

Further Reply to the Langs

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While claiming in their counterrebuttal that they “went out of their way to make clear that Chomsky’s political views were not the basis of our critique of the propaganda model,” in fact the Langs went out of their way to stress a congruence between Chomsky’s alleged political views and our communication model, even going so far as to state, basing themselves on their claims about Chomsky’s views, that the model “concedes no legitimacy to state authority,” which is false as regards both the model and Chomsky’s views, and which they make no effort to support. They continue to erect straw persons and misrepresent our position by decontextualization. In their first paragraph, they deny that they believe the media “are fully even-handed,” which of course nobody has suggested that they believe. And they characterize our position as saying that we “depict news as nothing but the surviving residue from an input of filtered information,” although we are extremely clear that the structural factors and filters that dominate media operations “are not all controlling and do not produce simple and homogeneous results . . . that the various parts of media organizations have some limited autonomy, that individual and professional values influence media work, that policy is imperfectly enforced, and that media policy itself may allow some measure of dissent and reporting that calls into question the accepted viewpoint.”

In criticizing our quantitative analysis in chapters 2 and 3 of *Manufacturing Consent*, whose existence the Langs had ignored in their opening article, the authors misread and undervalue our evidence and display an unwillingness to go beyond their own admitted ignorance of the circumstances. They question our procedure of “using the number of articles” mentioning Popieluszko’s death with that of a large set of Latin American religious victims, but don’t seem to have noticed that we also measured number of editorials, front page coverage, column inches, and the nature of the coverage devoted to the topic, not just number of articles. They claim that our analysis here “focuses on a single case,” when in fact we focus on Popieluszko and 100 religious martyrs in U.S. domains. We gave a coherent political explanation for this radically differential coverage, which fits the propaganda model. The Langs don’t even mention our explanation and its fit to the propaganda model, but say “it would be interesting to know just why this particular case attracted so much attention.” Which is followed by admissions of complete ignorance on the subject. They say that Latin America is “a region whose internal affairs have been consistently underreported.” However, as we have shown in refuting a similar false claim, El Salvador alone received as much coverage as Poland during the relevant periods (Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions*, 1989, pp. 147, 382). In fact, Central America was one of the most extensively reported regions in the 1980s. To mention one other case that we investigated, the Salvadoran and Nicaraguan elections were intensively reported, but in highly distorted ways that fit the Reagan agenda. The

killing of Latin religious figures by our clients didn't fit that agenda. The point escapes the Langs.

The Langs' treatment of our tabulations on election coverage in El Salvador and Nicaragua is equally misleading. The proper comparison is not between coverage of the compatible and incompatible agenda items within each election, but between elections. A reader will quickly see by looking at these tables that the "compatibles" are extensively covered in the favored El Salvador election but are almost entirely ignored for Nicaragua (e.g., the "army as protector of election" is mentioned in 17.9% of the news articles on El Salvador, but none in Nicaragua; "rebel disruption" [53% vs. 0]; "democratic purpose and hopes" [21.4% vs. 4.8%]). For incompatibles like "freedom of the press" and "limits on the ability of candidates to qualify and campaign," the differences are dramatic (0 vs. 28.6% and 0 vs. 54.6%). The Langs' discussion here is pure obfuscation, and their finding that this data "does not move us far beyond the anecdotal" is indefensible.

On our tabulation of media usage of the word "genocide," the Langs flounder even more haplessly. They say we note that the term was "applied lavishly" to Iraqi attacks on the Kurds in the 1980s, but "[fail] to note that their table covers 1990–1999 rather than the earlier period." The Langs fail to see that we were speaking of the use of "genocide" in regard to Iraqi attacks on the Kurds in the years when Saddam Hussein was being demonized in preparation for the 2003 invasion, and that our 1990–1999 data show the same kind of usage, correlated with the sanctions regime. Interestingly, the Langs do not claim that the word was used by the media in the 1980s when Saddam was a U.S. ally, presumably because they would not be able to sustain such a claim.

The Langs then try to claim a "serious deficiency" in "relying on content analysis and selection of the term 'genocide' as the single indicator for validating their model." They even "broaden the question," asking "how conclusive are inferences about the nature of the media system drawn from a rather superficial content analysis?" But we hardly rely on that single indicator to validate the model or draw conclusions about the media system—we do that by numerous quantitative analyses and detailed case studies. But we do claim that the politicized usage of the word "genocide" fits the predictions of the model very well. We also note that the Langs never come to grips with our criticism of their own seriously biased analysis of genocide which we made in our initial rebuttal, which they now support with a quote from R. J. Rummel, whose biases fit well their own (with only enemy states guilty of crimes that entitle them to be genocidists).

In criticizing our comparison of media treatment of the mass killings in Cambodia and East Timor, and attempting to make our extensive analysis "anecdotal," the Langs argue first that East Timor is remote and inaccessible, with access banned by the Indonesians. But the thousands of Timorese refugees in Australia and Lisbon were no more remote and inaccessible than refugees on the Thai-Cambodian border, but were virtually ignored, with rare exceptions that we have noted. It is a further indication of the Langs' serious bias that they raise questions about the credence that could be given East Timorese refugees—"highly partisan members or supporters of the Fretilin," which was misleading, as many were from the anti-Fretilin party UDT or otherwise not Fretilin supporters—but raise no question about the credence that should be given Cambodian refugees in Thailand, or "intelligence agencies," that have to evaluate evidence offered by Fretilin and are implicitly truth seekers only. The Langs say that after the ban was breached, "there was much highly critical reporting" of the performance of Indonesia in East Timor—but after alleging that we use anecdotal evidence, this statement of theirs does not even reach an anecdotal level, is devoid of citation, and is false. We have reviewed in detail

the media coverage following the worst atrocities, and found that with few exceptions it remained superficial and often apologetic right through the terrible atrocities of 1999, until the ban was finally breached in September 1999.

They also claim that the Cambodian killings were far more lethal than those in East Timor. They say that “the most probable” of the estimates of dead Cambodians is 2 million, more than 10 times that in East Timor (allegedly 150,000). They take the high end estimate for Cambodia and the low end for East Timor, where the most often cited number is 200,000, and they falsely claim that the figure for East Timor applies to a longer period, when both figures are for the years 1975–1978. The 2 million figure was first given by the French journalist Jean Lacouture, who alleged that the Khmer Rouge had “boasted” about killing this number. This was a fabrication, which he acknowledged, but his figure remained as the one preferred by the *Readers Digest*, mainstream media, and R. J. Rummel, and now the Langs, but not by the State Department experts. In *Manufacturing Consent* and *After the Cataclysm*, we pointed out that the view of State Department Cambodia experts at the time we were writing was that deaths from all causes might have been in the hundreds of thousands. We quoted top State Department Cambodia specialist Charles Twining’s estimate of killings, in the “thousands or hundreds of thousands,” but with admitted difficulty in getting valid numbers. We quoted Twining’s superior Richard Holbrooke’s estimate of “tens if not hundreds of thousands” for “deaths” from all causes. The State Department’s Timothy Carney estimated the deaths from “brutal, rapid change” (explicitly not “mass genocide”) as in the hundreds of thousands (*After the Cataclysm*, pp. 159–160). The Langs just bypass these official estimates for the preferred high number that originated in an acknowledged lie.

The Langs miss the crucial point that as Indonesia was a U.S. client state receiving decisive U.S. diplomatic support for the invasion as well as military aid, not only was the United States responsible for the ongoing East Timorese deaths, it also could have done something about the ongoing crimes, like cutting off aid. This means that media attention might have helped save lives, and it means that media inattention served the U.S. policy of support of Indonesia in its aggression and slaughter. The focus on Cambodia did not help Cambodians, but it did serve the useful propaganda function of demonizing the Communist enemy and justifying the prior Indochinese wars and continuing hostility to Vietnam, and as we showed, served to justify intervention in Central America that led to huge subsequent atrocities. The propaganda model can explain this radically dichotomous treatment. The Langs do not explain it.

It is true that some terrible events are relatively unnoticed at the time they occur, but this hardly calls into question the propaganda model or our comparison of Cambodia and East Timor, where U.S. officials and the media were well aware of the main facts but chose to deal with them in the dichotomous fashion that we describe. For cases like those the Langs mention in China, Russia, and North Korea, we may ask: Was the United States providing decisive diplomatic and military support for these atrocities? Were the U.S. media focusing on comparable atrocities in the same region and in the same years that could be blamed on an official enemy while the United States was supporting the Chinese (etc.) atrocities? Plainly, these are the crucial points that bear on attention and neglect.

The Langs mention “some evidence, albeit anecdotal,” that the media have occasionally focused attention on genocidal situations that forced their governments to act, not clearly serviceable to the national interest. Characteristically, they fail to mention any case to which this anecdotal evidence applies, although it may be that they have in mind their conventional misunderstandings of the Balkans wars that we have already

discussed. Actually, there are such cases, and elsewhere we have discussed some of them, but these are clearly not relevant here.

Addendum by Chomsky

With regard to Lippmann, the Langs are quite right to say that the phrase they provide is by no means “a fair synopsis of his thought.” But the issue is whether what I actually wrote about Lippmann is a fair account. And that issue, once again, they scrupulously evade. To repeat, they ignored what I wrote, choosing instead to refer to a Web site constructed by others, and they seriously misquoted the statement of Lippmann’s that was the centerpiece of their charges. Their new “quote” is not from anything I wrote, but from a transcript of a conversation—obviously not a serious source, particularly when plenty of material exists in print. Once we correct their serious errors and omissions, and add (again) that Lippmann’s editors take the significant context to be exactly as I presented it, then no response to their charges is needed beyond what I gave: look at what I have written on the topic—which they completely ignore.