Savage Frontier* is its ability to disaggregate inequalities coded into the broader media ecology. Certain voices count more than others in the intertextual, hyperlinked world that is 'the news' in the early 21st century. Here Jusionyte provides a superb complement to Dominic Boyer's (2013) recent ethnography of the bricolage of news production in the digital age: *The Life Informatic: Newsmaking in the Digital Era*. What *Savage Frontier* shows is that the battle to set the dominant frame around the triple frontier is an unstable and always unfinished process not predetermined by hegemonic media structures.

Although ethnographies of news productions have tended toward the major nodes in the information system (Gursel's (2016) recent ethnography of the circulation of photojournalism extends this trend), Jusionyte has strategically designed her project to give protagonism to the reporters working for local outlets, small nodes. Yet the author carefully eschews romanticizing the resistance of local journalists who are committed to, but also compromised by, their context. What her research reveals are the complexities and contradictions lurking beneath facile framings of the region. She writes,

> As the ever-expanding centrifugal apparatus of security incorporates books, petitions, documents, articles, resolutions, and conference papers that are absorbed into the circulating narrative of threat, the role local journalists play in the regime designed to manage uncertainty is ambivalent. (p. 128)

Savage Frontier is an intellectual reckoning with these ambivalences. In a context where local reporters are frequently intimidated if not outright threatened, they remain beholden to their own desires to live long and productive lives. Beyond a baseline survival calculus, local reporters are also key members in a community-level moral regime often at odds with the fetishisms of law and order, and far removed from the speculative and accusatory logics of transnational terror talk. Undergirding local representations about contraband is a moral economy where an illegal act, such as smuggling cooking oil, is a legitimate, pragmatic tactic of survival. Here local actors resist criminalizing discourses that circulate internationally and reverberate nationally.

At the national level, Buenos Aires–based reporters benefit from trafficking in discourses of the chaotic border, displacing insecurity, statistically most prevalent in the Argentine capital, back into the periphery – a dynamic not lost on Horacio, one of Jusionyte's extraordinarily articulate interlocutors (pp. 143–144). The irony here is that the national media selectively expands on stories it finds in the local press.

Jusionyte adds new layers to Anna Tsing's (2005) insight that scales are not neutral and should never be taken for granted (p. 58) by showing how divisions of scale are produced and enforced in the moment of news production (p. 7). This intervention, one of the book's most incisive contributions to the field of media anthropology, is made with careful attention to tactics of visibility and invisibility. The dialectical relationship of publicity and secrecy is a fundamental and timely issue for both media studies and security studies. The author's engagement with Joseph Masco's recent work *Theater of Operations: National Security Affect from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (2014) is illuminating (p. 107) and anticipates a field of scholarship on the mediatization of security that is poised to expand in the coming years.

Savage Frontier joins Mark Pedelty's ethnography, *War Stories: The Culture of Foreign Correspondents* (1995), which is about the production of international news of El Salvador's civil war, in a small but significant ethnographic literature on news making in politically charged Latin American contexts. The differences between these two works reflect the 20 years that separates their publication. *War Stories* was written amid the boom years of the globalization debates and focused its study on foreign correspondents and their editors. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, everything seemed to be about 'flows'; but now 'friction' and 'breakdown' have emerged as new key metaphors in the field (Larkin, 2004; Tsing, 2005). *Savage Frontier* brings to the fore the news media's role in producing and policing friction's discursive formation.

The story that Jusionyte is telling, and her call at the end of the book for scholars to look to the 'intersectional dynamics of security' (p. 245), fits within a larger discussion of interlocking scales in dynamic relation with each other. But what does her work say back to this literature? The reader is left to ask this question and infer its answer from a splendid ethnography and occasional theoretical reflections. Beefing up the analysis on scale would help to make explicit the importance of this study for other contexts. Media

anthropology is ideally positioned within the increasingly segmented discipline of anthropology to tackle the question of scale. Although the scalar issue is threaded throughout her book, a more extended theorization of the media's role in producing a dynamic hierarchy of scales in and beyond her field site would be a welcome addition to the introduction or conclusion.

The comparison between *Savage Frontier* and *War Stories* also begs the question of what is replacing the Cold War master narrative in Latin America. The 1989 demobilization of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN)) in El Salvador represented the twilight of the Cold War. But mediated anxieties about the threat of leftist guerrillas have since been replaced by worries about the insecurity posed by transnational crime. In his book, *Foreign News*, Ulf Hannerz (2004) quotes Tom Kent, an international editor at the Associated Press, as saying, 'In the past, if there had been a war between the Hutu and Tutsi, our first question would have been, who is ours and who is theirs' (p. 25). While in the Middle East the terrorist has slipped seamlessly into the historical role of enemy/other (Gregory, 2004), in Latin America terrorism as a new master narrative layers poorly on questions of criminality and insecurity (Tate, 2015: 47–55). *Savage Frontier* is an invaluable invitation to think through the limits of master narratives, not from the vantage of postmodern theory, but rather from the perspective of journalists who produce alternative story lines located in local moral worlds.

Savage Frontier is replete with insights into how regimes of knowledge are produced and contested – 'studying sideways', to use Hannerz's (2004: 3) phrase for the anthropology of journalism, at its best. Scholars in media anthropology, media studies, security studies, and Latin American studies will all find rich ethnographic material and insightful analysis to discuss and debate for years to come.

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