Crisis and Representation: Notes on Media and Media Studies

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Crisis and Representation: Notes on Media and Media Studies

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An extraordinarily voluminous analytical literature addressed to the financial crisis which surfaced particularly in 2007–2008 – and is regarded now, according to location, either with a sense of retrospection (drawing the boundary at 2010–2012) or as ongoing – is in the public domain. The part played by media coverage has not been neglected; most of the highlighted crisis-struck locations, in the United States of America (USA) and European countries, have been examined in this regard. However, though the unprecedented deposit 'haircut' of 2013 in Cyprus received extensive media attention, very little sustained analysis of this coverage is available as yet. The contributions to this special issue on *Participation, Media Representation and the Financial and Political Crises in Cyprus* fill this lacuna and are a most valuable addition to scholarship.

I am not in a position to contribute to the observations and debates which feature here, only to learn from them. In that spirit, this paper does not attempt to summarise or infer from the preceding arguments but to lay out some of the broader features surrounding the area in question. The following notes may perhaps serve to locate the more contextually grounded analyses above within wider debates. Two sections follow, threaded around two abstract nouns in the issue title: one on 'crises' (financial and political) and another on 'representation' (media). The latter delineates how the role of the media apropos the financial crisis has been accounted already, but from a relatively unusual perspective: that is not so much in terms of what media coverage did, but in terms of what analysts of that media coverage have done, or, more generally, by foregrounding some of the underpinning assumptions and methods of Media Studies.

Crisis

Most immediately, a financial or political crisis suggests an interregnum in which an existing economic or political order appears to be collapsible, and either recuperation of said order (modified or otherwise) or replacement by a different order is portended. The extent to which the financial and the political are coterminous with or consequent on each other is of considerable analytical interest, as becomes apparent below. Heightened tension between the potential for recuperation and for replacement could be regarded, in the first instance, as the discursive structure which is articulated as a crisis.

The crisis of, and after, 2007–2008 is predominantly presented as a *financial* one, and as such is considered at the broadest conceptual level as a crisis of capitalism – the dominant global order of the present, with a complex history of cyclical financial crises of which this is a particularly significant one. Its grounding in the USA and European Union (EU) is generally understood in terms of their putative geopolitical centrality and waning dominance in a global capitalist order, hence a *global* financial crisis. Since the potential for replacement of an existing capitalist order had been most cogently conceptualised, indeed historically enacted, through the Marxist critique of capitalism, that continues to be influential in elaborating critiques of present-day capitalist crises. Marx's own analysis of such crises, found in the logical line developed from delineation of simple reproduction in terms of two departments (*Capital* II, chs. 20–21), to the tendency of the general rate of profit to fall where surplus value extraction remains the same (*Capital* III, Part III), to description of the credit system or relation between real capital, money capital and debt capital (*Capital* III, chs. 30–33, obviously relevant to the 2007–2008 financial crisis), was perfectly balanced at the tension between recuperation and replacement. The cyclical logic of this line consistently places capitalist crises as recuperative phases, constitutively within the process of capital reproduction and expansion itself; and yet, with a historical rather than cyclical view (in a way breaking the logical cycle by gradually and forcibly turning that logic upon itself), promises an accruing terminal crisis which would render replacement possible – perhaps inevitable. Moreover, the latter was underscored by envisaging (however hazily) a communist political *and* economic order as replacement, thus balancing the slash between recuperation/replacement with an ultimate tilt towards the latter. This ever-imminent albeit deferrable potential for replacement in a crisis phase ensures the perpetual reiteration of Marxist critique when financial crises are experienced. The twofold potential has exercised rejuvenated and updated Marxist analysis of the 2007–2008 financial crisis (e.g. Harvey, 2010 and 2014; Vasapollo, 2012 [2009]). It also simmers beneath social democratic and some left liberal anxiety about the future of capitalism (as in Wallerstein *et al*., 2013). However, and this is a symptom of being encapsulated in totalistic capitalism, even those most optimistic of replacement seemed unwilling to envisage the modus operandi of transition, the economic pragmatics of an order that could obtain as replacement. When an actually exiting alternative economic and political order could be referred, quite different directions of Marxist analysis more or less habitually considered capitalist crisis and transition to socialism in the same breath, as in Althusser and Balibar's (1970 [1965], ch. 4) close reading of the relevant passages of *Capital* III, or in Mandel's (1968 [1962], ch. 14) observations on 'socialist accumulation', and prolifically elsewhere.

The potential for ultimate replacement has spurred analyses along the Marxist line because of its explanative power. In this line capitalist economics is regarded as activated through social relations. The mechanics of class interests and its embedment from base to superstructure underpin the logic of the capital cycle at every point: each of the above-cited logical moves in analysing crises in *Capital* demonstrates this in detail, as do the modifications in those moves by Rosa Luxemburg, Ernest Mandel and others. Capital movements signify, and are enabled by and grounded in, social relations, and it is impossible to extricate the economic from the political. In liberal economics, cycles of capital have generally been understood in terms of an autonomous system-based rationale – with capitalism as a kind of machine (which can be modelled) functioning through fuzzily understood self-regulating principles. Political factors may interfere therein, and the working of the system always has social implications, but those are conditional to – either after or before – the activating and self-regulating principles. Political norms only allow for contingent nudges to the system and are always in danger of messing it up. So the political and the economic are held apart in liberal theories of capitalism; they bear upon each other but are not coeval. Giving the right nudge or apt exercise of restraint involves trying to work out how any intervention in the system (say, by regulation of agents and institutions or limiting capital movements) will play with those autonomous principles. Since those principles are always fuzzily understood, they need to be accessed and checked constantly, and there are two dominant methods for this: first, in terms of somewhat instinctive and individualised psychological rationales (so that factors like 'greed', 'trust', 'confidence', 'panic', 'quality-of-life' are mooted as decisive causes); second, and at odds with the first, in terms of what can be inferred in a mathematically sound way – disinvested of psychological unpredictability – from the record of how the system has behaved in the past (from the imprint the system has left in the form of data, indicative of how the autonomous principles have worked thus far). By this approach, these principles are always *within* the autonomous system of capitalism, and social relations and political imperatives are always *without* – but acting upon the system in desirable or undesirable ways.

There are several consequences to the liberal approach for analysing crises phases. One is the *desire* (even while occasionally recognising the impossibility of its fulfilment) to apprehend the autonomous principles of the capitalist system without reference to social relations, predicated on mathematical consistency. The centrality of data analysis and modelling, and an institutionalised distinction between micro and macroeconomics, follows. Another is struggling to articulate the relationship between social relations and the capitalist system, which is always a point of pressure in a crisis phase. The big division in liberal economics tends to follow as divergent articles of faith about social justice. On the one hand, it is held that the autonomous principles of the capitalist system are inherently just – though the precise rationale for this cannot be laid out and proved, the record (the run of data) shows this (the tradition from the Austrian and Chicago Schools). This entails envisaging a state that intervenes minimally in capital circulations, or, neoliberally, a state that aligns its own functioning with the autonomous principles of the capitalist system and becomes subject to it. On the other hand, it is believed that the autonomous principles of the system are indifferent, like laws of nature, to social justice – so an ethical commitment to social justice has to be brought to nudge the system every now and then as purposively as possible (the Keynesian and 'saltwater school' tradition). This is best done, according to this line of reasoning, by states which actively define themselves as having a social justice agenda.

Yet another consequence of the liberal approach to crises is that it does not (here sharply contradicting the Marxist line) – indeed cannot – consider the possibility of replacing the capitalist order. It can consider replacing a political regime; it can (particularly if following the Keynesian or 'saltwater schools' tradition) consider modifying the economic system; but no liberal analysis can actually envisage replacing the capitalist system – capitalism is considered, in that sense, to be a final and perpetually reproductive order. The closest scenarios to replacement that liberal economists invoke are scare-inducing and apocalyptic: the replacement of reasonably good by very bad capitalism in some cases, or the return of a regressive pre-capitalist order, or a collapse into anarchy, or worse the threat of an undesirable socialist replacement. In times of crisis, the liberal economist either waits for automatic recuperation or campaigns for activating recuperation by nudging the capitalist system appropriately.

Since the 2007–2008 financial crisis surfaced amidst a capitalist global (well, centred in USA and EU) economic order, wherein the dominance of liberal economics is very nearly total, the analysis of it has been prolifically in liberal terms – at a tension between the potential for recuperation and unthinkable apocalypse (anarchy, regression). And since the agents held responsible for this crisis have derived mostly from the tradition of the Austrian and Chicago Schools – with neoliberal conviction that the capitalist system is endemically just – it is primarily the other sort, neo-Keynesians and left liberals, who have offered critiques of what went wrong and prescriptions for recuperation. These have veered from strong arguments for states to exercise their ethical commitment to social justice by nudging the system, more public investment and regulation and reform (such as Parks, 2011; Crouch, 2011; Krugman, 2012; Admati and Hellwig, 2013), to retrospection on how well existing liberal institutions/actors have worked, through appropriate interventions in the system, to enable recuperation and social justice since 2008 (Shiller, 2013; Drezner, 2014, and others).

In this process of liberal reckoning with the financial crisis, nineteenth-century political economic antecedents have occasionally been recalled – but not in the way Marxists call upon Marx, in a spirit of confirmation. After all, a long view of history is largely narrativized with social relations in view, which is central to the left tradition; whereas the liberal view reduces the past to the data imprint of the capitalist system and focuses on the moment of crisis and its immediate precursors. Piketty's (2014 [2013]) study of inequality presents an interesting departure from and links to both sides, possibly the reason for the widespread interest it has aroused – though it was not addressed to the financial crisis. Using a liberal understanding of capitalism (as a quantum within an autonomous rational system), Piketty analyses a long range of data from different geopolitically-specific capitalist regimes to demonstrate that the general system bears upon one important social relation: exacerbating inequality. Since the data consulted is long range and across different contexts, his inferences about capitalism itself do not facilitate recourse to political intervention for social justice. Thus, the inferences seem to coincide with those offered with a quite different rationale, the mechanics of social relations, in the Marxist tradition; yet it is based on liberal methods. Naturally, this has interested liberal economists greatly, who find themselves ideologically challenged by the findings; equally, it has interested socialist economists too, who find themselves unsympathetic to the liberal methodology but ideologically attune to the findings.

Like Marx in the socialist line, nineteenth-century political economists of the liberal line have nevertheless oft been referred apropos the 2008 financial crisis – Besoni's edited (2012) volume on how crises and cycles feature in various economic dictionaries and encyclopaedias recalls numerous liberal antecedents. That this volume foregrounds the textual form and referential practices of the field (with a useful introductory discussion thereof) leads these notes towards another aspect of analysing crises. Economic and political crises are not merely analysed for an existing condition, a given economic order or political regime – out there, so to speak; perception of crisis also tends to fold in on the practice of analysis itself, the analytical enunciation of crisis. Where analysis of crisis along Marxist lines is foregrounded, the construction of knowledge is always subject to the material conditions and bourgeois interests out there, and the accounting itself seems a conditional matter. Thus, O'Connor's (1987) attempt at a 'theory of crisis theories' (grounded in Marxist accounts of economic, social and psychological crisis in capitalist society) does gesture towards more than the objective and material evidence of crises, but immediately moves towards individual commitment as response rather than analysis of the field of intellection:

> 'The practical importance of this work is to show that "crisis" is not and cannot be merely an "objective" historical process [...]. "Crisis" is also a "subjective" historical process – a time when it is not possible to take for granted "normal" economic, social, and other relationships; a time for decision; and a time when what individuals actually do counts for something' (p. 3).

There is a hint here that the 'normal' of economic, social and other relationships should entail attention to the normalising devices of knowledge formation, of academic discourse, but that is not foregrounded; it is pointed to again only in passing towards the end of O'Connor's argument, when he speaks briefly of a 'crisis of crisis theories' (pp. 158–159). In a broader way, with conservative or liberal underpinnings or with less ideologically explicit commitments, discourses of crisis *within* knowledge formations have been an ongoing preoccupation. These have often appeared with an explicit or partially apprehended or unstated relation to economic and political conditions of crisis. And these discourses have often appeared with an expansive thrust, from specific areas of knowledge to knowledge itself and its pursuit at large. Such crises-in-knowledge discourses have appeared with growing frequency through the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries: with regard to disciplinary areas (crisis of sociology, crisis of science, crisis of the humanities, and so forth); to aspects of the undergirding structures of knowledge itself (crisis of meaning, crisis of reason, crisis of representation and crisis of theory among others); and thereby to crisis of knowledge work (crisis of communication, crisis of the university, and so on). Very seldom are such perceptions of crises in knowledge formation dissociated from political and economic crises out there; at the least, the mediation of relevant institutional factors inevitably bring in economic and political considerations. The financial crisis of 2007–2008 has understandably stirred discussion of both the condition and the content of analytical efforts: of what investigative methodologies attending to crisis entail and whether those are not brought to crisis themselves, and equally of the manner in which the financial crisis has endangered institutional support of scholarship and pedagogy. In fact, the superlative production of analyses of crisis of late has been such, the self-reflexive articulations of crisis so dense and variable, that the connotations of 'crisis' itself seem under pressure – in danger of being emptied, itself a signifier to dissect. As Roitman (2014) puts it:

> 'Crisis is a blind spot that enables the production of knowledge. It is a distinction that [...] is not seen as simply paradox, but rather as an error or deformation – a discrepancy between the world and knowledge of the world. But if we take crisis to be a blind spot, or a distinction, which makes certain things visible and others invisible, it is merely an a priori. Crisis is claimed, but it remains a latency; it is never itself explained because it is further reduced to other elements, such as capitalism, economy, neoliberalism, finance, politics, culture, subjectivity. In that sense crisis is not a condition to be observed (loss of meaning, alienation, faulty knowledge); it is an observation that produces meaning' (p. 39).

It therefore seems that 'crisis' is a signifier pushed into the anteriority of knowledge formation – and the context in which this is observed is not immaterial to the observation. Crisis both *guides* the registering and analysis of something out there, and at the self-same moment *enables* such analysis to turn upon itself – to explore how the signifier 'crisis' is enunciated and recognised and perhaps constituted as such in analysis.

Investigation of this self-reflexive turn in discourses of crisis, as much as a crisis of analysis as an analysis of crisis, seems a useful way into considering media representations of the financial and political crisis of 2007–2008. Media Studies, as the discipline devoted to analysing media representation, has the great advantage of being alert both to the object that is represented in media and to the media representation of that object (the modus of representation) at the same time. By holding media representation in focus, as an object of study, Media Studies might appear to render itself transparent – become a pure field of analytical application and practice. And yet, that could easily change: its focus on representation in media (let us say, in news discourse) could also lay bare its own representational practices and methodologies as medium (academic discourse), around the fulcrum of enunciating 'crisis'. That is where the tensions of *representing* crisis lie: in representation, and in the representation of representation.

Representation

The following observations are confined to analytical and researched accounts (academic accounts) of news media coverage of the financial crisis of 2007–2008.

Much of this research has understandably been concerned with two key and interlinked aspects of news media: presenting information (how information is selected, focalised, narrativised, interpreted) and making information public (usually considered in terms of access to information and the kinds of accountability that may be entailed). Methods for researching both – separately or relatedly – have been variously debated; this is not the place to summarise those. Two metaphors have characterised analysis of the coverage in question, and generally underpins a great deal of Media Studies research: 'framing' of news and, regarding the relationship to the public, news media as 'watchdog'. More or less rigorous definitions of these metaphors and the metaphorised objects (addressing questions like 'what is objective information?' and 'what is newsworthy and what is the public interest?') are too familiar to call for pause. But they are worth pausing on: these metaphors have an immediate suggestiveness which works through and sometimes despite specialist definition. In a way, their immediate thrust is indicative of the conceptual horizon against which the majority of Media Studies investigations are now undertaken. Metaphorically, 'framing' suggests that there is a picture (here the picture is newsworthy information) which is *not* interfered with, which is brought to view with its nuances and integrity intact, by means of strategies which work around it. Similarly metaphorically, a 'watchdog' alerts its charge (the public, news consumers) to dangers (here that means giving informing about risks to and practices against the public interest) and may even defend its charge from danger (that is, holding those endangering the public interest accountable); importantly, a 'watchdog' does not attack its charge or assist those endangering its charge. These (and such) metaphors therefore set up a normative horizon of how news should be presented and for what purpose – an ethics of what news ought to be – against which Media Studies analysis is undertaken: in brief, news media should not interfere with the substance of information, and should not work against the public interest (in both senses of 'interest', as serving *the public's curiosity* and as working for *the public's health*). There is a normative tension there between representation and responsibility: these are not necessarily coeval and call for a balancing act. Interfering with the substance may sometimes and arguably work in the public interest and not interfering may work against; and yet, not interfering and at the same time working for the public interest are often assumed as pre-subscribed norms for media and in analysing media texts.

The tensions between these assumed norms are constantly tested in routinized academic investigation without quite being articulated. These norms prefigure a kind of ideal media condition in terms of which analysis can be normatively inclined. So, a great deal of media analysis is devoted to showing how 'framing' does not simply present the objective picture, but massages, distorts, and even constitutes it at times – indeed, that framing is actually more like (metaphorically) looking through a veil or lens or different grids, and that the implicit ideal of unframed news is an impossibility and the normative horizon of objective news a chimera (message is massage). And similarly, also that the media as 'watchdog' could work against the public interest and sometimes understand public interest in ways that the public may not accept – so that the normative standard here is unstable and set by the agent that is supposed to be regulated by it. Media Studies analysts usually foreground departures from the presumed ideal of news *habitually*, without interrogating their own normative presumptions – in other words, such norms tacitly underpin routinized methodologies for research. However, when media discourses converge on narrativizing 'crisis' the normative presumptions come under particular pressure, and become more amenable to explicit interrogation. Arguably, media discourses perceive and declare crises so often and in so many ways that such discourses unravel continuously. Nevertheless, the sheer intensity (within specific news outlets) and density (across media outlets of different orientations) of coverage of the 2007–2008 financial crisis – reflecting the perceived scale of the crisis – meant that these norms became almost opaque, tending to move from horizon to foreground in analysis, exposed as a constitutive part of exploring the crisis itself. In that process the tacit presumptions and ambivalences in the Media Studies analyst's approach to and methods for examining news media became more examinable than usual. The plethora of such analyses addressed to the plethora of media reports dealing with a Choate issue threw forth, as it were, the assumptions of news reporters/writers *and* of Media Studies academics in a mutually-clarifying fashion.

A significant amount of Media Studies research now follows a fairly routinized and apparently empirically-grounded method, with numerous examples for coverage of the 2007–2008 financial crisis. This consists in the following steps: (1) choosing a thematic media discourse context, such as 'financial crisis'; (2) focusing on one geopolitical domain (typically a nation-state) or selecting two or more such domains for comparison; (3) identifying representative media outlets for those domains; (4) extrapolating texts relevant to the discourse context for the selected domain(s) and outlet(s) – namely, gathering a text corpus; (5) making some anticipatory hypotheses about the kinds of discourse features and contextual relations for the context that may be found within the corpus; (6) taking methodological decisions about how those features and relations may be disposed for analysis across the corpus (typically, by choosing key words or identifying discourse strategies which cohere with the defined terms); (7) coding the corpus accordingly, and generating data by statistical collation thereof; (8) undertaking regression analysis of the data obtained, so as to test the anticipatory hypotheses; and (9) thereby finding or failing to find confirmation of those hypotheses, and accordingly presenting 'conclusions' in the form of tentative or sound generalisations. Occasionally, the quantitative thrust of this method is kept at a basic level (especially at steps 7 and 8), and simple numeric observations are used to support qualitative analysis. Routinized recourse to this method has several ostensible advantages: it allows for apparent coherence between very differently contextualised researches using roughly the same method, and therefore scope for accumulative research; the relation between context and corpus seems to be empirically valid, especially if the scale of the corpus is apparently large (though 'large' is a relative term, and nothing is large enough to allow *conclusive* inferences if the notion of comprehensive corpora is kept in mind); and the numerate presentation of the research material and quantitative way of analysing it suggests that the investigator's ideological proclivities will not affect findings. To a not insignificant degree, conviction in such advantages derives from the mixed provenance of this method in linguistics. It is essentially a wedding of corpus linguistic methods to describe domain-specific language usage (especially from the 1950s) and methods for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of applied strategies for mediating social relations through language (mainly from the 1990s). The rationale of the former is largely based on a scale of (aspiring to comprehensive) data elicitation for specific language usage contexts, typically focused on the lexical unit (such as, for English, the very large and later numerous corpora of the Survey of English Usage and the International Corpus of English). The rationale of CDA methods are grounded on qualitative (sometimes conjoined with quantitative) analysis of the post-sentential structures of language in specific contexts and categories of texts. These two rationales do not necessarily cohere when brought together, and arguably could undermine each other – though, as in Media Studies, increasingly routinized recourse to both together are found widely in sociolinguistic research.

However, a cursory survey of Media Studies researches following (at least some of) the 9-step method, especially for a superlatively productive media context like the 2007–2008 financial crisis, casts doubt on the method's putative advantages – and serves to put such routinized investigative practice itself into an interrogative perspective.

Slipping between methodological rationales, every point in the 9-step method which allows for a choice to be made also allows for *distinctive* authorial preferences – that is to say, analyst's preferences – to be inserted, despite the appearance of methodological regularity and objectivity: choice of thematic discourse context, geopolitical domain, media outlets, hypotheses for testing, keywords for coding, variables in regression analysis. Since significant degrees of variation are evident *between different analysts* for the same selected delimitation in any given step, such studies seldom have an objective or accumulative advantage. This kind of shrouded intervention by analyst's preferences constitutes academic 'framing' of the media representations (media framing) under investigation. This becomes particularly evident when several papers on the same theme (financial crisis) can be compared for each of these steps. It would be tedious to go through demonstrations step-by-step, so let me pause on one: choice of geopolitical domain – typically nation-state. Several analyses of media coverage of the 2007–2008 financial crisis compared reportage across several domains, and each articulated the domains, and outlined what is comparable across domains, with distinct emphases. Thus, Strömbäck, Jenssen and Aalberg's (2012) study of how media coverage of the crisis across six European countries impinged on public knowledge, placed these countries in three categories: liberal welfare state, conservative welfare state and social democratic welfare state. Halsall (2013) compared media coverage of the crisis in Germany and the UK in 2008–2009 by taking the former as representative of conventionally different (though converging) models of liberalism, the Anglo-American neoliberal and the Ordo-liberal. In exploring whether media reportage was itself an encouraging factor in the credit crunch, Wisniewski and Lambe (2013) disposed their findings according to three national domains (UK, USA, Canada), with the assumption that their being Anglophone offers a particular basis for comparison. Robertson (2014) compared television coverage by placing outlets in the Anglo-Saxon world (BBC and CNN) and the 'counter-hegemonic' Russian (RT) and Middle Eastern (Al Jazeera) contexts. A study of newspaper coverage of financial crisis and parliamentary responses in Spain and the Netherlands by Vliegenthart and Montes (2014) focused on differences in political and media systems in the two countries respectively. So did, but with a distinctive emphasis on policy regarding autonomy and public service broadcasting, a study of Spanish and Swedish reportage by Ibarra and Nord (2014). In each of these, not only are the selected domains focalised in quite different ways for analytical purposes (with different reductions of complexity), the bases for comparison are grounded in distinctively ideologically-loaded (largely liberal) analysts' perspectives. Media coverage according to domains are mapped to varying mappings of international geopolitics, with analysts deciding whether to call upon globalisation theories, democratisation theories, regime theory, systems theory, neorealism according to their political inclinations.

Other Media Studies analysts used the same method to focus on how a particular national domain was represented by foreign or global (or transnational) media outlets – almost always presuming a clear separation of the latter from local outlets. The presumptive construction of such an inside/outside binary arises from ideological subscription too (with varying degrees of nationalism). In fact, in such cases it seems that a familiar frame of media representation (inside/outside; domestic/global; national/international; ours/theirs) becomes coterminous with academic framing – it is difficult to discern where the frame is constructed, or whether perhaps it has not always been pre-constructed. In reference to the 2007–2008 financial crisis, this mode of framing geopolitical domains and international relations was used variously by Media Studies researchers, for example: Chartier (2010) on how Iceland was represented in 'foreign' media; Tzogopoulos (2013) on representation of the Greek crisis in the 'international press'; Touri and Rogers (2013) on UK media coverage of Greece; Kaitatzi-Whitlock (2014) on the Greek crisis in 'transnational media'; Soto (2014) examining the 'reputation' of Spain in various 'global business newspapers and magazines'; and so on. In such researches, nationalist sentiment constructed the inside and outside with different emphases according to the strength of analysts' feelings. These differences were especially in evidence where media representation was regarded as being part of the crisis – markedly, for instance, in Greece. Thus, Tzogopoulos' (2013) study of stereotyping in the international press observed in an understated fashion that: 'Within this context, international newspapers were often entrapped in the logic of overgeneralization' (p. 113) – and ultimately concluded with lessons to be learned by Greece, since 'Those who have the fate of the country in their own hands are the Greek people themselves' (p. 165). On a contrary note, Kaitatzi-Whitlock (2014) found that the Greek crisis was represented in EU political forums and in transnational news media with a mutually supportive agenda which disabled Greek agency: 'Representations of the Greek crisis constitute particular cases of an institutional "intra-European racism." [...] Blame for corruption was attributed exclusively to Greeks, thereby purging the true corruptors: national monopoly champion companies in the North. It aimed also at punishing Greek citizens materially and intimidating them morally. This was a veritable *media war*' (p. 35). Both agreed however that Greek media had often reiterated similar frames as international/transnational media.

A number of researches based on (at least some of) the 9-step method focused on single geopolitical domains, and on news outlets representative of that domain. Shorn of a comparative dimension, not all such analyses necessarily framed their focused domains in general ways – but some did. In the latter, given knowledge of national characteristics were brought to bear upon the hypotheses to be tested, for example: 'Sweden is typically considered a democratic corporatist country with strong journalistic professionalism', in Falasca's (2014, p. 588) investigation into media intervention in politics there during the crisis; Romania as an 'Eastern European country' in contradistinction from the 'West', in Vincze's (2014, p. 568) account of how the crisis featured as a local media framing device. But even where this was not explicitly done, and the national context was only circumstantially registered, the presumption of inside knowledge – of the analyst's location – came with its own relatively slight ideological tilt: as in studies of media coverage of the crisis in Portugal (Sousa and Santos, 2014), Ireland (Cawley, 2012; Rafter, 2014), Belgium (De Bruycker and Walgrave, 2014), Germany (Lischka, 2014), and elsewhere.

The kind of interference of the analyst's own framing devices (focalisations, ideological proclivities) that appears in one step – selecting geopolitical domains – of the 9-step method radiates across other steps involving analysts' choices: selection of news outlets, hypotheses for testing, choice of coding terms, and so forth. The variety of analysts' constructions involved at any specific step means that, despite appearances, such researches render transparent accounting of the media field and accumulative observations unlikely. In fact, the numerate aspects of the method (coding, data collation, regression analysis) could also be compromised by a tendency towards circular argument. If the analyst's framing plays into the formulation of hypotheses to be tested, and then feeds into coding and analysis, then the conclusions tend to appear more or less self-fulfilling, or appear to be nuanced only in degree of self-confirmation. So, for instance, when Lischka (2014) presented the hypothesis that 'different revenue incentives cause differences within the content of public versus commercial news outlets' (p. 550), and then set up a process of preparing a corpus, coding, regressive analysis for a set of selected news outlets in specifically the German domain in the context of the financial crisis, the general conclusion that 'Overall, results confirm a structural bias [...] caused by the character of the news outlets' (p. 561) seemed to be preordained by the investigative method. The more nuanced meeting of expectations and unexpected findings in some respects operated within the parameters of general confirmation, derived from a methodological pre-determination of terms. Further, given the limits of the analyst's choices, the conclusions appeared to be too ambitiously generalised: the hypothesis and confirmed conclusion seemed more all-embracing than the limitations of the method allows. Much the same could be said of most of the papers following this method cited above, and other similar papers: Cawley's (2012) demonstration that in Irish crisis-coverage 'framing contests [that] tends to lean towards conflict and binary opposites' (p. 603) were repeatedly deployed; De Bruycker and Walgrave's (2014) three expectations (p. 89) about how media works upon issue ownership in Belgian politics; Baden and

Springer's (2014) investigation of the 'limitations on plurality' in public interpretations of the crisis through online comments on news; Falasca's (2014) anticipation and confirmation of 'politics as a media strategy' framing and 'conflict framing' (p. 586) for Swedish political news during the crisis period; and so on.

I am not suggesting that the hypotheses offered and the conclusions reached in such research were not valid – they mostly are, I suspect, and certainly seem persuasive and instinctively plausible. The point here is that the routinized methodology does not do as much as is claimed. In fact, a close look at this routinized method suggests that media framings and Media Studies analyst's framings of media framings work in a symbiotic relationship; and that the Media Studies analyst's framings are as quietly/subliminally deployed as they claim the media framings to be. But the kind of research I have been considering thus far seems to have been practiced with little anxiety about its own ambivalences.

In the less routinized precincts of Media Studies apropos the financial crisis, the operations and structures of the media – and tendentiously of Media Studies as a practice – were more searchingly contemplated, with a sense of the crisis out there imploding into a crisis of media representation and into the methods for analysing such representation. Inevitably this involved reconsideration of foundational questions in Media Studies: about the role of media in relation to the public (the 'watchdog' metaphor cropped up often); on what the public is and how the news constitutes it; and on the relation between 'specialists' and 'laypersons' (in the financial crisis, in media representation of the crisis, in Media Studies).

Relevantly, Starkman's (2014) book-length study of why the media failed as a 'watchdog' in the lead up to the financial crisis of 2007–2008 presented a strong historicist argument. Phases of 'accountability' and 'access' reporting (primarily American and British) through the twentieth century and onwards were charted here, on the understanding that 'access reporting tells readers what powerful actors *say* while accountability reporting tells readers what they *do*' (p. 10). Starkman argues that, in relation to moves in the financial sector that led to the crisis, accountability reporting seemed to fade after 2003 to be replaced by access reporting. Consequently, financial and political elites who benefitted from the deregulations and risk-management strategies that led to the crisis were able to embed their ideology and worldview through mainstream media, and to mislead the public till crisis-point was reached. The conditions of the news industry, Starkman avers, explain the shift towards access reporting, with digitisation (which encourages disinvestment from conventional news production norms) and financialisation (restructuring for profit maximisation) as key factors. So, on the one hand:

> 'Nearly all the advantages in journalism rest with access. The stories are generally shorter and quicker to do. Further, the interests of access reporting and its subjects often run in harmony. Powerful leaders are, after all, the sources for much of access reporting's product. The harmonious relationship can lead to a synergy between reporter and source. Aided by access reporting, the source provides additional scoops. As one effective story follows another, access reporting is able to serve a news organisation's production needs, which tend to be voracious and unending. Access reporting thus wins support within the news hierarchy' (p. 141).

On the other hand: 'Accountability reporting requires time, space, expense, risk and stress. It makes few friends' (p. 141). The underlying concept of news media's relationship with the public (the 'watchdog' metaphor) here, with its normative horizon of ideal democratic and citizenship responsibility, has been subject to influential crisis narratives for several decades (particularly since Herman and Chomsky, 1988, and Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995) – a crisis in the mutually-sustained structuring of both the industry and the content of news media. In this longer view, Starkman's account of the 'news about the news' of the 2007–2008 financial crisis updated the situation – though with, as he notes (p. 106), more faith in the marginal media's occasional ability to hold power elites to account than Herman and Chomsky had (including in eventually breaking news about the 2007–2008 financial crisis, discussed in ch. 8). Starkman thus conjoined the crisis of the financial and political sectors with the crisis in the media sector, radiating across and cutting into each other. And he implicitly raised again those key questions for Media Studies analysts about what the media does in and to the public sphere, along with what it represents for and to the public.

With media coverage of the 2007–2008 financial crisis in view, discussion of these foundational questions of Media Studies have been revisited occasionally – typically either by drawing upon Lippmann's (1930 [1925]) and Dewey's (1927) formulations on the public in democratic contexts and the role that knowledge plays therein (the Lippmann-Dewey debate), or upon Habermas' (1962 [1989]) conception of the public sphere and deliberative democracy. Scholarly discussions of these questions after 2008 have mainly sought to fine-tune earlier formulations, particularly in view of the structural changes in the media industry described by Starkman, and others (see Winseck and Jin, 2012; Aalberg and Curran, 2012). Thus, for instance, Davis (2012) argued that the 2007–2008 crisis coverage shows that the media propagated 'discourses, narratives and myths about finance itself to *financial and associated stakeholder elites*' (p. 241). But, according to Davis, this has played a supportive rather than primary role in the crisis itself, because the media works at a cultural and ideological level rather than directly upon the economy – and works more effectively on the elites who make decisions rather than on the public at large. With reference to the same context, VenderVeen (2010) took a somewhat contrary view of the media's relationship with the public, emphasising 'their educative role both in providing conceptual frameworks for understanding problems and in building capacities for acting to address them' (p. 172). For VanderVeen, coverage of the 2007–2008 financial crisis suggested some general proposals for underscoring the media's educative role.

An interesting drift in this context is found in academic mulling over the distinction between 'laypersons' and 'specialists'/'experts' made during the financial crisis, markedly in the media; inevitably, this potentially turns the gaze of Media Studies analysts also on themselves and their discipline. Roitman (2014) observed that the layperson/expert distinction that surfaced so extensively after 2007–2008 'relies on subject positions that are not tenable' (p. 5). However, in general, financial crisis discourses have tended to harden rather than blur the distinction. Some effort has even been made to establish objective differences between laypersons' and experts' apprehensions of the crisis, by using something like the 9-step method outlined above but with survey questionnaires (from a pool of respondents in Austria) rather than media texts (see Gangle *et al.*, 2012). Researchers have severally observed that precisely such a distinction often framed the financial crisis in news media, so as to legitimise the establishment view and its neoliberal ideology. With reference to two radio programmes in Ireland, for instance, Rafter (2014) found that the call on 'expertise' to comment upon and interpret developments during the financial crisis fell into several official and bureaucracy-friendly categories: 'someone of great learning with the authority to give opinions'; 'the star or celebrity pundits who are [...] favoured by programme-makers for their ability to engage in speculation and conjecture'; and the 'journalist expert' – in keeping with 'the movement from descriptive journalism where the reporter is an observer to interpretative reporting where the reporter operates as an analyst' (p. 601). In that obfuscation of boundaries between reporting and analysing, there is arguably a nod towards Media Studies analysts – a suggestion that Media Studies needs to contemplate its own understanding of expertise, its own specialist practices and norms.

That media practice (undertaking media representation, working in media industries) equips persons with expertise which is valued highly in academic Media Studies is widely accepted and institutionally recognised. The discipline naturally has a strong applied orientation, with pedagogy designed to facilitate future employment in media industries. But that circumstance opens unresolved questions for analytical research in Media Studies. Is it possible then that convergences may gradually develop between the media industry and Media Studies academic institutions, much as those described by Starkman between access reporters and their elite sources? May media representation and Media Studies analysis of that representation develop a mutually supportive framework – has such a framework perhaps developed already in routinized investigative methods?

Does Media Studies have a 'watchdog' role to play in relation to the public which is distinct from the media's 'watchdog' role? How salient are the two 'watchdog' roles in conceptualising the democratic public sphere? ... Ultimately, are journalistic expertise and academic expertise the same, or should there be clearly defined gradations of distinction?

Rather than a neat concluding statement, raising such questions seems the appropriate way to inconclusively draw these notes to an end.

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