2016

Through the Lens of David Douglas Duncan: Picturing Iran and South Asia in 1951

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Abstract
This project compares and contrasts the photojournalistic discourses in the image-word representations of David Douglas Duncan and the editorial coverage of Life magazine on Asia (particularly South and Southeast Asia) and Iran in 1951. By employing Critical Discourse Analysis, this paper looks at the visual modes and written text to explain whether the ideological positions of Duncan and Life magazine are separate and distinct in their representations, and if so, to what extent. The primary interest in this study is to reveal whether their representations perpetuate the Cold War narratives and images of otherness or rather Free world vs. Communist bloc dichotomy (‘in and out’ group identity) based on the anti-communist ideology that became an integral part of the post-war American foreign policy. To this end, this study initiates the conceptual framework proposed by Theo van Leeuwen on the “social actors” and the “visual representation of social actors.” The use of van Leeuwen’s system networks will allow us to explore possible asymmetrical patterns in the visual and textual depiction of social actors, which include Asian countries, Iran, Western countries, and countries in Communist bloc, who participated in the new international order during the early stages of the Cold War.

Background
The rising tension within this region occurred against the backdrop of early post-war developments, significantly influenced by the rise of a new international order. On the one hand, U.S. foreign policy post-war tensions with the rise of a new international order. On the other hand, accompanying the polarization of the newly emerged superpowers, the implementation of U.S. foreign policy opened a new era which began to witness political and economic penetration of the U.S into the territories of the former European colonies. During that time, Asia was considered to be inclined to Communism. After the rise of Communism in China and the explosion of the war in Korea, American foreign aid programs were put into practice, providing financial and military support to nationalist governments in Asia and to Iran in order to prevent the spread of Communism.

Life Magazine
Taking into account the productions for Life, Duncan’s voice would not be heard without the superimposition of the magazine’s influence. During that time, Life was run by Henry Luce—said to be the “most influential private citizen in the America of his days.” Life’s targeted audience was middle-class Americans, and it can be assumed that the photo-magazine had a substantial effect on American opinions and values. Thus, their representations played a major role in forming the Western view of post-war Asia and Iran, making their discourses worthy subjects for close analyses.

Data Collection
The discourse we will examine in this study include images from Duncan’s stay in Asia and Iran in November/December 1951, a caption book by Duncan, and an editorial story from Life magazine. The majority of the images that were captured by Duncan and their associated captions have remained unpublished. Thus, our study relies heavily on unpublished materials that our research supervisor has collected from the Duncan Archive at the Harry Ransom Center of the University of Texas. We are in the process of selecting images. Images showing no human subjects will be omitted, and the rest of the pictures will be analyzed according to the visual social actor networks. After omitting some pictures as mentioned, we will identify the participants. These are the social actors. And then we will analyze the images and textual materials using NVivo software.

Methodology
This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis. Discourse refers to text, speech, and in this case, images. Critical Discourse Analysis looks at discourses through a problem-based lens, focusing on power relations and representation. Within our methodology, we will use two system networks developed by Theo van Leeuwen: the “Social Actor Network” and the “Visual Social Actor Network.” The “Social Actor Network” seeks to answer the question, “How can social actors be presented in English?” while the “Visual Social Actor Network” seeks to answer the question, “How are the people depicted?” Significant in these networks is the partition of operational socio-semantic-categories of in and out groups. They are used to find semantic choices made by image-word producers, to understand the potential meanings these choices carry, and to analyze the depiction of “otherness.”

Research Questions
RQ 1: How are the different leaders, groups, or individuals depicted in the word and image narrative of Duncan’s images and Life’s works?
RQ 2: Do Life magazine’s depictions of these participants have a different representation from Duncan’s, and if so, to what extent?
RQ 3: Do Duncan’s representations of social actors and those of Life maintain the us vs. them dichotomy (“in and out” group identity) based on the anti-communist ideology that was heavily invested by the post-war American foreign policy? If so, what are the asymmetrical patterns that prevent social actors, particularly those associated with the Communist camp, as an “other,” – reinforcing fears of otherness?

References and Images