The battle for Seattle: protest and popular geopolitics in The Australian newspaper

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Abstract

“Popular geopolitics” demands that attention be given to examination of the role of the media in the construction and perpetuation of dominant geopolitical understandings. This paper gives specific attention to the ways in which Australia’s only national daily newspaper, The Australian, represented protests against the 3rd World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ministerial Conference held in Seattle during December 1999. News stories were presented within the context of a ‘protest paradigm’ which, through its central characteristics of story framing, drawing from official sources and invoking public opinion, made protest-critical viewpoints salient, and served to delegitimize, marginalize and demonize anti-WTO protestors. So presented, protestors and their actions provided a dramatic foil that added credibility to those people and organizations supportive of the WTO. Through these mechanisms, and in its role as an institution of everyday culture in Australia, The Australian contributed to the scripting of a neoliberal geopolitical hegemony.

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Introduction

On Tuesday morning, the 30th of November 1999, “a furious rag-bag of anti-globalization protestors” (The Economist, 1999) converged on downtown Seattle, USA, their main target being the scheduled opening of the 3rd WTO (World Trade Organisation) Ministerial Conference. Over the next four days, until the close of the conference on the afternoon of Friday the 3rd of December, tens of thousands of protestors were involved in hundreds of non-violent activities and demonstrations

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interspersed with outbreaks of violence and property destruction, as well as repeated confrontations with riot police. Over 500 protestors were arrested. Although they came from a diverse range of backgrounds and interest groups, protestors were united in their aims to draw attention to the problems of trade liberalization strategies that fail to take adequate account of human rights, environmental issues, democratic process, and local sovereignty (for discussions, see Smith, 2000; St Clair, 1999; Wainwright, Prudham, & Glassman, 2000).

The WTO meetings and associated protests in Seattle received extensive mass media coverage around the world and featured heavily in Australia’s sole national daily newspaper, *The Australian*. Acknowledging the role of the media in the cultural process through which meanings and realities are produced and consumed by audiences (Lee & Solomon, 1990), the ways in which this clash of elite, dominant geopolitical actors with “rag-bag” demonstrators were worked out within the mass media offers a valuable insight to the role of the media in shaping geopolitical discourse.

Dominant geopolitical discourse is (re)produced by the media in a variety of ways (see, for example, Cresswell, 1996; Myers, Klak, & Koehl, 1996) including delegitimization and marginalization of protest groups that challenge established orders. This paper gives specific attention to the ways in which protests related to the December 1999 WTO Ministerial Conference were constructed and represented in *The Australian* over the two-week period surrounding the conference. In particular, we outline ways in which a series of geopolitical scripts — in the form of *The Australian’s* reporting of WTO protests in Seattle — were presented within a “protest paradigm”. We show that protestor voices were delegitimized, marginalized and demonized, thereby giving emphasis to particular understandings of the WTO and neo-liberal trade policies.

**Critical geopolitics and the mass media**

Critical geopolitics seeks to denaturalize and recover ‘the complexities of global political life’ (O’Tuathail, 1999: 108) working to expose the inherent power relationships attached to global knowledge. Problematizing prevailing geopolitical orders not as given, but as ‘historically constructed perspectives asserting privileged forms of representation’, critical geopolitics challenges the unremarkable quality of hegemonic representations within the international sphere (Popke, 1994: 257). The focus of critical geopolitics is to trace the construction and imposition of discourses within which international debate takes place and to deconstruct the active constitution of worlds and subjectivities (Popke, 1994; O’Tuathail, 1996).

Because it sets aside the realist focus on the territorial state as primary geopolitical actor that characterizes traditional geopolitics, and links civil society with the state, critical geopolitics demands understanding of the complex workings of hegemony. It takes us to explorations of the constituent elements of the state actor, its internal contradictions, and power relations (Sharp, 1998: 154; 2000: 333). It creates space for discussion of political and social activity, including movements and moments such as the protests in Seattle, that are difficult to account for in realist approaches
to geopolitics (Routledge, 1996). It requires that we uncover mechanisms by which political and economic control and ways of seeing the world are projected and accepted as “common sense” and “natural”.

The ends of critical geopolitics are achieved through investigations of: geopolitical thought and the geopolitical tradition (formal geopolitics); the everyday practice of statecraft (practical geopolitics); contemporary geopolitical tradition (structural geopolitics); and popular culture, mass media and geographical understandings (popular geopolitics) (O’Tuathail, 1999: 110–111). Despite this variety of geopolitical subject matter, the majority of critical geopolitics has been directed towards state-level actors in their formulation and pronouncement of policies. The effects of popular culture upon the “high politics” of the international scene have traditionally been overlooked or deliberately down-played (Sharp, 1998; Dalby, 1994). Having said this, it is fair to note that since the early-to-mid-1990s, the importance of popular geopolitics in the perpetuation of dominant geopolitical reasoning has emerged as a significant research focus within critical geopolitics (see, for example, work by Cresswell, 1996; Dalby, 1996; Dodds, 1996, 1998, 2000; Myers, Klak, & Koehl, 1996; Popke, 1994; Sharp, 1993, 1996, 1998, 2000).

It is the area of popular geopolitics — involving exploration of the practical geopolitical reasoning found in informal, everyday discourse and examination of the role of the media in the construction and perpetuation of dominant geopolitical understandings of events, peoples and places — which is the focus of this paper. Our work reflects the realizations that the mass media provide ‘a context within which elite geopolitical texts are [re]produced’ (Sharp, 1993: 491); that the division between “high” cultures of statecraft and popular, “low” cultures have become tenuous (Sharp, 1998: 154); and consequently that media reporting of international events helps constitute and legitimate geopolitical agendas such as foreign policies (Atkinson and Dodds, 2000: 10). It follows earlier good examples (see, for example, Popke, 1994) of research that make it clear that geopolitical discourses emanating from institutions such as the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and reinforced by the mass media, supply and entrench (“commonsense”) interpretive frameworks through which the political world is rendered comprehensible. This, of course, is not to imply that there is a direct and unproblematic relationship between the interests of dominant geopolitical actors and the expressions of those interests in the media. The connections are mediated in a variety of ways based on, for example, the personal biases of journalists, professional practices and organizational imperatives, as well as pre-existing structures for understanding the world. Nevertheless, what we do see in The Australian’s coverage of the Seattle WTO protests is an articulation of the hegemonic ideology of ‘transnational liberalism, the belief that universal progress lies in the expansion and extension of capitalist markets across the globe’ (O’Tuathail, 1998: 19).

Through our discussion of ways in which the Seattle WTO protestors were delegitimized, demonized and marginalized in The Australian, we also take up calls by Dalby (1996) and Dodds and Sidaway (1994) who have suggested that a critical geopolitics that seeks to take seriously discourses of resistance, such as protest movements, must also explore the processes whereby these alternative understandings are
marginalized in conventional geopolitical discourse. Essential to any deeper understanding of resistance movements is an appreciation of the structures and mechanisms of political legitimacy within which such activities inevitably exist (Routledge, 1996).

Popular culture is significant as the dominant location for the production and reinforcement of a (inter)national consciousness. This consciousness provides a framework for understanding the new and unfamiliar in geopolitical spheres. It facilitates definition and renders phenomena comprehensible. For geopolitical actors, whether they be politicians or media outlets, to have their versions of knowledge widely accepted, those interpretations must sit comfortably with such a hegemonic consciousness (Sharp, 2000). Institutions of popular culture, such as cinema (Sharp, 1998), newspapers (Dalby, 1996; Myers, Klak, & Koehl, 1996), cartoons (Dodds, 1996, 1998) and magazines (Sharp, 2000) routinely reproduce established geopolitical images, metaphors and assumptions of such an outlook or culture, to the point that they become normalized as common-sense understandings. Moreover, through the mass media the complex multiplicities of geopolitical and economic worlds are suppressed and compacted into ‘controllable geopolitical abstractions’ (O’Tuathail and Agnew, 1992: 195). Thus, the mass media play a crucial role in providing the cultural context within which formal geopolitical scripts and geopolitical agendas are successfully produced and reproduced.

Everyday perceptions of the mass media as neutral or objective mask their role in the continual textual (re)production of ideologies and power relationships. That role is performed clearly in the reporting of political matters. A combination of people’s uncertainty about, and inconsistencies within, their political positions, coupled with the diversity of interpretations and perspectives that surround political matters, together with the news media’s tendency to repeatedly employ particular strategies for interpreting events, make the media highly significant agents in the shaping of public opinion (Iyengar, 1990: 20–21). Media power is expressed and wielded through superficially harmless news reports about places and people, events and organizations. Indeed, as Myers, Klak and Koehl (1996: 22) point out, it is often where information appears to be at its most benign, in press reporting of contested places and peoples, that this power is expressed and wielded most virulently. By providing a means by which particular texts are produced and disseminated, perhaps finding their way into public discourse, media offer a route through which versions of reality may ultimately become part of conventional wisdom and by which unequal power relationships may be sustained. The interests of existing political elites and power structures may be seen in the media through ways in which particular events are covered. This is of particular significance in situations, such as that which prevails in Australia, where a limited range of media outlets dominate a market for commercially produced news stories.

Why The Australian?

The Australian is Australia’s only daily national newspaper, and is owned by Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation Limited. In the most recent surveys available

(June, 2001), national readership figures for The Australian stood at 415,000 for weekday editions and 932,000 for the weekend edition (Roy Morgan Research, 2002). While it may not have the largest daily readership in the country and while we acknowledge Sharp’s (2000: 333) observation that ‘[d]ominant images of the world and its workings do not emerge from a single source’, it is fair to claim that as the nation’s only daily national paper, The Australian is one of the most influential voices in Australian society. According to editor Michael Stutchburg (2002), The Australian ‘has been recognized as being the nation’s foremost agenda-setting newspaper — there are few newspapers in the world quite like it.’ He goes on to note that The Australian is ‘part of the social mortar which defines the nation’s shape, its mood and ambitions’. In part, this might be attributed to some of the characteristics of the newspaper’s readership, which is notably wealthier and better educated than the balance of the nation’s population (Roy Morgan Readership Poll, in Stutchburg, 2002). The Australian also has more overseas offices than any other Australian newspaper or newspaper group. The paper is located firmly in Australian society as a globalizing mechanism by which news of the world is brought to the breakfast tables and boardrooms of the country’s most influential people. In that capacity, we argue that the ways in which this newspaper communicates stories about local matters such as the WTO protests in Seattle are instrumental in shaping support or otherwise for particular expressions of globalization and resistance to them. Our study of The Australian’s interpretations of events in far-away Seattle is also intended to help broaden the focus of recent geopolitical literature to include discussions of the ways in which popular geopolitical understandings are created in places other than Europe and North America. Through these ways of examining means by which international politics are imagined geographically, this paper goes to the heart of critical geopolitics.

Methodology

The Australian’s coverage of the WTO protests was analyzed over the two week period (26th November–10th December) surrounding the Seattle Ministerial Conference. With the exception of letters to the Editor, all articles in weekday and weekend papers that mentioned the Seattle protests were included in the study. A total of 27 articles, editorials and opinion pieces over the two-week sample period were analyzed. Adapting content analysis methods employed by Jenkin (1998) and McGregor (1998), analysis of coverage included a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. Each time a group or person was quoted either directly or indirectly, the number of lines devoted to their statements was recorded, along with their standpoint on the issue of the WTO and protestor actions and opinions. These findings were then compared with the number of lines devoted to the discussion of other issues within The Australian’s coverage of the Seattle WTO protests. Published opinion pieces and their particular stand on the protests were also tallied. This approach made it possible to determine which groups were afforded greatest depth and quality of coverage in The Australian. An intensive deconstruction of articles was then under-
taken to uncover and analyze the myths, discourses, stereotypes, metaphors and narrative structures that *The Australian* drew on to contextualize and give meaning to the WTO protests.

**Media and the protest paradigm**

The mass media regularly delegitimize and marginalize protest groups that challenge established orders (see Cohen, 1980; Cresswell, 1996; Gitlin, 1980; Hall, 1981; McLeod & Detenber, 1999; McLeod & Hertog, 1992; Murdock, 1981). As Cresswell (1996) suggests, the transgression of implicit social boundaries is often the only mechanism through which normalized political and social assumptions are usurped from the realms of doxa. Transgressive events such as social protest may force a reply to questions asked of the hegemonic “common sense”. It is in these responses — usually channeled through press reporting of civil disobedience and the like — that established orders are defended and reproduced. Taken-for-granted understandings are forced ‘out of the realm of the assumed’ (Cresswell, 1996: 137) to be defined and made explicit. In many examples, such as Cresswell’s tale of media reporting of Greenham Common protests and Stratford and Harwood’s (2001) work on skaters in Tasmania, this process can be explicitly geographical, with the transgression involving spatial boundaries (e.g., associated with official spaces such as streets and footpaths) that go to defining and delimiting certain activities and presences as (in)appropriate. However, the ‘terrains of resistance’ (Routledge, 1993) which are the focus of this paper are more metaphorical than literal. We examine the representational spaces of the “Battle for Seattle”.

Those actions of the media that serve to delegitimize and marginalize protest groups are not the result of any kind of direct collusion or conspiracy between media and elite groups — although at times the slavishness with which the press mirrors dominant group concerns can be remarkable (see, for example, Cresswell, 1996). Instead, the embedded bias of the news media is the ‘logical outcome of the organization of news gathering and processing and the assumptions upon which it rests’ (Murdock, 1981: 223). Support for the status quo is embedded in the processes of mainstream news production and often occurs without the conscious awareness of individuals producing the news messages (Cromwell, 2000; Lee & Solomon, 1990). It emerges instead as the product of a range of influences such as: “the biases of individual journalists; professional conventions, practices and ideologies; organizational imperatives; sociocultural worldviews and an underlying hegemonic ideology” (McLeod & Detenber, 1999: 4). An overall outcome is that the media act inadvertently as a form of guard-dog or gatekeeper, regularly covering protests from the perspectives of those in power and thereby entrenching hegemonic “common sense”.

One of the common mechanisms by which existing power structures are supported has been described as the protest paradigm — a ‘routinized pattern or implicit template for the coverage of social protest.’ (McLeod and Hertog, 1999: 310). The protest paradigm builds on earlier studies identifying various methods by which the mass media make certain viewpoints surrounding protest situations salient and publicly
influential (see Hall, 1981; Murdock, 1981). The paradigm comprises four main categories: story framing; reliance on official sources and official definitions; invocation of public opinion; and other techniques of delegitimization, marginalization and demonization (McLeod and Hertog, 1999: 311).

**Story framing**

Although there is no single definition of framing or of a news frame, the various characterizations that have been deployed feature similar characteristics (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000: 94). Framing refers to the deliberate or unintentional deployment of specific properties of a news narrative which encourages people perceiving and thinking about events to develop particular understandings of them (Entman, 1991: 7). As a narrative structure, the frame is one of the most important parts of a news story, helping journalists and readers organize the world by drawing attention to particular aspects of a reality described. Frames themselves are ‘schemata of interpretation’ (Goffman, in Pan and Kosicki, 1993: 56) or, in other words, ‘persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse’ (Gitlin, 1980: 7). Entman (1993: 52) goes on to note that in the process of framing, journalists select some aspect of a perceived reality and make it more meaningful and memorable (i.e., salient) in their text, ‘in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation’.

Conceptual links between the role of frames in media reporting and the scripts problematized by critical geopolitics are evident. Both organize and structure information in ways that engender particular interpretations of events.

Frames can influence the ways in which readers (or viewers) perceive and understand an issue and may also shape individuals’ opinions about matters that appear in the news. Through the discursive practices of placing, repeating, and reinforcing words and images which refer to some ideas but not others, frames work to make particular ideas more visible in a news text, others less so, and still others completely invisible (Entman, 1991: 7). Framing also involves other deliberate and subconscious strategies such as selecting and suppressing information and deploying metaphors, myths, common-sense definitions, stereotypes and bounded categories. The process may reduce a complex issue to a small number of central aspects or yield simplistic views of the world in which opposition viewpoints are silenced or drowned out (Nelson, Clawson and Oxley, 1997: 568).

Elements of news texts are more salient to readers if they fit pre-existing structures for understanding the world. Of course, the opposite also holds. Existing schemata may make it difficult for a receiver to apprehend certain ideas emphasized within a text. Thus, whilst the presence of a specific frame does not guarantee a particular kind of influence over audience thinking, it is likely to have common effects on large proportions of a receiving audience (Scheufele, 1999: 105).

Frames can be detected by probing for particular themes, words, descriptors and labels that appear frequently in a text and convey certain meanings and views of reality. Frames employed within news stories may be revealed through critical exam-
ination of the facts included and importantly by their frequency of appearance, associations with culturally familiar symbols, and also by those choices of attribution, phraseology and source selection that journalists have made which present some of those facts as being especially significant (Bendix and Liebler, 1999: 659; Entman, 1993: 52–3).

In their work on mass media’s role in the regulation of social groups, McLeod and Hertog (1999: 312–313) usefully identify a variety of frames for protest stories. The balanced frame sees all sides of an issue covered adequately and fairly. Although often set forth as a model of good journalistic practice, this frame is rarely deployed. Sympathetic frames are those in which protestors’ concerns are dealt with positively. Typically found only in the alternative press, these frames might focus on matters such as unjust persecution of protestors or the links between protestors and other like-minded groups. Mixed frames take a variety of forms and might, for example, draw parallels between a protest group and some other to demonstrate either legitimacy or deviance. Finally, and most commonly used in protest stories within the mass media, are marginalizing frames. McLeod and Hertog (1999: 312) have identified eight varieties of narrative structure that marginalize protestors. These variously emphasize violent crime, property crime and riots, carnivalesque and freakish aspects of protest, childish antics, and moral and social decay. As the following sections vividly demonstrate, it is evident that The Australian’s stories about WTO protests in Seattle served to marginalize protestors by using many of the narrative structures identified by McLeod and Hertog. We can also identify an additional schema of interpretation which we present here as the “idiots at large” frame.

Protest as performance

The Seattle WTO protests were presented repeatedly by The Australian as a form of carnival “performance”. This attachment of metaphors of “carnival” to protest groups is a well-documented phenomenon and the links between the two are discussed extensively by Cresswell (1996: 121–133. See also Couch (2001) for a short discussion of art, symbolism, humor and other aspects of carnival as integral parts of contemporary resistance.). In The Australian’s coverage, Seattle protest actions were portrayed as ‘grand street theatre artfully staged’; the ‘greatest circus stunt yet’, with journalists describing a ‘chorus of protest’ which ‘goes for ratings’ (The Australian, 29 November: 13). The ‘Seattle Street Theatre’ (The Australian 2 December: 12) had a ‘carnival atmosphere’ (The Australian 4 December: 43). The city’s streets were a ‘stage’ packed with ‘performers’ (The Australian 29 November: 13), described as ‘creative … to the bizarre’ (The Australian 4 December: 43). Even if they were beaten, gassed and shot at by police ‘at least the rioters had a good time’ (The Australian 4 December: 43). Protestors were said to be ‘singing, dancing, banging [and] waving … [their way] through the streets’ (The Australian 4 December: 43). It was ‘slightly chaotic but fun’ (The Australian 4 December: 43). Protestors were represented by The Australian as performers within a spectacle, prompting readers to perceive protestor actions as a grand form of costume party — some fun and a good day out.

The ‘protest as performance’ narrative structure framed protestors’ actions and
justifications as merely acting, thereby emptying them of their radical political content (Murdock, 1981: 212) and shifting the focus of reader attention away from protestors’ political perspectives and reasons for being on the streets of Seattle. Indeed, The Australian’s use of the performance discourse obliterated or rendered less visible the protests’ undeniable political content. Through this frame, protestors became performers without cause and without a legitimate position from which to state their claims. Moreover, when combined with the different levels of attention (see Tables 1 and 2) given to WTO and protestor positions, the performance framing mechanism offers greater salience and legitimacy to the prevailing definitions of the WTO.

Protestor appearance and identity — distractions and fringe dwellers

The ‘freak show’ frame described by McLeod and Hertog (1999: 312; see also Cresswell, 1996: 105–113) highlights protestors’ oddities and appearances. In The Australian’s coverage of events in Seattle, protestors were depicted — through descriptions of their appearance and behavior — as fringe dwellers on the realms of mainstream society (i.e., The Australian’s readership). Descriptions focused around things such as looks: ‘a heavily pierced activist sat sewing radical cheerleader uniforms’; and diets: ‘while huge vats of beans were carried from a makeshift kitchen, as the hungry hordes tucked into donated vegan food on tinfoil plates’ (The Australian 4 December: 43). ‘[P]rotestors dressed as Sea Turtles and puppeteers wielded Monarch butterflies’ (The Australian 1 December: 6); while ‘the young man wearing a kilt and a hairy chest cheers’ (The Australian 2 December: 7); and the anti-WTO ‘cause [was] taken up by young women marching bare-breasted’ (The Australian 3 December: 8). ‘Dressed in black’, ‘they [we]re suit-wearing mainstream and they [we]re disposal shop sub-culture’; ‘there [we]re buzz cuts and dreadlocks and pierced lips, noses and eyebrows’ (The Australian 4 December: 21). Protestors were referred to derogatorily: ‘Jones [an activist] looks like the small-towner she is’ (The Australian 4 December: 21); and identified in headlines as a ‘Motley Crew’ and ‘rag-tag… in a strange alliance’ (The Australian 2 December: 7).

Table 3 shows clearly that a great deal more print space was given to descriptions of the appearances and identity of protestors and their violent clashes with police than to the substantial political content and underlying causes of their presence on the streets. Approximately 33% of the space given to protestors in The Australian was dedicated to descriptions of their appearance, identity, personal attributes and even their diets. However, not a single word was devoted to those same characteristics of any of the pro-WTO/anti-protest commentators. Attention was focused clearly on their opinions and statements, not on their dress-sense, hairstyles or diet (see Table 3).

In ways reminiscent of British media coverage of women’s protests at Greenham Common in England (Cresswell, 1996), The Australian invoked social norms and focused attention on protestors’ appearances. Protestors were clearly presented as a strange, isolated minority of fringe-dwellers, the likes of which most “normal” people would not want much to do with. This moved attention away from consideration and analysis of protestors’ political concerns and perspectives. By concentrating on
Table 1
Number of lines devoted to quotations about the Seattle WTO protests in *The Australian*, 26th November–10th December 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WTO-supportive/protest-critical</th>
<th>Indirect quote</th>
<th>Direct quote</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Mean lines/speaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>WTO-supportive/protest-critical</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US President — Bill Clinton</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTO Chief — Executive Director Michael Moore</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economist — Paul Krugman</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor of Seattle — Paul Schell</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Trade Minister</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief of Seattle Police</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Main WTO players’</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Foreign Affairs &amp; Trade Dept. Secretary</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Secretary of State — Madeleine Albright</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former OECD Member</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Defenders of the WTO’</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Trade Expert’</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>159</strong></td>
<td><strong>139</strong></td>
<td><strong>298</strong></td>
<td><strong>26.5</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| WTO-critical/protest-supportive |               |              |       |                   |
| Australian Conservation Foundation | 19            | 6            | 25    |                   |
| Turning Point Project           | -             | 22           | 22    |                   |
| ‘Sea-Turtles’                   | 19            | 3            | 22    |                   |
| Ruckus Society                  | 4             | 12           | 16    |                   |
| ‘Protestors’                    | 11            | 5            | 16    |                   |
| ‘Critics of the WTO’            | 3             | 10           | 13    |                   |
| US Labor Federations            | 13            | -            | 13    |                   |
| Steelworkers Union              | 6             | 5            | 11    |                   |
| OXFAM                           | 8             | -            | 8     |                   |
| Anti-WTO web-site               | -             | 7            | 7     |                   |
| Ralph Nader’s Public Citizen Global Trade Watch | 7             | -            | 7     |                   |
| Sierra Club                     | 7             | -            | 7     |                   |
| ‘Anti-WTO army’                 | 7             | -            | 7     |                   |
| Activist — Troy Jones           | -             | 6            | 6     |                   |
| Friends of The Earth            | 5             | 1            | 6     |                   |
| Humane Society                  | 6             | -            | 6     |                   |
| UK Food Group                   | 5             | -            | 5     |                   |
| Aust. Council of Trade Unions   | 4             | -            | 4     |                   |
| Earth First                     | 4             | -            | 4     |                   |
| Australian Greens — Bob Brown   | 4             | -            | 4     |                   |
| ‘Ecology activists’             | 3             | -            | 3     |                   |
| ‘Anti-WTO activists’            | 3             | -            | 3     |                   |
| ‘Activists’                     | 3             | -            | 3     |                   |
| Jubilee 2000                    | 3             | -            | 3     |                   |
| Washington Assn of Churches     | 3             | -            | 3     |                   |
| Californian Senator — Tom Hayden | -             | 1            | 1     |                   |
| **Total WTO**                   | **147**       | **78**       | **225** | **8.7**          |
Table 2
Opinion pieces devoted to particular standpoints regarding the Seattle WTO protests published in *The Australian*, 26th November–10th December 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standpoints</th>
<th># of pieces</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WTO-supportive/protest-critical</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTO-critical/protest-supportive</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3
Number of lines devoted to various segments of coverage of the Seattle WTO Protests in *The Australian*, 26th November–10th December 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segment</th>
<th># of lines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quotations — WTO-critical/protest-supportive</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions — Protestor appearances and personal attributes</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions — WTO-supportive/protest-critical commentator appearances and personal attributes</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions — Protestor v. Police clashes/ incidents of violence</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

form — the physical appearances and other characteristics of protestors (e.g., piercings, nudity, veganism) — rather than content, *The Australian* emptied this protest of its political significance (Murdock, 1981) whilst simultaneously delegitimising and marginalizing “freakish” protestors.

*The Battle for Seattle: i) policing violence*

According to McLeod and Hertog (1999: 312), the violent crime story is that which most commonly marginalizes protestors. Coverage of the Seattle protests was clearly presented as a battle script. Headlines such as ‘The Battle for Seattle’ (*The Australian* 2 December: 1) repeatedly emphasized clashes between police and protestors. ‘[M]arauding protestors’ (*The Australian* 6 December: 15) were said to be repeatedly involved in ‘violent battles’ in which ‘riot police … took back the streets of central Seattle, driving hardcore anti-WTO demonstrators out with percussion
grenades, “stinger” rubber bullets, pepper spray and tear gas’ (*The Australian* 2 December: 1). Conflict was continually given attention by journalists as ‘relations soured between demonstrators and police’ (*The Australian* 4 December: 21) enforcing a ‘decision to impose a zero-tolerance policy on protests’ (*The Australian* 3 December: 8). ‘The Siege of Seattle’ (*The Australian* 2 December: 7) ended with ‘Darth Vader riot police hold[ing] streets that had been declared a 24-hour no-go area to anyone but WTO delegates’ (*The Australian* 4 December: 21). Just as “performance” and “appearance/identity” discourses diverted attention away from the content of the protest to its form, the ‘Battle for Seattle’ narrative structure portrayed protestors as being involved in violent conflict with police rather than engaged in intellectual debates against the WTO.

The Battle for Seattle: ii) violence, lawlessness and anarchy

Vandalism and acts of civil disobedience are typically the focal points of those property crime stories within the marginalizing frame. Anti-WTO protests were presented within an “anarchy and violence” narrative structure in which repeated reference was made to property destruction by protestors’, to their acts of violence, and to the presence of ‘masked anarchists dressed in black’ (*The Australian* 4 December: 21). The violence of battles with police was set against the ‘illegality’ (*The Australian* 1 December: 6) of protestor actions as they made ‘circuits of city blocks, smashing windows, vandalizing cars, attacking a McDonalds’ outlet and other stores’, such as ‘a Starbucks’ coffee house (*The Australian* 2 December: 1). Seattle was shown falling victim to scenes of ‘sporadic violence’ (*The Australian* 2 December: 1) in which ‘protestors overturn[ed] police vans and set garbage bins alight’ contributing to a sense of ‘[s]hattered [p]eace’ (*The Australian* 2 December: 7). The streets of Seattle became a ‘playground for anarchists’ (*The Australian* 4 December: 21) as an ‘organized squad of anarchists’ (*The Australian* 2 December: 7) participated in actions in which protestors were ‘adopting guerilla-type tactics’ (*The Australian* 3 December: 8). The overall feel of events led one journalist to label the protests as simply ‘Anarchy in the US’ (*The Australian* 3 December: 8).


Amongst their eight story types that marginalize protestors, McLeod and Hertog (1999: 312) describe a ‘Romper Room’ frame that ‘portrays the protestors as immature deviants engaged in childish acts.’ While *The Australian*’s coverage certainly presented news within this narrative structure, there was within this frame an almost sympathetic connection between the Seattle protests and those now-celebrated civil upheavals of America’s recent past. There were ‘Echoes of the 60s in downtown Seattle’ (*The Australian* 4 December: 43) and ‘old methods for a new order’ (*The Australian* 1 December: 6). Comparisons were made between anti-WTO protests and anti-Vietnam War protests of the 1960s: ‘some of the worst civil unrest in the US since the anti-Vietnam protests of the 1960s’ (*The Australian* 4 December, p.12); ‘Seattle was to be their San Francisco, the cradle of the anti-Vietnam movement, and the WTO their “Tricky Dicky” Nixon’ (*The Australian* 3 December: 8). Seattle’s streets saw ‘a scattering of veterans of the grand old days of the Vietnam War pro-
tests’ (*The Australian* 2 December: 1). At times however, the tone of reports shifted to suggest that the WTO protests were little more than an expression of an adolescent phase for a new generation: ‘oh-so-fond of anything retro, the US grunge capital’s hosting of the WTO provided Generation X with the perfect venue to get a taste of the 60s’ (*The Australian* 3 December: 8); ‘to Gen Xers, it smells like 60s teen spirit’ (*The Australian* 3 December: 8). Aside from implying that Seattle protestors were politically naive, comments such as these downplayed the unique content and character of their political concerns. Protest actions were presented as ‘the latest incarnation of a protest ideology’ (*The Australian* 3 December: 8) — a rehashed version of well-worn ideals.

In much the same way events of the May 1968 student uprisings in France were used in the media to compare and give meaning to a later anti-Vietnam war rally in London (Murdock, 1981: 210), events in Seattle were situated within a 1960s/Vietnam discourse. Invoking 1960s and anti-Vietnam narrative structures, *The Australian* transferred particular understandings of those events to the protests in Seattle. Where Vietnam was a single-issue campaign against US involvement in war, Seattle can be seen as a series of complex debates which have been simplified to incorporate ‘commonsense’ (Sharp, 1993: 494) interpretations of right or wrong. Despite the fact that they might mean well, protestors were obviously wrong and ‘the true believers will, I suppose always fight the good fight’ (*The Australian* 3 December: 8).

*The Prattle in Seattle: economic ignorance, stupidity and conspiracy theories — ‘Idiots at large’.*

Cresswell (1996) has recognized that metaphors of madness and insanity are frequently associated with moments of transgression of implied socio-political boundaries. Despite this, one story type that McLeod and Hertog (1999) do not identify in their categorization of frames is one which focuses on the mental ability or stability of protestors and which we call here the “idiots at large” story. In the pages of *The Australian*, WTO protestors were repeatedly depicted as being ignorant and stupid. Protestor arguments were represented as ‘extremely primitive’ (*The Australian* 29 November: 10), and were watered down to little more ‘than the focus of their [protestors] anxiety in a world of rapid change’ (*The Australian* 4 December: 21). The ‘logic of trade [was] lost on protestors’ (*The Australian* 2 December: 7) and they were consistently denounced as ‘the witless in Seattle’ (*The Australian* 4 December: 34), ‘militant dunces parad[ing] their ignorance’ (*The Australian* 4 December: 43), ‘Economic luddites rain[ing] on the WTO’s parade’ (*The Australian* 2 December: 13), and, in the words of one journalist, ‘Clueless is putting it kindly’ (*The Australian* 4 December: 43).

Journalists stated repeatedly, and explicitly, that protestors had little or no understanding of that against which they were protesting. They were: ‘only demonstrating an impressively wide portfolio of anarchic ignorance and precious little understanding’ (*The Australian* 4 December: 34). ‘Most of them didn’t know what it was exactly the WTO did’ (*The Australian* 3 December: 8). Protestors’ mental faculties were brought under fire: ‘middle class nut cases … living out their childish fantasies of
resisting oppression by a fascist state serving a multinational conspiracy’ (The Australian 8 December: 36). A conspiracy focus was also expanded upon to delegitimize protestor concerns, which were described as nothing more than ‘myth … [and] successful urban legends’ (The Australian 2 December: 13). The ‘Prattle in Seattle’ (The Australian 4 December: 21) was seen as ‘an X-Files-induced distrust of big brother government’ (The Australian 3 December: 8) where ‘the WTO has become to leftist mythology what the United Nations is to the militia movement; the center of a global conspiracy against all that is good and decent’ (The Australian 2 December: 13).

The discourse of inherent protestor ignorance framed Seattle protestors as political simpletons with little conception of the prevailing global political economy, little knowledge about the issues surrounding trade liberalization and the WTO, and a poor understanding of the causes they were fighting for. The “idiots at large” story delegitimized political arguments put forth by protestors and undermined any justification they may have had for pursuing methods outside the realm of consensus politics to state their claims. Commonsense norms of economic understanding were clearly lost on the Seattle protestors. Cues about protestor stupidity and cluelessness let readers know whose “side” to take.

The Australian’s coverage also portrayed ignorant protestors as subscribers to conspiracy theories, leftist mythology, urban legends and childish fantasies. By drawing direct associations between protestor arguments, myths, legends and conspiracy theories a commonsense definition of the issues surrounding the protests was further invoked. Readers were prompted towards an understanding of protestors and their actions as inherently flawed and fuelled by little more than television show-induced anxieties and fears of a modern world out of control.

By continually applying dominant views to WTO protesters, and social protests more generally, prevailing viewpoints and power structures were reinforced in the pages of The Australian. This process guides readers towards a position supporting the WTO. In the newspaper’s texts, not only is there no reason to be concerned about the Organisation, but protestors and others who object are clearly “nut-cases”. The narrative structure of (economic) ignorance discourages readers from empathizing with protestor views or opposing the dominant pro-WTO position. More than any of the previous frames associated with The Australian’s coverage of the Seattle protests, that of “idiots at large” most blatantly denunciates and denigrates protestors, their political viewpoints, and their actions on the streets of Seattle.

Official sources and official definitions

In an inherently political act (Sharp, 1993: 495), journalists rely heavily on official sources (Lee & Solomon, 1990: 17–19). Not only do these add prestige and apparent trustworthiness to a story, support the illusion of objectivity, and heighten the efficiency of news production, but official sources can also have a significant influence over a story’s narrative structure (Bendix & Liebler, 1999: 659-60; Hay & Israel, 2001; Liebler & Bendix, 1996, p.54; McLeod & Detenber, 1999: 6; McLeod & Hertog, 1992; McLeod & Hertog, 1999: 314). For this reason, corporations, institutions, local, state and Federal legislatures, executives and agencies, lobbyists, pub-
lic relations officers and other dealers of information all compete to tell their stories, to have their accounts heard and accepted by journalists (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1987). The competition is not entirely fair. Journalists rely heavily on government officials — whose social position usually lends credibility to their statements and whose input is easily obtained — thereby making official perspectives dominant (Lee & Solomon, 1990: 17–19; Liebler & Bendix, 1996: 54). Moreover, the tendency of reporters to draw from a small number of sources heightens the influence of those sources and the institutions with which they are associated. An outcome of this competition is that within a news text we can see ‘the imprint of power — it registers the identity of actors or interests that competed to dominate the text.’ (Entman, 1993: 55).

In The Australian’s coverage, sources were overwhelmingly protest-critical/WTO-supportive (See Table 1): more lines were devoted to direct and indirect quotations of WTO-supportive viewpoints on issues associated with the Seattle protests. In terms of direct quotes, which imply a much greater quality of attention (McGregor, 1998: 197), the ratio was even more unbalanced. Protestor-critical views received 139 lines whilst protestor-supportive viewpoints attracted only 78 lines. Even deeper contrasts between the ability of the two competing groups to announce their viewpoints in The Australian are apparent from the depth and quality of attention afforded each person quoted.

It is evident that The Australian was WTO-supportive. An average of 26.5 lines was devoted to each WTO-supportive commentator’s discussion of the protests while protestor-supportive speakers received an average of just 8.7 lines per individual quoted. Moreover, more than 75% of WTO-supportive views were drawn from just three people: economist Paul Krugman, WTO Chief Mike Moore, and US President Bill Clinton. The greatest amount of space given to any single protestor-supportive group or person was just 25 lines.

Table 2 refers to the number of opinion pieces (labeled ‘opinion’, ‘comment’ or ‘editorial’) devoted to the two opposing viewpoints. Of the 12 pieces contained in The Australian’s coverage of the WTO protests, 11 were WTO-supportive/protest-critical.

In its coverage The Australian reflected and reinforced international political–economic power structures supportive of the WTO. WTO advocates were given space to articulate their views and, therefore, the power to assign meaning and definition to the WTO protests and to frame events according to their own ideological understandings.

Invocation of public opinion

Protest stories frequently include explicit or implicit references to public opinion as a means of representing protestor actions as an infringement of an implied social consensus. The forms of reference include devices such as opinion polls, witness observations and other bystander input. The inclusion of comments of bystanders and ‘concerned citizens’ serve as a metaphor for public opinion and can have a strong influence over individual behaviors and perceptions (McLeod & Hertog, 1999:
Other powerful means of communicating deviance are through depictions of protestors’ violations of social and legal norms (McKirnan, 1980). These featured heavily in *The Australian*’s coverage of the Seattle protests, where attention focused on issues such as protestors’ “deviant” appearances, identities, beliefs and actions. In many cases out-of-the-ordinary characteristics were not objectively part of the protestors’ persons and actions but appeared as a result of their juxtaposition by the newspaper against the normality and decency of the streets and businesses of Seattle and the workings of the WTO. Protestors were simply “out of place” and were therefore associated with a variety of deviant characteristics.

Public opinion was also invoked by situating the protests within the defining imaginations and political discourses of past events. In new, complex or ambiguous situations, such as the Seattle protests, situating events within discourses already familiar to readers, is a necessary part of the news process (Murdock, 1981). *The Australian* established links between situations and events in a process referred to by Murdock (1981: 215) as ‘rewrit[ing] history for popular consumption’. It was in this process that a series of social norms were invoked by *The Australian*, conveying implicit references to perceived public opinion.

Set adrift from local context or meaning, continual references to violence and anarchy in *The Australian* support the status quo. Amidst protestors-critical viewpoints in the articles, readers are drawn into positions opposing the protestors, their actions and objectives, for these deviate from norms of legality and law and order. In drawing upon the enigma of the anarchist, tied to a repeated focus on violence, voices in support of the WTO protestors were effectively silenced in *The Australian*. Against the backdrop of *The Australian*’s coverage, support for protestors would indicate tacit backing of lawlessness, property destruction and anarchy, irrespective of the potential validity of protestor claims. By invoking social norms of democracy and consensus politics through a focus on violations of legality and non-violence — the ‘mischievous work of a few leftist ratbags’ (*The Australian* 3 December: 8) — *The Australian* conveyed cues to interpretations of events in Seattle. Coverage not only communicated the deviance of protestors but it also depicted them as an isolated minority, with public opinion directed firmly against them.

“Grunge” and “generation X” metaphors and stereotypes also delegitimized and marginalized the actions of protestors through association with a nihilistic, drug-taking, disaffected, individualistic youth sub-culture. Protestor actions were also linked with negative connotations of past instances of civil disobedience, such as disloyalty to country; communist infiltration; hippies and fringe dwellers.

**Other techniques of delegitimisation, marginalisation and demonisation**

As we have seen, a variety of methods is deployed in news stories to delegitimize, marginalize and demonize protestors. We have already discussed the ways in which journalists may refer to peripheral matters such as protestor appearances and clothing, dietary habits, language, and beliefs unrelated to the protest issue. This is defined explicitly by Murdock (1981: 207) as a process whereby ‘attention is shifted away from the underlying issues and definitions of the situation proposed by [protest]
groups, and fix[ed] instead on the forms which this action takes … [t]he issue’ therefore becomes one of the forms rather than causes.’ ‘By focusing attention on the immediate form of contemporary events’ (Murdock, 1981: 214), such as confrontations with police and protestors, news media ignore the underlying content, context and structural causes of the situation.

The emphasis on form rather than content in *The Australian’s* coverage of the Seattle WTO protests was manifest in a variety of ways. First, more space in the newspaper was devoted to descriptions of protestor violence and conflicts with police (the actuality/form of events) than was given to protestor viewpoints surrounding the protests and the WTO (the content/context of the situation) (see Table 3). Just as “performance” and “appearance/identity” discourses diverted attention away from the content of the protest to its form, the “Battle for Seattle” narrative structure portrayed protestors as being involved in violent conflict with police rather than being engaged in intellectual debates against the WTO. This repeated focus on the actuality of events can be said to delegitimize and deny any coherent form of contextualization for protestor actions (Hall, 1981: 154) and to defuse WTO protestors’ social and political criticisms.

Second, in the process of ‘rewriting history for popular consumption’ (Murdock, 1981: 214), and as we have already noted, the WTO protests were continually drawn into parallel with events of the 1960s and anti-Vietnam civil disobedience. It is important to add, however, that *The Australian* linked these two situations not at the level of underlying structures and processes (near impossible due to the unique characteristics of both situations) but at the level of the immediate forms and images surrounding the protestors. These shallow linkages not only eased readers’ interpretations of events but maintained a focus on the appearance of protests over their substantive content. Protestors were an isolated minority with no legitimate reason for their clearly misguided actions.

Third, protests were connected at a superficial level with anarchy and violence, reasserting longstanding associations of anarchists with chaos, lawlessness, disorder, violence, bombs and political ignorance. Through the ‘category boundedness’ (Vujakovic, 1998: 154) of terms associated with anarchy, simplified sets of assumptions common among readers were drawn on to demonize protestors (and to reproduce particular understandings of anarchy). This is compounded by the fact that nowhere among the repeated emphases on violence and anarchy — not even in the tainted discussions of the political platforms of various other protest groups — is any mention made of anarchists having any form of political focus. While WTO-supportive elites found space in *The Australian* to voice their interpretations and ideological understandings of events surrounding the Seattle conference, protestors representations were framed in ways that continued to support prevailing power structures.

Emphasis on protest form prompts readers to view events in Seattle as a mere transitory deviation from the status quo. Simultaneously, much longer-term processes and issues, to which the protests were inextricably linked, were ignored. The ‘event orientation’ (Murdock, 1981) of coverage of social protests is seen as an inevitable consequence of the organization of the news process. Thus, the radical political
activity of the anti-WTO appears essentially ephemeral, rather than the product of historically structured and continuing global inequalities in the distribution of wealth and power (Murdock, 1981). It is unsurprising then that the meanings attached to the Seattle protests by The Australian coincide directly with those of prevailing political elites (i.e., the WTO, trade representatives) whose views are not only given more salience in the articles but much more legitimacy and credibility.

As well as giving emphasis to form over content, literary techniques deployed in The Australian served to delegitimize and marginalize protestors and their views. Quotation marks were placed around terms such as “peaceful demonstration”, “civil disturbances” or “march for reconciliation” thereby adding commentary and favoring particular interpretations without jeopardizing apparent impartiality (McLeod & Detenber, 1999). Achieving the same ends, “stance adverbs” (such as “allegedly”, “supposedly”, “apparently”) were used to describe protestor arguments against the WTO. For example, ‘grievances ranged from the WTO’s supposed threats to the environment and labor standards, to its alleged anti-democratic character and its claimed abuses of national sovereignty’ (The Australian 2 December: 7 — emphases added).

Conclusion

This paper has illustrated ways in which a well-publicized clash between demonstrators and dominant geopolitical actors was worked out and portrayed in one of the most influential of Australia’s daily newspapers. In so doing, it has responded to earlier suggestions (Dalby, 1996; Dodds & Sidaway, 1994) that a critical geopolitics that takes discourses of resistance seriously must uncover those means by which heterodox understandings are delegitimized. Throughout The Australian’s coverage of the Seattle protests, competition for representation was dominated by WTO-supportive/protest-critical groups. News stories were presented within the context of a protest paradigm which, through its key characteristics of story framing, drawing from official sources, and invoking public opinion, gave salience to protest-critical viewpoints and served to marginalize and demonize anti-WTO protestors.

The rhizomatic nature of protest and resistance movements often proves difficult for the media (Routledge, 1996). This was especially so in the case of the Seattle protests. Confronted by a multitude of protest groups, without officially dominant or charismatic leaders, groups or representatives with whom they could communicate (Hawken, 2000: 31 & 49), The Australian’s journalists appear to have deployed the protest paradigm as a device by which some (“common”) sense could be made of the situation.

The narrative structures used by The Australian focused on protestors’ acting abilities, appearances and identities, anarchic violence and confrontations with police, links to grunge and the 1960s, and economic ignorance and idiocy. The Australian’s clear and demonstrable reliance on official sources provided WTO advocates ample opportunity to communicate their viewpoints clearly, and the prospect of assigning meaning to the protests that matched their particular ideological positions. Coupled
with the framing strategies deployed in the newspaper, implicit references to public opinion via the invocation of social norms suggested that protestors were distant from mainstream society, while their viewpoints, methods of political activity and sanity were brought into question. At the same time other methods — such as the use of stance adverbs and a repeated focus on protest form over protest content — continued the processes of protestor marginalisation.

Taking into account the media’s taste for particular kinds of news-story, the protestors’ actions not only provided WTO representatives a high profile in Australia but they also offered a dramatic counterpoint against which WTO-supportive claims were reinforced and legitimated. Put bluntly, one set of geopolitical ideas was inadvertently given added credibility because those people opposing them were portrayed repeatedly and emphatically as a cast of freaks, vandals and idiots. Moreover, through its preoccupation with the outlandish and illegal aspects of protestor actions, *The Australian* may have averted the critical gaze — including its own.

It is evident that by discrediting the protestors, *The Australian* perpetuated the dominant geopolitical discourse of free trade and corporate globalization supported by the WTO. It is interesting here to recall Sharp (1996: 558), who noted that ‘hegemony is not only constructed from political ideologies but more immediately through detailed scripting of all aspects of everyday life.’ *The Australian* — as an institution of everyday culture in Australia — took up and passed on particular understandings of free trade, corporate globalization, development and their impact upon human rights, labor standards and the environment. These “commonsense” understandings of the WTO justified the absence of detailed discussion of the merits of free trade; marginalized alternative interpretations; and were linked explicitly and implicitly to the discrediting of protestor viewpoints.

Public protest is the archetypal vision of a transgression of socio-political and geographical boundaries. Such moments of transgression force hegemonic actors, speaking through media outlets, into articulating and reinforcing otherwise assumed notions of geopolitical “common sense”. This process may involve constructing transgressors as being “out of place” and “other”. Dalby (1991, 274) suggests that it is when geopolitical discourse divides complex interactions into “us” and “them” frameworks of understanding, such discourse has reached an ‘essential moment’ of [geo]political operation. Such a moment functions to characterize, incorporate (or conversely, exclude) and regulate. In the case of Seattle this essential moment is uncovered through the contextualization of a discourse explicitly deligitimizing, marginalizing and demonizing anti-WTO protest groups. For Seattle, the power of such everyday, popular geopolitics lies in its ‘social reproduction of relations of power and political economy’ (O’Tuathail, 1998: 2).

Instruments of popular culture (including the mass media) help shape the terrain within which “high politics” can be played out. They give space to some groups and interests. They marginalize others. Despite, or indeed as a result of, their everyday nature, news stories disguise the role of the media as a critically important global instrument of power. Dominant geopolitical actors map out lives and practices on a terrain of (inter)national consciousness — a hegemonic “common sense” — to which they and the mass media, through their representational practices, have contributed.
Through its exploration of ways in which *The Australian* presented news of the Seattle WTO protests this paper has contributed to scholarship on the role of the mass media in (re)producing and legitimating formal geopolitical scripts and contributing to the contexts within which those scripts are sustained. As we noted earlier, it is evident that geopolitics involves more than a singular notion of elite foreign policy deliberations. Indeed, it requires that we continue to embrace popular geopolitics’ appreciation of the diversity of representational practices that together constitute hegemonic social and cultural imaginations.

At one level, this paper has provided a reminder of the need for further investigation into connections between the media’s coverage of events and dominant geopolitical discourse — connections that have new-found significance in light of the current stream of global justice protests and the “war against terrorism”. It has also provided an account of some of the ways in which mechanisms of marginalization, delegitimization and denomination may be played out in the media. As well as informing understandings of popular critical geopolitics, we suggest that such insights to the role of the media within mechanisms of economic and political control might be taken further. First, critical geopolitics — and particularly that which examines discourses of resistance — needs to engage more comprehensively with existing work on mass media (e.g. McLeod & Detenber, 1999; McLeod & Hertog, 1999; Scheufele, 1999; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) to better understand, for instance, specific means by which dissenting and alternative understandings are marginalized. Second, the insights of an increasingly media-savvy popular geopolitics, coupled with an appreciation of the significance of popular culture for the maintenance of hegemony, offer the vital promise of a geopolitics for social change. We can, and should, supplement a dispassionate critical geopolitics that explores the construction and imposition of discourses with a ‘newsmaking’ (Hay & Israel, 2001) geopolitics that has emancipatory ambitions. It is time to develop a popular geopolitics that not only reads mediascapes but more effectively writes them, too.

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**References**


