

Global Media Journal

German Edition

Book Review

The Greek Crisis in the Media: Stereotyping in the International Press

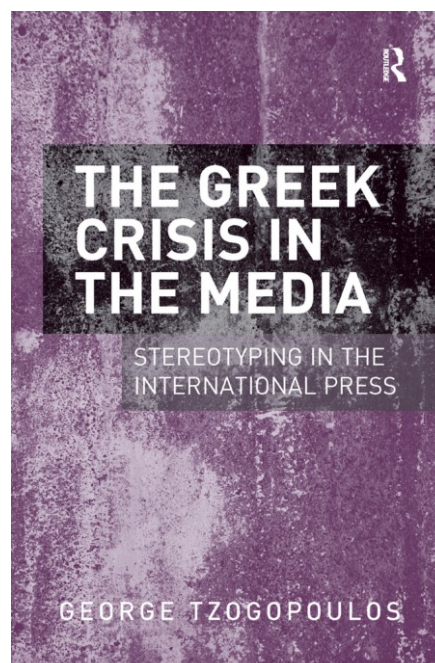
Tzogopoulos, George (2013): The Greek Crisis in the Media: Stereotyping in the International Press. Farnham: Ashgate. 207 pages. ISBN 978-1-4094-4871-6.

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To cite this article: Kalantzi, Foteini (2014). Tzogopoulos, George (2013): The Greek Crisis in the Media: Stereotyping in the International Press. *Global Media Journal – German Edition*, 4(1).

George Tzogopoulos offers a thorough analysis of the international media coverage on the sovereign debt crisis, which with the passage of time proved to be much more than that – a crisis of trust. He has brought his skills as a seasoned journalist to this in-depth study leveraging his journalism experience combined with original research.

Academics and specialists will gain insight from the wide spread of issues analysed. They will more easily appreciate the more technical side of Tzogopoulos' analysis through the language of 'metastasis' effects, the 'pathogenies' of Greek society, and 'Poleconomics in Unreliability'. However, the book is also highly recommended for the lay reader, which at an initial level is an excellent reference for the developments of the Greek crisis. A holistic and objective view of events is often difficult to discern amongst the mass of personal opinions and specific news stories which proliferate in the media. Here Tzogopoulos manages to offer a perfect balance of historical context, an overview of the crisis, and via the media analysis, a concise outline of causes and symptoms of problems afflicting Greece.



The book commences with a clear outline of his methods, chapters and goals. In Chapter 1 via his theoretical framework, Tzogopoulos discusses agenda-setting and offers a definition of framing according to the famous Entman definition. He suggests that this theory will be important for his qualitative analysis on the portrayal of the Greek saga by the international media. The task of analysing 'the International Press' is a daunting one and he has chosen a representative sample of 'elite' broadsheets, tabloids and financial papers from a selection of key countries, i.e. the UK, US, France, Germany, and Italy.

In Chapter 2, the writer begins by highlighting that default is not exactly new to Greek history, but weaved into the historical events of the past century or more. A background to the Greek political reality defined by themes such as 'statism' and 'clientelism' is offered. Tzogopoulos is quite open and balanced in his assessment on public life, the political system and governance. He provides a solid introductory background of pertinent Greek history since EEC accession in 1981 until the beginning of the crisis in 2009. The chaotic problems of Greek economy are mapped out, including the uncontrolled Greek deficit, lack of competitiveness, tax evasion, fiddling of numbers, corruption and transparency issues. The great puzzle throughout is the hanging question of how Greece managed to enter the Eurozone.

The book also focuses on the relationship between Greece and the EU. In chapter 3, Tzogopoulos discusses the dichotomy between difficult internal decisions on the one hand and the negative political climate on the other, the lack of consensus within the Greek political elites and the painful austerity measures, along with the enduring but discomfited Greek citizens. He educates the reader about the key features of the crisis such as the Memorandum of Understanding, the Medium Term Fiscal Strategy Plan, bailouts, austerity measures, and crucially the political and media tumult to which we bore witness. He highlights the "lack of social consensus and the continuous reaction to a policy of change" with the trade unions representing "the driving force behind the opposition to various reforms" (p. 55).

At the heart of the book, he follows with several chapters of quantitative and qualitative analysis with a focus on the latter. The quantitative chapter 4 is not the greatest strength of the book, but adds some context/numbers to the analysis and a few interesting points. For example, it demonstrates that the number of articles published about Greece increased sharply from 2010. Interestingly, German newspapers published distinctly more articles than the other sampled countries. A more sophisticated quantitative analysis could have provided significant insight, e.g. it would have been interesting to see the distribution of subjects over time or across countries, and this would have complemented his qualitative chapters well.

The qualitative analysis (Chapters 5–6) is a discussion of central issues and themes 'framed' by the international media supported by selected representative examples from his sampled publications. In Chapter 5, he focuses on the wider political and

economic issues as viewed from the international level, such as fear of domino effects, the nepotism and (un)reliability of Greek politicians, Papandreou's call for referendum, the IMF, and potential default/euro exit. A key theme is that although there is consensus in the overall critique of Greece, differences are evident in coverage from different nations due to e.g. internal divisions within the EU (i. e. French and Italian attitudes to the dominant Germany) and French and Italian fears that they might be the next victims of the crisis (in contrast to the "more hostile and ironic" UK-US-German views (p. 129)).

Here lies one of the problematic aspects in the book. Although Tzogopoulos highlights the differentiation between the different countries' coverage, he says that "foreign journalists have, as a whole, reported developments in the Hellenic Republic in a clear, comprehensive and fair way" (p. 155). In his effort of drawing an all encompassing conclusion about the stance of the international press, he falls in a trap of simplification.

In chapter 6, his second qualitative section, he focuses on the domestic problems within Greek society, i.e. the causes and the symptoms of the crisis. The subjects he selects as 'framed' by the international media include corruption, tax evasion, stifling bureaucracy, civil service inefficiency, financial uncertainty, citizens' anger at political parties, strikes, protests, and difficulties enforcing laws. He also covers the international media's special attention on personal stories dealing with unemployment, poverty, hunger, homelessness and youth emigration. He highlights the media's strong preference to focus on the negative, with positive outcomes and the successes of e. g. Greek shipping marginalised in reporting.

Overall, the book is in itself broad in scope, edifying, and highly readable. The main critiques lie within the expectations Tzogopoulos establishes from the outset.

Residing in the book's title is the concept of "stereotyping". When he does address the issue, his view is not as clear-cut as his personal opinion on the overall crisis (which is offered along with proposed solutions in Chapter 8). In Chapter 7, he ultimately concludes that "populist rhetoric and production of stereotypes... do not mirror general coverage" and that "foreign journalists did not distort the image of Greece after the crisis broke out" (p. 155). However, this sits uneasily with his discussion of overgeneralisation (i.e. unfairly attributing blame to the entire society) (p. 113), the media's focus on negative stories (p. 133), and his assertions that the difference with the other PIIGS- States (abbrev. for Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece and Spain) is that "no stereotypes for their societies have been largely produced" (p. 133) (an incidentally questionable statement). One of his central concluding points is that rather than distorting Greece's image, the international media contributed to the internationalisation of the image of Greece and the suffering faced by its citizens, however this assertion is not sufficiently examined nor supported. Overall, stereotyping is not a concept that is explicitly dealt with throughout the book.

A further critique relates to his application of the concept of 'framing'. In Chapter 1, he promises to qualitatively analyse subjects via the logic of framing. Instead, his qualitative chapters are simply a detailed analysis of the key problems affecting Greece and supported by a range of examples from the international press. His selection of topics regarding the economic and political problems is undeniably thorough, however it is not discussed under the suggested framing prism. A discussion about the international media's choice of themes, its focus (over-representation) of certain aspects, and mode of coverage would have realised his invocation of framing and added depth to the study. In particular it would have been interesting to see his analysis placed within the problematics of media ownership, neo-liberal realities and communication theories like the Chomskyan approach (which he refers to at the outset).

Tzogopoulos maintains a mostly objective and explanatory approach throughout. He has clearly structured his analysis into historical context and exploratory themes. Although framing theories have not been applied as one would expect and the issue of stereotyping has not been overtly tackled, the book is nevertheless an excellent contribution to the understanding of the Greek crisis and a forerunner to further analysis on these themes.