

Revisiting the Coronation

A Critical Perspective on the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953

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Media scholarship has long since abandoned the idea of unified media effects – that is, the idea that media content affects all members of the audience in basically the same way. Decades of methodological and theoretical development have brought a more sophisticated understanding of “audiences” and “effects” to media research. However, the idea of unified media effects still seems to be quite strong in the study of *media events* – large-scale, pre-planned live events that dominate the mediasphere for a short period of time, where the presentation is characterized by ceremony and reverence, to roughly follow Dayan and Katz’s definition (Dayan & Katz 1992:4-9). It may be that it is difficult even for media scholars to free themselves entirely from the frames of interpretation imposed by the media. The media routinely portray media events as being received and interpreted in fairly uniform ways or according to simple binary oppositions – note for example the two dominant, opposing descriptions of media effects and audience reactions prevalent in the popular analysis of the death and subsequent funeral of Princess Diana in 1997: on one hand, that of “a nation/world united in grief”, and on the other, “media-induced mass hysteria”.

Media events are the locus of a number of classical questions in media studies: questions about media effects, media audiences and media representation all appear in both lay and academic analysis of media events. One can, with Dayan and Katz, consider media events to be one of the archetypal media formats or media genre of our times; but regardless of whether we agree with this view, we will have a hard time denying that events that can bind the entire globe together as a simultaneous audience through mass mediation surely are important as objects of study. While Dayan and Katz offer a very comprehensive and well-considered analysis of media events, their view is still essentially functionalistic, and at times seems to fall into the trap described above: that media events are largely uniform in their effects.

This article outlines a more critical perspective on media events, based on ideas advanced in an early study of media events by Lang and Lang (1954/1984), and on the concept of media logic. The article presents the results of a study comparing audience reception of an event with newspaper representations and narratives of the same event. This comparison shows some interesting differences and discrepancies both between media coverage and audience reception, as well as among the audience members them-

selves. The object of the study is twofold: to bring to light the diverse nature of audience reactions to and interpretations of media events, and to show how the concept of media logic can contribute to a critical theory of media events.

The event studied is the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. This is one of the classical reference points when it comes to media events, both in Britain and internationally (Dayan & Katz use the Coronation as an early and typical example of the genre, see Dayan & Katz 1992:26, 43). This event is interesting as a case study for two reasons. First, it has for the most part been interpreted as mainly integrative in its effects and from a basically functionalistic perspective (see Shils & Young 1956 (further references are to the 1975 reprint) and Scannell 1996), i.e. it has been interpreted according to the media's own frames and is, thus, interesting to revisit with a new set of theories and concepts. Second, earlier studies of the Coronation have focused on television coverage and ignored newspaper coverage, a very important part of the overall media landscape (as in Briggs 1979, Cannadine 1983 and Chaney 1986) – even though media events arguably were made possible by television, they are hardly only “television events”. I propose that a return to the paradigmatic media event of the Coronation can give us important insights into how to re-conceptualize media events in our own highly mediated time.

A Critical Perspective on Media Events

A comparison between media representations and audience receptions of events is a potentially very fruitful way to approach media events critically. A research design similar to that presented here appears in Thomas (2002), who compares media representations of the death and funeral of Princess Diana with audience reception of the same event. In this study, he draws attention to the problem inherent in using media coverage as a source of knowledge about social and cultural phenomena. In a media event of the magnitude of Diana's death and funeral, audience reactions and interpretations across the nation and the globe are bound to be very varied – and yet, as Thomas points out,

Across all media – television, radio, broadsheet and tabloid newspapers – the story could scarcely have been more monolithic if it had been state-imposed. For despite the thousands of pages and hours devoted to a story that quickly moved from being one about Diana's death to the unfolding reaction, a remarkably uniform picture was offered based on the unity, emotional intensity and adulation of popular opinions. (Thomas 2002:7)

This tendency of the media to impose a unified frame of representation during large-scale media events is not unknown. The earliest study of the discrepancies between media representations of an event and audience reception of the same event is probably Lang and Lang (1954, further references are to the 1984 reprint).

Lang and Lang set out to compare media accounts of an event (the MacArthur Day Parade in Chicago 1952) with the accounts of people actually present at the site(s) of the event. Lang and Lang advances the since well-established idea that the media themselves not only represent (or mis-represent), but also actively *construct* events: “A landslide effect is cumulative: it builds as assumptions about reality leads to acts that reinforce the definition as reality.” (Lang & Lang 1984:56). They come to the conclusion that the formats and symbols chosen by television producers led to a one-sided coverage:

First, the depiction of the ceremonies mainly in terms of unifying patriotic rather than potentially divisive symbols left no room for the depiction of dissent. Second,

and more important, the television presentation enlarged the viewer's field of vision but not the context in which he could interpret the event. (Lang & Lang 1984:57)

Media events become a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, where the media construct an event that does not necessarily correspond to the event as witnessed by physically present spectators. Similar thoughts are expressed in the historian Daniel Boorstin's work *The Image* (1961) – the media work to create worlds of their own that have little to do with people's everyday experiences.

This critical perspective, however, is largely absent from Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz's key work on media events, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (1992). Even though essentially functionalistic, Dayan and Katz are hardly unaware of the fact that media events can function as an exercise of power, but one of the striking features of the book is that a critical stance towards media events seems perpetually half-realized. They show that one of the main functions of media events is their conferring of status to different persons, organizations and institutions, but they do not interpret this as having much to do with relations of power and dominance (Dayan & Katz 1992:43ff, 192, 199). They suggest that television depoliticizes society because it creates an illusion of political involvement, but then brush aside the ideological implications of this depoliticization (Dayan & Katz 1992:59). They note that the normal journalistic rules of objectivity, fairness and critical distance are superseded by a reverent mode of presentation during media events, but do not dwell on the possible ideological consequences of this mediated reverence (Dayan & Katz 1992:91f, 192f). In short, the work of Dayan and Katz has critical potential, but this potential remains largely unrealized.

Looking specifically at the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth, the object of this study, it is clear that the dominant view of the Coronation as a media event is based on functionalistic notions and a basic stance towards the event as a positive occasion – a view that owes a great deal to Edward Shils and Michael Young's study of the Coronation (Shils & Young 1975, a reprint of their 1956 article). The view of Shils and Young is that the Coronation was an occasion of integration, community and expressions of the moral centre of society. Their analysis is based on a textual analysis of the Coronation broadcasts on television, and some analysis of data on audience reception. Their conclusion is that:

The coronation of Elizabeth II provided at one time and for practically the entire society such an intensive contact with the sacred that we believe we are justified in interpreting it as we have done in this essay, as a great act of national communion. (Shils & Young 1975:151-2)

Viewing the Coronation as a more or less unproblematic occasion of national unity or even national communion seems to have since become the dominant interpretation (see for example Scannell 1996:75-92).

Dayan and Katz do mention that certain groups or members of the audience may disagree or even protest against the values or ideals at the core of the media event, but in summing up the possible effects of media events, they do not return to this fact or expand upon it (Dayan & Katz 1992:68ff). In fact, in their concluding chapter, Dayan and Katz clearly focus on what could be described as positive and functional effects of media events, such as liberating leaders to act differently, reactivating enthusiasm, creating openness to new possibilities, creating an upsurge of fellow feeling, etc. (Dayan & Katz 1992:190ff).

When it comes to the Coronation, those who disagreed with the basic message of national celebration and unity were in the minority, but they still existed – so one cannot draw the conclusion that the event was mainly integrative and positive just because the media representations only featured happy people. Shils and Young's contemporaries Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang give media events a more critical treatment.

Dayan and Katz also discuss the way in which media producers frame media events using formats and scripts (Dayan & Katz 1992:45ff), but again, this is not something viewed as a potential problem, or as something that has possible ideological implications. What I want to explore specifically is the nature of the *unity* so often presented in media event coverage – the lack of criticism and alternative perspectives. It stands to reason that this unity has something to do with the highly organized nature of media events, and the concomitant reliance on predetermined media formats and modes of presentation. Alternative representations simply become impossible to formulate.

The Media Logic of Events

The building blocks of a more critical perspective on media events can be found in David Altheide and Robert Snow's work *Media Logic* (1978) and Nick Couldry's more recent work on media power and media rituals (Couldry 2000, 2002). Together, these works can be used to draw attention to the non-integrative, non-cathartic, ideological aspects of media events.

David Altheide and Robert Snow introduced the term *media logic* to describe the way in which media force other societal spheres of activity (politics, sports and religion are their examples) to conform to media-specific ideals and considerations (Altheide & Snow 1978, 1991). The thrust of their argument is akin to that of the 'self-fulfilling prophecy' character of media coverage – first and foremost, media frames and media formats work to place the media themselves at the centre. They write, "In brief, *it is axiomatic that what is presented via the mass media matters and has consequences*" (Altheide & Snow 1978:192, emphasis from the original). They also consider format and modes of presentation to be of central importance to how societal issues are framed, where media formats supersede all alternative modes of presentation – the media way becomes the only way. As one of their nine points about the effects of media logic, they state:

Sixth, the truth or accuracy of a report has virtually no bearing on the consequences for the individual, activity, organization, or institution involved – only the presentation matters. (Altheide & Snow 1978:193)

And further on, describing the consequences of media logic in the particular case of a public official accused of improper (but not illegal) behaviour:

As illustrated above, this meant that certain events would be focused on, treated, and given meaning in order to promote a particular kind of presentation and understanding that was compatible with, for example, scheduling and time considerations, entertainment values, and images of the audience./.../ The work of news, then, is not an organizational mirror for the world, but is in itself a major organization form for interpreting the world of experience. (Altheide & Snow 1978:196-7)

In this, Altheide and Snow echo Lang and Lang. It should be noted that, as do Lang and Lang, Altheide and Snow study only broadcast media, but their ideas about the power of media logic and media formats hold true for newspapers as well. Applying this perspec-

tive to the findings of Dayan and Katz creates a theoretical perspective with more of a critical thrust.

In his work on media rituals, Nick Couldry writes specifically about media events (Couldry 2002:55ff). He suggests that media events, being of an essentially short-term character, do not really *express* societal values the way Dayan and Katz and Shils and Young would have it. Instead, Couldry's interpretation of the role of media events is closer to Lang and Lang's and Altheide and Snow's – that media events do not express but *construct*. What they construct is specifically the position of the media themselves at a societal centre, and as a source of privileged knowledge about that centre. Couldry's critical analysis of media events leads him to assert the following:

We have, in effect reversed Dayan and Katz's argument that media events, through their exceptional nature, reveals 'truths' about contemporary mediated societies which in normal circumstances are invisible. On the contrary, claims for the uniqueness of media events and the media's special role in interpreting them are merely intensified versions of the media's ordinary claim to be representative of 'the centre'. (Couldry 2002:70)

Couldry criticizes how many media scholars have used the concept of "ideology". By assuming that the media only reproduce ideologies that somehow reside outside the media system (like the ideology of the free-market system, for example), the self-legitimizing nature of the media institutions themselves is obscured. The media also reproduce an ideology distinctly of their own, an ideology whose chief feature is the insistence that media are important and a natural societal centre for public debate, moral arbitration, and of political and cultural importance in general (see Couldry 2000:13-15 and Couldry 2002:12, 38ff). Couldry criticizes the notion of the media as a natural societal centre in the following way:

"In reality /.../ there is no such social centre that acts as a moral or cognitive foundation of society and its values, and therefore no natural role for the media as that 'centre's' interpreter, but there is enormous pressure to believe in each. So great are those pressures that it even seems scandalous to name these myths as such. Yet it is essential to do so. The idea that society has a centre helps naturalise the idea that we have, or need, media that 'represent' that centre [...]" (Couldry 2002:45-6)

So, while reproduction and reconstruction of other ideologies (of the 'ruling class', for example) may still be going on in the media, an analysis of media representations and media ideology must also concern itself with the specific ideology of the media – how the media legitimate and naturalize their own position and societal role.

The perspectives of Lang and Lang, Altheide and Snow and Couldry can thus be used to develop the critical potential of Dayan and Katz's study of media events by adding questions about the implications of the media frames, the modes of representation, and the constructed nature of media events. To use this critical perspective on the Coronation in 1953 is particularly relevant because of the status of the Coronation in British media history – it is generally viewed from the perspective of Dayan and Katz, as an integrative, functional event, and the possible discrepancies between media coverage and audience interpretations have not been given a thorough examination. Thomas, who uses a research design similar to that of Lang and Lang, very convincingly points to the almost total failure of the media to reflect the diversity of audience attitudes (Thomas 2002:180). Using the same perspective and design on the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth

II in 1953, the first major television event in Britain, can offer important insights into the nature of media events and the ways in which the media establish themselves as privileged interpreters of the social and cultural world.

Methodology and Analytical Framework

Empirically, this study is a comparison between the newspaper coverage of the Coronation and the audience reactions to the Coronation as a media event. The data on the audience reactions and interpretations come from material collected by the organization Mass-Observation at the time of the Coronation. The newspaper material comes from eight different daily British newspapers. Comparisons have specifically been made in areas that are defined as *problems*, or areas of conflict, relating to the Coronation.

The Empirical Data

Mass-Observation was an organization dedicated to collecting data of various kinds about the everyday lives of ordinary people, mainly through participant observation and material collected from volunteer panel writers. It was founded in 1937 and is probably most famous for its collections detailing everyday life in Britain during the Second World War (Madge & Harrisson 1941, Mass-Observation 1943). Mass-Observation was discontinued in the mid-1950s (it was restarted again in 1981, with basically the same aims and remit), and the study of the Coronation was the last major study the organization undertook. The results were never published, though they were used for analysis by other authors, notably Harrisson (1961), Harris (1966) and Ziegler (1978). The materials of the Mass-Observation are collected in the Mass-Observation Archive (M-OA) at the University of Sussex. The material from the Coronation study is very wide-ranging and contains survey data, participant observation data, textual analysis of newspaper and magazine material, data on Coronation decorations and more. The bulk of the data collection done by Mass-Observation was based on replies to both quantitative and qualitative questionnaires (called “directives”) sent out to a panel created by self-selection (Mass-Observation was based on the voluntary participation of interested members of the public). This of course raises some problems of representativeness, but as the primary purpose of this study is to raise issues of diversity, and to demonstrate the existence or non-existence of certain viewpoints and interpretation, the material is sufficient. There is, regrettably, no space here to go into a detailed analysis of the character of the very extensive and varied Mass-Observation materials, but a good summary of the methodological issues involved in using this specific archive can be found in Bloome, Sheridan & Street (1993).

The analysed data from the Mass-Observation Archive come mainly from the directive replies on pre-Coronation and Coronation Day activities from 150 panel members. Some material from public replies (i.e., material sent to Mass-Observation after appeals to the public, and thus not from people who were part of the regular Mass-Observation panel) to questions about pre-Coronation material has also been used, as well as the results of two Mass-Observation surveys on attitudes towards the Coronation made about one month before the Coronation, conducted in February and May 1953 (MO-A TC69/2/A). Supplementary data on viewing figures and viewer reactions from the BBC’s own audience research, kept at the BBC Written Archives (BBC WAC T14/846/2), have also been used.

The newspaper coverage analysed comes from selected daily newspapers in the month leading up to the Coronation – the period analysed is May 1st, 1953 to June 5th, 1953

(three days after the Coronation, which took place on Tuesday, June 2nd, 1953). The newspapers have been selected for variance in key respects: both broadsheets and tabloids, both national and regional, and of different political inclinations. The newspapers analysed are *Times* (broadsheet, national, independent), *Daily Herald* (broadsheet, national, labour), *Daily Telegraph* (broadsheet, national, conservative), *Daily Mirror* (tabloid, national, independent), *Daily Worker* (broadsheet, national, communist), *Manchester Guardian* (broadsheet, regional, liberal), *The Scotsman* (broadsheet, regional, conservative), and finally *Financial Times* (broadsheet, national, independent). In these newspapers, all coverage produced by the newspapers own staff (i.e., advertising and other commercial material has been excluded, as well as letters to the editor) directly referencing the Coronation in some way has been coded and analysed. Collected newspaper clippings available at the BBC Written Archives have also been used as background material (BBC WAC R30/478/1).

Some Words on the Role of Newspapers

As mentioned previously, the study of media events in general seems to be the study of television events – at least if we follow Shils and Young, Lang and Lang and Dayan and Katz. There is a tendency to use ‘the media’ as a general term, when one is apparently really referring to television. But if we wish to continue using the concept of ‘media events’, we should also study other media besides television. So there is clearly an empirical rationale for looking at other media coverage as well. Besides the broadcast media of television and radio, the most relevant mass medium to study is arguably the newspaper. If we are interested in analysing multiple and differing media discourses, then the newspapers are a good starting point. Newspapers in 1953 were – and still are – heterogeneous in terms of format, basic political stance, subject areas covered, etc. – a marked contrast to the relatively homogenous broadcast media of the time. In looking for alternative representations, conflicts, problems and contestation, a wide sample of newspaper coverage seems an appropriate empirical material. Also, there is no doubt that the newspapers contributed a great deal to the Coronation as a media event. Many newspapers had some sort of “Coronation countdown”; they provided readers with maps of the Coronation route, arranged competitions with Coronation-related prizes – plus, of course, continuous news coverage of the Coronation, bringing the event to public attention and keeping it there.

The Framework of Analysis: Problem Areas and Conflicts

The Coronation, for the most part, was presented as an occasion for unity and festivity. Cannadine observes that media in Britain generally adopted a reverential view of the royal family, and providing Coronation coverage placing Elizabeth II in an imperial context and creating an event characterised by reverential grandeur (Cannadine 1983:153p, 158pp). But the common wisdom of media research, particularly news research, is that unity is a less likely theme for news: news items are much more likely to focus on problems and conflicts. However, news items are also likely to focus on anything that can hold the attention of the audience and therefore generate sales, so a largely conflict-free coverage of large media events and festivities comes as no surprise. The Coronation also lent itself easily to personification (mostly through the young Queen herself), another important criterion for newsworthiness.

But within this general mood of celebration, it stands to reason that there must still be elements that are identified as problems of different kinds – threats to the smooth and successful execution and performance of the Coronation, or criticism levelled at the Coronation as such, or at related subjects (like the institution of monarchy, the role of religion in society, etc.). It is these elements that I am interested in taking a closer look at. While Couldry (2000) argues for looking at instances in which media power is *de-naturalized* (such as when ‘ordinary people’ come into personal contact with media production procedures), I look instead at an instance in which media power seems to be naturalized to a high degree, and then study the representations of problems, conflict and dissent related to this instance. The Coronation is, to use terminology analogous to Couldry’s, an event in which the role of the media is *super-naturalized* or *hyper-naturalized*.

Problem areas of any kind did not receive much attention in the Coronation coverage, so the number of actual media texts (articles) analysed are few. But even this limited number of articles gives an insight into how the newspapers constructed the Coronation event and what kinds of problems and conflicts were allowed within the media frame. The mediated framings of problems and areas of contestation become even more illuminating when compared to the concerns of the media audience. The questions I ask are: What areas are considered problematic for the newspapers and the audience? What areas are open for contestation in the newspapers and within the audience? How are these areas framed and what are the newspaper and audience discourses on problems and conflicts? By answering these questions, I hope to further illuminate the points set out in the earlier theoretical section: the mediated relationship between centre and periphery, the self-appointed centrality of the media, and the complexities of mediated discourses on media events (involving not only integrative but also conflictual discourses).

Based on the results and observations made in previous studies of the Coronation, mainly Shils and Young (1975), Ziegler (1978), Chaney (1986) and Scannell (1996), a number of possible problem areas have been chosen. After the basic coding, some of these areas turned out to be more important and salient than others – as is usually the case. The possible areas in which problems, conflicts and contestation could be identified at the outset were *practical*, *national*, *political*, *economic*, *personal*, *religious* and finally *media-related* (the same categories were of course used when analysing the newspaper texts and the audience data).

Here follows a brief explanation of each. The *practical* area refers to problems and conflicts that might arise in the practical organization of the Coronation, for example problems with the number of seats or possibilities of access to these seats for different societal groups. *National* problems are those related explicitly to the cohesion of the nation, both relating to other nations and regions within a nation. For example, media coverage or personal reports criticizing the Coronation as essentially a London affair, or problematizing the participation of Scottish or Welsh representatives in the Coronation ceremonies would fall into this category. *Political* contestation is all forms of contestation that are based in differing political/ideological viewpoints, for example criticizing the Coronation on republican grounds, or saying that the Royal family is an essentially “Tory” institution. *Economic* contestation includes both worries that the Coronation itself will cost too much, as well as seeing commercialization of the event as a problem. *Personal* contestation is such contestation that is centred upon Queen Elizabeth II personally: either questioning her personal suitability as a monarch or voicing concern over her physical well-being during the long Coronation ceremony. The *religious* area con-

sists of conflicts or problems relating to the role of religion in the Coronation ceremony, for example criticizing the Coronation for being too sacral, as well as saying it is not sacral and solemn enough. Finally, *media-related* contestation concerns problems relating to the media's own coverage of the event and whether or not this constitutes a problem.

One methodological problem arises in limiting the study to the coverage from the month immediately preceding the Coronation. Specifically, this affects the category of media-related contestation. There was a big controversy, widely reported in the media, about the initial refusal of the Coronation Committee to allow the BBC to broadcast TV from the Coronation service itself in Westminster Abbey (extensively covered by Briggs 1979:457-73). However, this controversy took place in October-November 1952, more than six months before the actual Coronation, so a major source of media coverage of media-related contestation is left entirely outside the study.

The justification for doing this is two-fold. One reason is that the controversy surrounding the BBC broadcasts has already been studied in some detail by both Briggs (1979) and Scannell (1996). The second is that I wish to focus on the period in which the Coronation really became a major media event – that is, an event saturating both most media coverage and everyday life – because this is probably when the self-defined mediated ‘centre’ is at its strongest and most obvious. The press clippings collected by the BBC itself (BBC WAC R30/478/1) indicate that the Coronation did not rise to media prominence until about one or two months before June 2. A detailed analysis of the media coverage of the Coronation broadcast controversy is perhaps worth a study in its own right.

Analysis and Results

As this study sets out to review problems, conflicts and alternative interpretations within a framework that is largely one-sided and positive, it is hardly surprising that the actual amount of references to problems and conflicts are small in both the newspaper coverage and in the audience. Some of the problem areas turned out to be ignored or virtually ignored by both the newspapers and the audience (for example, the religious and political areas), so in these cases one must assume that there is no hidden diversity or discrepancy to be found. Therefore, when presenting my results, I have chosen to concentrate on the most salient areas of disagreement between media and audiences, as well as to describe the overall characteristics of the media frame. After a description of the overall media frame, the areas in which key differences appear (national and economic) are presented. The final section covers the differences between mainstream and alternative newspaper coverage – as expected, the coverage in the communist newspaper the *Daily Worker* was so different that it could not be included in the general analysis, as it skewed the sample too much.

Overall Frame: National Celebration and the Audience as Problems

The overall media framing of the Coronation focuses on celebration and festivity and is generally positive in tone. This is hardly surprising, and fully consonant with earlier studies of the Coronation as a media event. Problems and possible areas of contestation do not receive much space. Of the total number of articles dealing with the Coronation, 8% deal with some kind of problem or conflict. The newspapers fall within a ‘problem-coverage’ rate of between 6% and 11%, not counting the *Daily Worker* and the *Financial Times* because their coverage is of such a different nature – more on this later. However, there is no direct criticism of the Coronation in any newspaper except the *Daily Worker* – in some

articles in the mainstream press, persons critical towards the Coronation are quoted, but even this occurs in very few instances (14 articles in a total sample of more than 500 articles, again not counting *Daily Worker* and *Financial Times*). This is a definite contrast to the audience material from the February and May surveys from Mass-Observation – there, around one in six expresses some form of direct criticism of the Coronation. This includes the people who express both positive and critical aspects of the Coronation.

Overall, the occurrences and circumstances defined as problems are those that pose a threat or hindrance to the smooth performance of the Coronation – of the total coverage of problem areas, 46% deal with this type of problems (the second-largest problem area, the national, makes up 29%)¹. Some of these threats come from the over-eager audience itself, forming crowds and holding up traffic, and other threats are rather threats to the enjoyment of the audience. In this, the Coronation is described exactly as can be expected from the results of Dayan and Katz. They write “By agreeing to play a role in the representation of public events, broadcasters thereby suspend something of their professional role as independent critics” (Dayan & Katz 1992:76). What they say about broadcasters seems to apply equally well to newspaper journalists.

For example, the crowds trying to get a glimpse of the Queen during the Coronation rehearsals in the Abbey, or just sightseeing and looking at the Coronation decorations, are problematic. This occurs on May 18, “Coronation route rehearsal. Big crowds turn out” (*The Scotsman*), “Londoners out in thousands for a Coronation preview. Route thronged: long traffic queues.” (*Manchester Guardian*), on May 21, “The Queen stopped by crowd” (*Daily Herald*), “Crowds stop Queen’s car” (*Daily Mirror*), and again in late May, nearing the Coronation: “Coronation route crowded by holiday-makers. Hottest Whitsun for nine years. Traffic held up by sightseers” (*Times*, May 25), “Crowds outside the Palace. Queen’s return at midnight” (*Manchester Guardian*, May 26) and “Yard may decide: ‘Ban sightseer cars’” (*Daily Mirror*, May 28).

The paper most concerned with the hindrance that the crowds of people represent is the *Daily Telegraph*, where the crowds are first page news on four occasions: “Crowds tour coronation route. State coach out for rehearsal. Solid line of cars in mall” (May 18), “West End crowds halt Queen’s car. Police cordon broken. (May 21), “Coronation route crowd halts evening traffic. Swirling mass in West End” (May 25), and “6000 crowd halt the Queen’s car. Police line broken outside Abbey. Night watch at the Palace gates. Australians mount guard in bush hats.” (May 27).

Other practical problems covered include the *Times* report on the logistical problems that creating housing for the procession troops entail: “‘Housing troops’ at Coronation. Kensington Gardens’ 3,200 tents. Orders for June 2” (May 7), and the information on the special public transport arrangements for the Coronation in the same paper: “Getting to the Coronation. London transport arrangements” (May 20). The audience is urged to co-operate to overcome possible problems, as in “Don’t litter the June 2 route, they plead” (*Daily Mirror*, May 26) and “Helping the police. Sir H. Scott’s appeal for early arrival” (*Times*, May 29).

Finally, the *Daily Mirror* clearly places itself as a representative and ombudsman of the audience, in articles such as “Is 8-hour wait for Coronation necessary? Govt. are asked” (May 15) and “A nasty idea” (May 16) – the latter being an editorial piece criticizing railway workers for taking union action by going extra slow on Coronation day. And one big Coronation front-page headline in the *Daily Mirror* also defines the lack of Coronation decorations on Piccadilly as a major problem: “The shame of Piccadilly. The rich street forgets” (May 29). The article continues:

This is the shame of Britain's most famous street – Piccadilly. In the centre of Coronation London, Piccadilly has failed to capture the spirit of the Golden Days. Even in back streets where money is counted in pennies – streets not within a Coronation roar of the great procession – pictures of the Queen are in every window: there are brilliant flags, golden crowns and brand new decorations. These streets are proud to pay tribute to the Queen. They are not worrying about the costs. But what of Piccadilly, the street where pounds are almost small-change, the street where thousands of Americans and other Overseas Coronation visitors are sightseeing now?

The media frame of the Coronation as an occasion for great national celebration suspends media criticism from “outside” the frame. Criticizing the audience for interfering with the proceedings, or criticizing groups or institutions that threaten some aspect of the Coronation, is within the frame and therefore possible. Other forms of criticism, such as criticism on political-ideological grounds, or criticism of excessive spending (indeed, the *Daily Mirror* chastises the shopkeepers on Piccadilly for not spending *enough*) or of a simplified notion of national community, are not possible within the celebratory frame. And it is in the coverage of the latter aspects, national community and economical aspects, that key differences between the newspaper discourse and the audience discourse emerge.

National Community in Newspapers and Audiences

As has been stated earlier, in previous studies of the Coronation a theme of national unity and community emerged in the media coverage. The Coronation ushered in a “New Elizabethan Age”, it provided a country in financial crisis with a much-needed occasion for national celebration, etc. (Ziegler 1978). But at many times in the history of the United Kingdom, the national has been an area of serious conflicts and contestation, with a substantial element of ‘invention of tradition’ to create national identities where none existed before (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). Therefore, in everyday news coverage, the national could be expected to be an important area of conflict and problems, problems that would mostly fall into one of two categories: conflicts about the internal cohesion of the different parts of the British Isles (Scotland's and Wales's nationalist movements can be seen as an example of this), and conflicts about the relationship between different parts of the British Commonwealth, and between Britain and other countries.

As it turns out, in the sample no newspaper coverage about conflicts or problems relating to the internal cohesion and community of the various regions of the British Isles is to be found. The main problem related to national belonging and community is instead the question of the participation of the Prime Minister of Malta, Dr George Borg Olivier. On May 11, the Maltese Premier issued a statement saying that neither he nor any official representatives of Malta would attend the Coronation. The reason given was that Malta was not accorded Commonwealth country status in the planning of the Coronation ceremony – instead, the Maltese Premier was placed with the representatives of the Colonial communities and excluded from the activities of the other Commonwealth Premiers. As a protest, the Maltese Premier made the decision not to attend, and to cancel all official Coronation celebrations on the island of Malta.

This is picked up by *The Times*, *Daily Herald* and the *Daily Mirror*. The *Daily Mirror* is most detailed in its coverage, quoting Dr Borg Olivier's intention to even take down the Coronation decorations that have already been put up in Valletta (May 13). Further coverage mostly quotes verbatim the statements of British Premier Churchill that these prob-

lems can be solved and that Malta is urged to attend, particularly because Malta is a valued member of the Commonwealth community (*Times*, *Daily Herald*, *The Scotsman* and *Manchester Guardian* on May 21). Finally, the controversy comes to a happy conclusion when the Maltese Premier is accorded status as a Commonwealth representative and reverses his decision not to attend (*Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *The Scotsman* and *Manchester Guardian* on May 22). When the story comes to an end, it is described as greeted with “...rejoicings...” (*Manchester Guardian*), a “...happy outcome...” (*Times*), and “Members of all parties broke into prolonged cheers...” (*Scotsman*, *Manchester Guardian*). A minor threat to Commonwealth unity appears, and is conquered.

Only the *Times* notes that the Coronation is controversial in other Commonwealth countries. On May 22 and May 27, the *Times* reports of criticism of the Coronation in nationalist newspapers in South Africa. These articles limit themselves to quoting the debate in the South African press, with one slightly disparaging comment in the article of May 27, saying that the Republican newspaper in which the criticisms of the Coronation has appeared “...studiously ignored the visit of the Royal Family to South Africa in 1947...” Apart from the Malta story and this coverage of disagreement in South Africa, nothing is reported that challenges the general discourse of national unity.

The newspaper concern over the (arguably minor) threat to the unity of the Commonwealth that the non-participation of the Maltese representatives poses does not leave any traces in the discourses of the audience. The audience criticism that is related to national dimension instead focuses on relationships internal to the United Kingdom – the prescribed mood of national unity is in some cases replaced with a general suspicion or dismissal of the centrality of London, in particular. For example, a lack of belief in the unity of the United Kingdom was manifested in Scotland as a brief controversy over whether Queen Elizabeth would be designated the First or the Second – the view held by those with stronger national pride was that Elizabeth was in fact the first Queen bearing that name, since Elizabeth I had in fact not been Queen of Scotland. Therefore, some argued, the Queen being crowned in Westminster Abbey in 1953 would more appropriately be referred to as Queen Elizabeth I. “They should make it definite if it’s the first or second Queen Elizabeth”, said one Scottish panel member (TC69/2/A). Also, disapproval of the Coronation was more marked in Scotland than in England (TC69/2/A). The “Elizabeth I or II”-controversy does not get reported in *The Scotsman* in the month preceding the Coronation.

Another critique of the prescribed national unity comes from those who are disinterested because they take the view that the Coronation really is mostly a London affair (this is also noted by Ziegler, 1978):

It’s going to be a great affair – that is, in London. It won’t make much difference to me.

If I was a Londoner, I’d think it was great, but we are too far north to be really interested. (Both quoted in Ziegler 1978:104)

Don’t know. Don’t take much part in it. I’m from the West Country. Londoners will turn out for everything. (TC69/2/A)

These sentiments do not represent a critique per se, but they do show that all did not share the sense of binding national community. The interest in the Coronation was greatest in London, and outside London both disinterest and disapproval were more widespread (TC69/2/A). There is also some overlap between this critique and the economic problem area, as one of the survey replies demonstrates:

London will get the money returned by visitors etc, but in the Northwest here where there's so much unemployment it is not returned and goes on the rates. At a time like this the expense is not justified. (TC69/2/A)

Among the audience, the issue of international and Commonwealth unity does not appear as an important problem area. The idea of internal national unity is more frequently disagreed with – directly opposite of the newspaper coverage, where challenges to the internal unity are non-existent.

Problems of Economy in Newspapers and Audiences

The relationship between the Coronation and the economic sphere is interpreted in different ways – and to a different extent – by the newspapers and the audience. First of all, newspaper coverage worrying about or criticizing excessive public spending is largely absent from the sample – except in the *Daily Worker*, about which more will appear in the next section. Besides the *Daily Worker* coverage, there is but one article in *The Scotsman* and one in the *Manchester Guardian* reporting any form of criticism of public spending on the Coronation. The article (from May 5) in the *Scotsman* clearly does not indicate any critical perspective on the newspaper's part, as the article simply reports the criticisms of Coronation spending made by Socialist MP Emrys Hughes of South Ayrshire in a six-penny pamphlet. Indeed, *The Scotsman* political correspondent is subtly critical of Mr Hughes's ideas, as seen in the latter part of the brief article:

Mr Hughes does not indulge in arguments about the desirability or otherwise of the Monarchy in Britain. He seems to accept the fact that there are few who would prefer a republic. But he goes into a lot of detail to build up his case that the present costs are too high, that much of the existing ceremonial could be dispensed with, and that the amount to be spent on the Coronation is too large. And he is at great pains to stress his belief that all this Coronation expenditure is a subtle plot by the Conservatives to pave the way for a "red, white and blue General Election" later in the year.

The only instance in which a mainstream newspaper within the sample presents any substantial criticism of excessive public spending on the Coronation that obviously represents the stance of the newspaper itself is in the *Manchester Guardian*, in an editorial from June 5. The editorial is a response to reader's reactions to a political cartoon by resident cartoonist Low that appeared on June 3, the day after the Coronation. The cartoon depicts the disorganized remnants of a children's party, with books bearing the titles "Fairy Princess tales" and "Snow White", a half-overturned TV set in the corner, and a text on the floor saying "£100,000,00 SPREE". The title of the cartoon is "Morning After". Some members of the *Manchester Guardian* readership took offence to this cartoon and said so in letters to the editor, and it is this criticism that the *Manchester Guardian* editorial responds to thus:

We are sorry if they [the readers, my note] have felt offended, but surely these things have to be looked at in perspective. /.../ Wednesday morning was a little too near the emotions of Coronation Day to try to press home what, we are afraid, is the cold truth to which we shall all have to come. /.../ It was worth it, but on balance it probably set us back in our economic struggle more than it helped us.

Note that even while the *Manchester Guardian* editorial writer takes a critical stance and defends the staff cartoonist, the criticism is measured and accompanied by assurances that the Coronation truly was a grand occasion worth celebrating, and that the cartoonist perhaps went too far after all, as in this passage towards the end of the editorial:

To warn us to take life seriously after our period of emotion hardly seems to be an offence, though perhaps he [Low the cartoonist, my note] should have remembered that this time, thanks to the great technical achievement by the B.B.C., the emotion was really deeply shared throughout the whole country, and therefore takes longer to fade away. It was, more than any earlier coronation, a relatively sober and serious celebration.

The article in *The Scotsman* is atypical because it refers to even the possibility that the Coronation could be criticized for consuming too much public resources. The editorial in the *Manchester Guardian* is even more unusual as it actually addresses and to some extent agrees with this criticism – but not until after the Coronation. Concern about excessive public spending is not really reflected in the mainstream newspaper coverage.

The newspaper coverage is not overly concerned with another contestable aspect of the economic area, that of commercialization, either. This only comes to the fore when the papers quote the sermon of L J Collins, the Chancellor of St Paul's, on May 10, in which Collins criticizes the rampant "cashing-in" on the Coronation. This is reported in the *Manchester Guardian*, *Times*, *The Daily Herald* and *The Scotsman* on May 11. Other than that, the fact that the souvenir industry capitalizes on the Coronation is not reported on as a problem by the mainstream newspapers – and in the *Financial Times*, the marked increase in souvenir sales is mentioned in favourable tones (May 20). Of course, the newspapers can to a certain extent be said to have contributed to this commercialization with Coronations special supplements, Coronation maps, Coronation souvenir books produced by the newspaper itself, Coronation prize draws and competitions etc.

In contrast, in the survey on opinions on the Coronation carried out by Mass-Observation in May 1953, the economic aspects emerge as an important area of criticism. About one in six in the sample voiced mild to strong concern over public spending connected to the Coronation. Comments such as these are typical:

I think they're spending too much money on it, when the country's on the verge of a breakdown. I think it's a waste of money. I do really, with the poverty there is in the country. It doesn't make her any better; she'd be Qn [sic] just the same if there wasn't the fuss.

Don't believe in it at all. Too much expense when other things are in need of it. The country is in such a state.

I think it's a waste of money and a waste of time; after all we have to pay for it.

It's ridiculous to economise on certain services and then squander too much on the Coronation. (TC69/2/A)

The concerns about the crass commercialization of the Coronation, mentioned in passing in the newspapers, also appear in the audience sample, but to a lesser degree than the concerns about excessive public spending. But criticism of commercialization is still present:

It's a very interesting historical event, but we tend to lose the real importance. It is getting too commercialised.

I've nothing against it, I think she's very nice, but there's been so much about it on Television and in Woolworth's – I said to myself it's like the way they put out X-mas cards the moment you come back from holidays. X-mas is stale before you get there and I feel the Coronation is like that too. Woolworth's is full of it far too long in advance. (TC69/2/A)

The problem in this case, though, is not really the Coronation itself but the way in which some people see it as source of income – thus not showing the proper respect for the occasion.

Another economic aspect voiced by a few members of the public, but not in the mainstream newspaper coverage, is a criticism of the cost of the Coronation to the individual. This is framed in class terms:

Personally I think they're spending too much money, I mean what chance is there of the likes of us seeing anything – could *you* afford £10 for a seat? I know I couldn't. It's like all these things they go in for, it's a rich man's Coronation. If you can afford to dress up in all that fancy ermine. I suppose it's all right but personally I prefer to clothe my kiddies. What's proper for one isn't proper for the other. You're not taken in by these things nowadays, are you?

Seats are too dear for working class people. (TC69/2/A)

The *Manchester Guardian* is the only mainstream newspaper in the sample to even mention the fact that seats in the Coronation stands along the procession route actually cost money (“End of the buyers' market in Coronation seats – Ten Guinea Minimum Likely to Rise”, May 27). Otherwise, the fact that a quite large expenditure of money was required to view the Coronation procession in relative comfort was not reported or even mentioned by the other newspapers.

The newspaper coverage is, then, largely unconcerned with the economic aspects of the Coronation as a possible area of conflict – whether it be excessive public spending, commercialization, or costs to the individual. The economic aspect that does appear in the newspaper coverage is the quoting of Chancellor Collins and his criticism of the commercialization of the Coronation – again, an aspect that can well be interpreted as a threat to the dignified performance of the Coronation. However, in the sampled audience discourse, the economic aspect emerges as a definitely salient area of contestation and critique – concern for excessive public spending on the Coronation is considerably more marked in audience discourse than in the newspaper discourse, where such concern is mostly absent.

Mainstream Media, Alternative Media and Audience Discourse

I have alluded in previous sections that the newspaper coverage was rather uniform – except in the case of the *Daily Worker*. As a communist newspaper, the *Daily Worker* definitely existed on the far left fringe of the mediated public sphere – but it still circulated beyond an audience of card-carrying communists. Exact circulation figures are hard to come by – Seymour-Ure lists the circulation in 1950 as 115,000 and in 1955 as unknown, “possibly 6000-7000 copies per day” (Seymour-Ure 1996:29). The *Daily Worker* was included in the sample specifically to represent a possible alternative media discourse – and the empirical study confirms that the *Daily Worker* was a source of infor-

mation and perspectives on the Coronation not seen elsewhere in the newspaper discourse. The *Daily Worker* features *nothing but* coverage of problems and areas of conflict and contestation relating to the Coronation, and so can clearly be said to represent an alternative voice among the newspapers.

The *Daily Worker* is more concerned with the economic aspects of the Coronation as an area of conflict than the other newspapers in the sample. But, surprisingly, concern over excessive public spending does not get much coverage here either; it is mentioned in two articles. The first article, headlined “Coronation row in Kensington” (May 28) covers a disagreement over Coronation spending in Kensington. The second article is probably more important, as it is the first-page headline for Coronation Day itself, June 2, and here the costs of the Coronation are placed at the centre of criticism:

The money and effort spent on Coronation Day have been diverted from essential projects. For example, the steel and timber used are needed for houses and schools. /.../ But there are still millions of British citizens who have not been bamboozled. They have quietly watched what has been going on. In such homes today they will be asking themselves: “What good has been done?” The will ask also: HAVE the preparations for the Coronation enables one extra house to be built? HAVE they provided one extra hospital bed in our crowded industrial cities, where beds are at a premium? HAVE they given the old age pensioners any hope for the future after the crumbs from the rich Coronation table has been eaten?

Overall, the economic problem area is framed in such a way as to allow criticism of corporations and financial interests in the first place. For example, the *Daily Worker* covers the commercialization of the Coronation, but does not interpret this as mainly a threat to the dignified performance of the ritual:

There can be no questioning the solemn dedication of the millionaire Press and the women’s magazines to the sacred cause of driving us all crazy by pounding away at the Coronation theme far beyond the bounds of human reason. /.../ Manufacturers are dedicated, too. They have been letting no considerations of taste or suitability stand in the way of their clear and patriotic duty of affixing crowns, royal ciphers and royal portraits on everything from liquorice sticks to lingerie. (Daily Worker, May 2nd, p 4)

The main area of contestation in the *Daily Worker* is the area of politics. The *Daily Worker* is explicitly republican in outlook and has numerous articles criticizing the monarchy – indeed, the main feature in the *Daily Worker*’s Coronation coverage is a series of articles under the banner “The truth about the Coronation”, inaugurated on May 4 with these words:

The Daily Worker today begins an important series of articles on the Coronation. It will cut through the claptrap and adulation, the drum-beating and the snob gossip, to get at the truth.

The following articles in this series are most concerned with criticizing the monarchy and advancing the cause of republicanism. In this, of course, the *Daily Worker* clearly represents the minority view, so the *Daily Worker* coverage does not really represent a more accurate representation of audience preferences in this respect.

The *Daily Worker* does seem to be more in tune with the audience when framing the notion of national unity as an area of contestation. Again, however, the challenges to the

prescribed mood of national unity in the *Daily Worker* are mainly expressed in terms of class conflicts, like in the article “Crown is symbol of disunity” (May 21), but criticism of the monarchy as a broader symbol of the Commonwealth also appears:

Mr Swaffer says the Coronation ‘will yet more strongly unite the peoples of the Commonwealth’. This means that because a Queen is being crowned in London, the people of Kenya, Nigeria, Malaya and other parts of the Empire will forget that their land has been stolen and that they are being shot down – and worse – for demanding its return. (*Daily Worker*, May 25, p 2, article “These guilty excuses just won’t do”).

Similar criticisms focussing on the colonial past of Britain appear in an article on Coronation Day (June 2), “The ‘family’ that starves its children”. But the strand of criticism based on centre-periphery relations of regions within Britain found in some members of the audience is not present in the *Daily Worker* coverage either. So, while the *Daily Worker* clearly represents an alternative media discourse, the areas defined as areas of conflict and problems are not quite the same as those defined as areas of conflict and problems by the members of the audience sample.

Obviously, the *Daily Worker* occupies a very particular place in the mediated public sphere. As a communist newspaper, it was boycotted by newsagents and for the most part had to rely on volunteer distribution networks. During the war, the government had suppressed publication of the *Daily Worker*. It was a fringe, far-left publication, albeit with a readership extending to non-communists as well, so it is hardly surprising that class-based criticism, a preoccupation with anti-Royalism and a rhetorical and ironical writing style are ubiquitous features. It has been included here for exactly this reason. The study seems to show that criticism of the Coronation that is not based solely on practical concerns of access, performance and decoration, only is possible on the fringes of the mediated public sphere – whereas criticism and dissent is evident in members of the audience that in terms of their general political views hardly can be described as “fringe”. The second point made in a comparison between mainstream newspapers and the *Daily Worker* is that even a far-left newspaper with a radically different perspective on politics, economy and national unity could not *ignore* the Coronation. There is a highly visible series of articles specifically connected to the Coronation, and on Coronation Day and the day after the main news stories are about the Coronation – the *Daily Worker* was gripped by the same “Coronation fever” they accuse other newspapers of succumbing to.

This is in stark contrast to the *Financial Times*. In a quite different way, the *Financial Times* also can be considered an “alternative medium”, at least when it comes to coverage of the Coronation. The *Financial Times* stands out among the newspapers in the sample as the paper giving the *least* amount of coverage about the Coronation. For the other newspapers – including the *Daily Worker*, as mentioned above – it was simply impossible to ignore the Coronation, but the *Financial Times* does not take an interest in preparations, political issues, issues of national unity, religious issues or practical considerations regarding the Coronation celebrations. Just to give an indication, in the sample period *Financial Times* contains 14 articles relating to the Coronation – compared with 100+ articles in the *Daily Mirror*, the around 80-90 articles in the *Times*, *Daily Herald*, *Daily Telegraph*, *The Scotsman* and *Manchester Guardian* and the 40+ articles in the *Daily Worker*. The *Financial Times* has no picture material on the Coronation except the day before Coronation and the day after (*Financial Times* was not published on Coronation Day), another marked contrast to all other newspapers.

If one looks only at the mainstream newspaper coverage, the impression is clearly that Coronation coverage was celebratory and uncritical, and the only things framed as problems or possible sources of conflict were those that presented a threat to a smooth and joyous celebration. Looking at other coverage, we can see that criticisms seem to be limited to fringe media outlets, and that not even “fringe” or “alternative” media like the *Daily Worker* can afford to totally ignore the Coronation (if only because it serves as a focus for several issues central to the ideology of the *Daily Worker*). The only newspaper that can afford to ignore the Coronation almost entirely is the *Financial Times*, who presumably know that their elite audience will either not be interested in Coronation coverage, or can get their Coronation information from other media outlets. And the newspaper coverage in general does not pick up on the themes of criticism that the Mass-Observation material indicates as the most salient in the audience.

The Coronation Revisited: Conclusions

In the mass press, the Coronation is an unproblematic event, framed just as Shils and Young describe it: an occasion of national communion, celebration and festivity. The main problem related to the Coronation is how to guarantee a smooth functioning and successful performance. Part of this problem is the audience itself – clogging up streets, causing delays and possibly littering.

The differences between the media coverage of possible problems and the audience interpretations of what constitutes problems or areas of criticism are most marked in two areas: the area of national community, and economic/financial considerations relating to the Coronation. These areas, which the audience define as problems and areas of contestation, are not represented at all in the mainstream newspaper coverage.

Even though the audience reports are also largely consistent with the festive mood, they do show a more complex picture, and most importantly show that audience members are more disposed to question the prescribed festive mood than are the newspapers. For the most part, the newspapers are uninterested in anything that does not fit into the frame of joyous celebration – even though there might be serious public interest in more controversial areas.

The only serious criticisms of different aspects of the Coronation come from outside the media mainstream, in the communist paper the *Daily Worker*. But it is an indicator of the self-perpetuating nature of the media coverage that not even the *Daily Worker* can ignore the Coronation – indeed, a substantial number of articles cover it. However, being a fringe leftist newspaper, the *Daily Worker* can really not be said to have represented the criticisms raised by the audience any better than the mainstream press did – but it is still important to note that political and ideological criticism of the Coronation is only possible outside the mediated mainstream.

The Nature of Media Events

According to Couldry, one of the central premises of Dayan and Katz’s theory of media events – that media events reveal deeper truths about society and culture – is questionable. Coverage of media events cannot be said to be purely an expression of a prevailing mood or societal moral centre (Couldry 2002:41-7, 56ff). This study supports Couldry’s criticism – the newspaper coverage clearly does not represent the diversity of interpretations among the audience. In fact, the mainstream newspaper coverage does not

represent any critical aspects of the Coronation at all, whereas the audience does pick up and comment on possible areas of problems and contestation. The problem areas most keenly experienced by the audience members: economic factors and the character of national community, are not questioned or covered at all in the press. It is only the fringe newspaper *Daily Worker* that is somewhat more in tune with audience criticism than the mainstream newspapers.

The results of the study point towards Lang and Lang's interpretation of media events rather than Dayan and Katz's: media events are truly *media* events because they are largely constructed by the media. Problems that are inconsistent with the prescribed media mood of celebration are ignored, whereas contestation that in some way can be framed as possible threats to a generally amicable mood of festivity is covered – albeit that, too, does not take up much media space. Dissent becomes virtually impossible within the media mainstream, which should lead us to question the nature of the proposed integrative effects of media events.

Both academic and popular discourses about the Coronation frame the event as uniform in its (positive) effects, creating a feeling of national community and celebration. While there is no doubt that the Coronation was an occasion for festivity for many people, it is also true that other members of the audience did not feel included in the media-constructed national “we”. According to Shils and Young and Dayan and Katz, one of the most important effects of a media event like the Coronation is its ability to create a sense of community among the audience. Media events, according to Dayan and Katz, bring family members and friends together, create an openness to new possibilities, connect the centre and periphery and reverse the trend of individualization (Dayan & Katz 1992:195ff, 205). However, it is unclear exactly what this “community” consists of, and what it is that audience members feel part of – if they indeed feel part of anything. An important part of the media-constructed community is the national community, but as we have seen, audience members view issues of centre and periphery within the British Isles as more of a problem than the newspapers do. Perhaps the most tangible community is the very general community of celebration: people feel that they are sharing a festive moment with other people, though not necessarily a festive moment infused with national meaning. And in many aspects, this community of celebration is constructed by the media: as Ziegler (1978) reports, many people were negative or neutral to the Coronation but could not help feeling “drawn in” or “swept away” as the day approached, simply because the media-fuelled expectations were inescapable. Thomas's study of people's reactions to the death and funeral of Princess Diana show similar results – reaction to and reception of an event are generally assumed to be uniform because the media present them as uniform, but looking at how people actually acted and felt provides a more complex, nuanced picture (Thomas 2002:175ff).

In their list of effects of media events, Dayan and Katz mention some points that are worth returning to:

Live broadcasting enhances the status of the principals, conferring both legitimacy and charisma during the event and after. (Dayan & Katz 1992:192)

Nevertheless, broadcasters are rewarded with status and legitimacy for abandoning their “adversarial” stance in favor of an integrative role. (Dayan & Katz 1992:193)

Broadcasters also gain status as “donors” of an event. (Dayan & Katz 1992:193)

In the eye of public opinion, media events confer status on the institutions with which they deal. (Dayan & Katz 1992:199)

Dayan and Katz specifically refer to “broadcasters”, but the principle is exactly the same for the press. Following Altheide and Snow and Couldry, it is clear that one of the institutions involved in this process is the media. The media are also allowed to confer status upon themselves, and to legitimate themselves as interpreters of the public mood. The media frame is one of celebration and community, therefore the mood must also be one of celebration and community. The simple fact that not everyone feels at home in this constructed community is systematically ignored. This can hardly be considered integrative. And, even if media events do create an “upsurge of fellow feeling” (Dayan & Katz 1992:196) at the moment of the event, this does not really say anything about what happens afterwards. Considering the results presented here, the most lasting effect of the Coronation was probably (as both Briggs (1979) and Scannell (1996) mention) to cement the legitimacy of the BBC, rather than to provide any long-lasting feeling of community or a redefinition of the national identity. The “moral centre of society” is a fleeting thing, as the dissenting audience reports quoted here show – what remains is the view of the media as privileged interpreters of social and cultural reality.

Note

1. These figures do not include the *Daily Worker* coverage. If the *Daily Worker* were included, then that paper would on its own account for 42% of the problem area coverage, compared to figures of 6% to 11% for all the other newspapers.

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