

Identities are constructed and then continually reshaped. This relational concept of identity stands in opposition to an essentialist conception of ‘national character’ or national consciousness. The renegotiation and reinterpretation of the agents and mechanisms involved with the formation of identities in a comparative perspective through the prism of cultural transfer theory can reorientate research into new areas of scholarship. This was evidently the intention of the editors, as is indicated by the title, and by combining previous scholarship with a wealth of new information, it succeeds in doing so. The carefully researched studies in this well-structured and engaging collection are an indispensable addition to the existing literature on cultural mediation and the historical process of identity construction. The volume is highly recommended.

Gioula Koutsopanagou
ETMIET/KENI, Panteion University
Hellenic Open University

Gioula Koutsopanagou, *The British Press and the Greek Crisis, 1943–1949: Orchestrating the Cold-War ‘Consensus’ in Britain*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. Pp. xii, 375.
DOI:[10.1017/byz.2022.34](https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2022.34)

‘Public diplomacy’ is a staple of diplomatic life in Britain’s missions overseas and at home. At peace and in conflict, embassies and high commissions court the public in their host countries, while the Foreign Office in London tackles domestic communications. The task, simply put, is to explain key policy goals, so as to influence the policy of foreign governments and shape public opinion abroad and in the UK. In recent years, social media have expanded the palette, while also making the task more difficult. In cases such as Ukraine today, where hostile governments mount sophisticated disinformation campaigns through cyberwarfare, the stakes appear existential.

These disciplines were first forged in wartime, specifically the two world wars. Winning the information war came to be seen as of strategic importance and could not be left to chance. As early as July 1939, six weeks before it declared war on Germany, the Chamberlain government gained parliamentary approval to plan the recreation of the Ministry of Information (first set up in 1917 and disbanded two years later). The efforts of democratic governments to control their media through wartime censorship are a complex and controversial part of this story. Perhaps surprisingly, the importance of the media to warfare has only recently been taken as seriously by historians as it has long been by government. Koutsopanagou’s well-researched study fills this gap in relation to the role played by the British press towards Greece in the period 1943 to 1949.

The book has an ambitious canvas, surveying the stance taken by the British press in the three rounds of ‘Greek Crisis’, as the ‘internal’ civil war morphed into the ‘external’

geopolitical tensions of the Cold War. Yet this canvas is not quite wide enough: all but expert readers will be puzzled by the absence, in an introduction, of a systematic account of the legal and institutional structures through which the British government, from 1939 onwards, attempted to direct and control the British press during the war. (Chapter 2 covers post-war structures.)

Chapter 1 is prefatory, summarizing the bibliographical shift towards media studies in historical analysis, particularly of the Cold War. Chapter 2 surveys the construction of an ‘anti-communist consensus’ in Britain, focusing on the period 1946–9. Chapter 3 briefly summarizes the creation, in the same period, of an anti-communist lexicon. Chapter 4 is a useful survey of the main wartime organs of the British press, together with information about key editors and journalists. Chapters 5–8 provide the meat of the argument: a detailed analysis of the coverage of key events by the British (and international) press, together with an account of the British government’s often unavailing attempts to control and critique that coverage. (Chapter 5 covers January 1943 to the liberation of Athens in October 1944; chapter 6 the ‘December Events’ of 1944; chapter 7 the Varkiza Agreement of February 1945 and the ensuing ‘White Terror’; chapter 8 the period when Britain handed over its role in Greece to the USA, from April 1947 to 1949.) Chapters 9 and 10 attempt conclusions.

The methodology consists of a close reading of newspaper accounts, cross-referred to diplomatic telegrams and minutes, and third-party sources. There is occasional consideration of BBC material, none of Pathé News. The approach is strongest in the analysis of press behaviour: how the newspapers formulated their internal lines; how tensions and disagreements were handled between correspondents on the frontline and editors at home; how the diplomats and politicians tried to influence the newspapers, to the extent of seeking the replacement of ‘irresponsible’ journalists or, on the other hand, of making life difficult for editors who ignored ‘responsible’ journalists’ copy. The granular analysis of anti-government coverage in *The Times* under the liberal editorship of Robert Barrington-Ward is instructive, in terms of what it tells us about the limits of the government’s authority and about internal newspaper pressures.


The approach also casts light on the interplay between the British diplomatic mission to Greece, in Cairo then in Athens, and the British press at home and overseas. The analysis of efforts by ambassador Rex Leeper at the time of the Lebanon Conference in spring 1944, first to control the press and broadcast media, and then to get the results of the conference disseminated across occupied Greece, points to the complexity of media management at this time. Press and government needed each other; the game of cat and mouse was elaborate, mutual manipulation ensued. Chapter 6, on the ‘December Events’ of 1944, is perhaps the most successful presentation of the countervailing factors at play and the different perspectives of diplomats, politicians, journalists and editors.

Although they are central to the story, the book is weakest when considering the diplomats. There is little appreciation of the policy-making process at the Foreign

Office, its structure and hierarchies, the different roles played by an embassy and the Foreign Office's departments in London. Too often one reads that something 'caught the attention of the Foreign Office' or 'irritated the Foreign Office' or caused the Foreign Office to 'immediately react', when all that has happened is that a junior officer has left a note for the record. Not everything in the files carries weight. This occasional lack of perspective is exacerbated by a more serious prosopographical failing. Despite the array of talent and personality in the wartime Foreign Office, the book shows a notable lack of interest in the people themselves. There are many mistakes made with names and posts: Sir Orme Sargent, to quote the most egregious example, is never once given his correct title. (During the period covered here, he was, successively, Deputy Under-Secretary (Northern and Southern Europe) and Permanent Under-Secretary.) The reader never gets a lively sense of what the diplomats thought they were about; even those whose actions are examined (e.g. Leeper and his press officer Osbert Lancaster) are not appraised in the round.

The book convinces more in analysis than in overall shape and conclusions. The attempt to juggle wartime and post-war handling of the press, and to see the attitudes and ideological techniques of the Cold War presaged by efforts to handle the press in wartime ('orchestrating the Cold War consensus'), leads to structural complications and ellipses, and is not wholly persuasive. The year of 1947 is surely a more significant breakpoint – and, for the UK, breakdown – than it seems to the author. The ending of UK economic aid to Greece; the pronouncement of the Truman Doctrine; the launch, in 1948, of Marshall Aid – all point to a transformative ideological shift and a shift in the location of dominant power. Chapter 8, which looks at 1947–49, suggests that, for Britain's press and government, energy had now gone out of the game in Greece. The new ideological structures created in that period, such as the Foreign Office's Information Research Department (covered in chapter 2), reflect the reality of a Britain now becoming dependent on US hegemony, and of a bipolar ideological world being newly conceptualized. The closing round of the Greek Civil War was caught up in this, as K. shows. But for Britain the economic and, in time, military withdrawals from Greece, and the contemporary media and information strategies, were symptoms of a deeper malaise. Less, it seems to me, a matter of orchestration than constrained improvisation in the face of an overwhelming new reality.

The book, while consistently interesting, is vitiated by the absence of careful editing. There are many mistakes of language, referencing, and typography. The transfer from PhD thesis to book has not been consistently done and the index is slipshod. Palgrave Macmillan charge a hefty price for academic books: is it too much to ask them to invest in copy-editors?

John Kittmer 
Scarborough, Yorkshire