

**RTÉ and the Globalization of Irish Television.** By Farrel Corcoran. Portland, OR: Intellect Books, 2004. 249 pp. ISBN 1841500909.

The globalization of broadcasting is reshaping communication environments around the world. While broadcasting was previously viewed as a form of cultural expression, over the past decade it has increasingly been treated as a tradable information product. Like a number of other European countries, Ireland's broadcasting sector was dominated by its national public-service broadcaster, Radio Telefis Éireann (RTÉ), until the 1990s. Farrel Corcoran's *RTÉ and the Globalization of Irish Television* examines the impacts that foreign competition, digitization, and neoliberal ideas are having on Irish broadcasting, and through it Irish culture and civic life. In many ways, the Irish and Canadian experiences with public broadcasting have been similar, and Ireland's experience with media globalization offers significant insights for Canadians.

The book is interesting in part because of the author's unique credentials. Professor Corcoran is a former head of the School of Communication at Dublin City University, and from 1995 to 2000 he was chairman of the RTÉ Authority, the body that regulates and directs public broadcasting in Ireland. As a result, the book is part insider's memoir, part historical review, and part academic analysis. Corcoran had a personal hand in many of the RTÉ's victories and setbacks in the 1990s, and this gives the book a distinctive flavour that is both its greatest strength and greatest weakness. Because of the author's proximity, the book never treats the RTÉ as a monolithic institution. On the other hand, the level of detail, especially in the first few chapters, may be stifling for readers who lack an in-depth knowledge of Irish politics.

The book is rooted in cultural nationalism and a view of the public sphere that privileges democratic discourse over commercial competition. The first four chapters provide an overview of the political economy of Irish broadcasting, and it is these chapters that contain the bulk of Corcoran's reflections on his time as RTÉ chairman. Although the level of detail in these chapters can be excessive, they are nevertheless successful in acquainting the reader with the Irish broadcasting system and the politics that surround it.

Canadian and Irish broadcasting politics are both defined by the same problematic realities: fragmented national unity and periodic political interference. In chapter 3, Corcoran speaks to the RTÉ's difficulties in covering Sinn Féin and to the Lowery-Tuffey Affair, described by one minister as "a naked attempt to destabilize the government" (p. 61). The RTÉ's struggle to be both critical and independent is reminiscent of the debate that surrounded CBC Television in the 1960s, particularly the controversial program *This Hour Has Seven Days*.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7, respectively, are devoted to the development of digital broadcasting in Ireland, the impact of media globalization on children's television, and the birth of Teilifís na Gaeilge (TnaG, now TG4), the RTÉ's first full-time Irish-language television station. In these chapters, Corcoran uses the RTÉ successes and failures in developing infrastructure and meeting the needs of children and the Irish-speaking minority as a barometer with which to measure the strength of public-service broadcasting in Ireland.

Chapter 8 looks at the homogenizing and Americanizing effects of globalization on popular entertainment. Corcoran examines the launch of TV3 in Ireland in 1998, a joint venture between Granada Television of London and CanWest Global of Winnipeg. The latter half of the chapter is devoted to a critique of the business practices of the Global Television Network in Canada and TV3 in Ireland. Corcoran refers to CanWest as the "Love Boat Network" because of the private broadcaster's proclivity to rebroadcast syndicated American programming while struggling to evade or lessen its domestic content requirements. Although increased competition may have been good for TV3's investors, Corcoran is clear that it adds little to the Irish public sphere.

It is in chapter 8, and the conclusion that follows it, that the author makes his point most effectively. In Ireland and elsewhere, the broadcasting sector has been “reformed” to allow for more competition and less regulation. The reforms were supposed to bring greater choice and efficiency, but have failed to do so. In order to make room for private-sector competitors, public-service broadcasters such as the RTÉ were weakened and sidelined. In the Irish case, TV3 used the spaces it was given to rebroadcast foreign programs that in many cases were already available on the RTÉ or through cross-border signals from the U.K. This form of competition, Corcoran argues, results in less choice, less domestic production, higher costs, and more foreign programming.

Corcoran’s book is interesting for Canadians because Ireland and Canada face similar cultural realities. Like Canada, Ireland lives in the cultural and economic shadow of a larger and richer neighbour, and like Canada, Ireland turned to public broadcasting in part to address the homogenizing effects of that relationship. Both have an English-speaking majority with a significant linguistic minority, and both are struggling to be part of the global economy while trying to maintain some level of cultural uniqueness.

On a deeper and perhaps more significant level, the book is valuable because it challenges the North American myopia that dominates so much of Canadian communications thought. As Canadians, we too often use the United States as our sole basis for comparison, and we too often focus on our role as victim of American cultural imperialism. With its critique of CanWest Global and to a lesser extent CHUM City International, the book is a useful reminder that some of our own cultural industries are as aggressive and culturally indifferent abroad as foreign companies are in Canada.

*RTÉ and the Globalization of Irish Television* is worthwhile for Canadian communication scholars interested in broadcasting policy, cultural or media globalization, and the political economy of communication. The book is clearly written and accessible, though some knowledge of Irish politics would be helpful. More importantly, it succinctly captures a national experience that is relevant and comparable to Canada’s.

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