Ivey succeed in sensitizing us to the fact that people's media use and the meanings ascribed to it cannot be studied outside its context.

Leuven School for
Mass Communication Research
University of Leuven
Veerle Van Rompaey

Biegert, K. (Ed.). (2004). News of the other. tracing identity in Scandinavian constructions of the eastern Baltic Sea region. Goteborg: Nordicom. ISBN: 91-89471-26-1 (241 pp.)

The recent enlargement of the European Union with ten, mainly eastern European, member states is the starting point of this edited volume, containing ten profound contributions. The focus of the multinational research is particularly on the Nordic mass media (newspapers, TV) and how they report about the Baltic Sea region: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Russia. One should not expect large scale, quantitative content analyses. Instead, the contributors rely on often small scale samples from limited time frames (e. g., one week), but the thoroughness of their investigations and the unique cross-national and historical comparisons make this volume worth reading and definitely inspiring for everyone who is interested in identity construction by the media, as reflected in news stories as well as in images.

Geographically, the Baltic region is adjacent to the northern European countries Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. Despite the fact that they are neighboring countries, the representation of the region in the Scandinavian news media is characterized by negative labeling and stereotypical portrayals. An example of this is the description of this region as less developed or, in the case of Russia, as threatening; in short, rendering spatial distance as non-essential in defining countries as more 'foreign' and 'inferior'. In Ekecrantz's contribution, for instance, we find indications that Swedish journalistic reports about the Baltic countries in the 1920s contain striking similarities with those of today. And this historical continuity is not due to the journalistic tendency to simplify complex situations, but news "constructs a very special and homogenized view of the world that has long been ensconced in the mutual exchange and misunderstanding across borders" (63).

Generally speaking, this book offers a refreshing view on the concept of the 'other' as the mainly Anglo-American theories are broadened with an inspiring Scandinavian view on the issue. Kivikuru opens the book with a discussion of the roots and ideological development of modern

Western collective identities. She, very originally, combines the insights of the usual suspects (e. g., Anderson, Gellner, and Hall) with those of Scandinavian scholars, and mainly gives clarifying examples of Finnish identity. And it is the latter which makes this theoretical chapter, often the less accessible one in a book, rather easy to get through.

Riegert and Åker elaborate on the idea of making foreign news comprehensible in a national context. According to the media, the Baltic states do not have a unique culture, but are dealing with their communist past and they have, among other peculiarities, a bad taste in music compared to ours. The mutual exchange between the diverse media flows is also demonstrated in the contribution of Lund about Danish journalism. She argues, for instance, that news about the European Union is often formulated and criticized in terms of national debates, and as such EU stories become part of 'otherness' and not of a new European identity.

The main shortcoming of the contributions is the absence of methodological clarifications. Making the methodological procedures more clear is not only helpful when one evaluates the validity of findings, but also for everyone who is struggling with conducting good quantitative and qualitative research. The study of Ellefson and Kingsepp is the scarce exception, for it elaborates substantially on theory and methods. What is more, they analyzed the front pages of not only Scandinavian newspapers but of other European countries, Egypt, and the USA as well, making it a very fascinating cross-national study. Following the tradition of structuralist analysis of narratives, this study demonstrates how the news story of the OSCE summit meeting in Istanbul reproduces a classic narrative of the hero, the villain, and the victim, where 'we' (the West) are the Good, Boris Yeltsin is the Bad and the Chechens are the Ugly, the victims. Additionally, Riegert includes some methodological notes in her contribution, but still there are no clear statements how exactly she identified the narrative themes and binary oppositions that showed up in Swedish and Danish television news of the Baltic region in the mid-1990s. Nevertheless, the findings of this study also point in the same direction, namely that there is not much evolution in the Scandinavian media portrayal of their eastern Baltic neighbors.

A differentiation of different 'others' can be found in Raitilla's study, which consists of two cases. In the first, she investigated news coverage on the sinking of the ferry Estonia in 1994. Unfairly, the Finnish and the Swedish media initially publicized the suspicion that the fault lay in poorly Estonian seamanship. In the second case, which focused on Russians in newspaper articles, special attention is given to themes and means of expression, but also to the speakers and their mutual interaction, giving this research a surplus value. She figures out that the superiority of the Finnish was brought forward via the construction of "gener-

alized Russianism" and the large amount of crime news on the one hand, and via tolerance for Russians who embraced Finnishness and were "almost like us" (160).

Horst and Lolk's study involves the perceived threat to Denmark by the Ignalia nuclear power plant in Lithuania. After they thoroughly expounded the theory on risks, they demonstrate how journalistic narratives about science are dependent on a small circle of experts and how assumptions from the Cold War period continue to shape news stories from the East. This study is particularly intriguing for those interested in national identities, since it shows how mediated stories of risks have the possibility of creating and sustaining the notion of society as an ordered place where authorities act responsibly towards any risk that threatens the nation.

As is regularly the case with edited volumes, this book also brings a diversity of contributions together under a heading that not always covers the overtones. A number of articles do not deal exclusively with the Scandinavian identity and the Baltic states. The book has some surprises in store, as for example the study of Hurd concerning the German and Swedish newspaper coverage about the German revolution of 1918–19. Another remarkable study is the one carried out by Åker who describes and analyzes five front page photographs in meticulous detail. He shows how depictions of ordinary citizens are used as metonyms for broader societal issues and for the nation's inhabitants.

Again, we are very impressed by this contribution to scholarship from the Information Centre for Media and Communication Research (Nordicom), an energetic organization with a clear international charisma that assembles communication scholars from the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden). For the future, we suggest tightening the bonds with the Baltic states. This could lead to a study about 'mutual representation', since the contributions at hand do not describe how the Scandinavian countries are represented in the Baltic media. Maybe it would also be fruitful to involve Baltic communication scholars in an analysis of the Nordic media. As it is stated in this volume (200), we all have limited understanding of specific values and myths in other countries, and in that respect it is advisable to set up international collaborative projects.

Department of Communication Baldwin Van Gorp
Radboud University of Nijmegen

Department of Media Studies Jasmijn Van Gorp
University of Antwerp