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The Challenges of International Public Relations



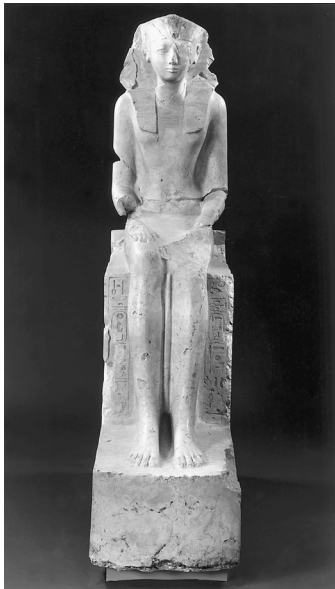
Public relations is coming of age around the world. In the 20th century, the United States took the lead in defining its practice and formalizing its structure. But in the new millennium, public relations is blossoming from a U.S.-based industry into a global industrial phenomenon spanning countries with vastly different cultures, economic and political systems, and levels of development. The number of public relations agencies and organizations that have sprung up around the world in the past few years are proof that public relations is recognized and formalized around the world, from the United States to sub-Saharan Africa to Asia.

Consider, for example, Ireland, Romania, Russia, and Italy, which are among the more than 20 different European nations with public relations associations. Public relations in Italy has grown so much that T. M. Falconi, president of the Italian Federation of Public Relations, claims 1 of every 1,000 Italians is a “public relations operator” (2003, p. 15). In Bulgaria, the public relations field is “developing too fast and it will be not overstated if

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we say that most of the public relations agencies and departments are as good as they [sic] colleagues from West Europe" (Boshnakova & Zareva, 2005, p. 12). In 1992, there was only one public relations agency in Bucharest, Romania; now there are 20 (GAPR, 2004).

According to a 2004 poll, China has more than 1,500 public relations firms, and public relations is one of the top five professions in the country. The growth of the profession in China has caused a shortage of qualified public relations professionals (Wood, 2005). In Russia, Mikhail Margelov, head of the Russian Information Centre, said, "The Russian experience since 1996 is one of rapid and steady growth of public relations work practically in all spheres of the life of the country" (in Fish, 2000, ¶ 53). The Middle East Public Relations Association anticipated a 30% surge in membership in 2005 (MEPRA, 2004).



To maintain the crown, Hatshepsut ruled as a man to fit patriarchal Egyptian society.

Photo 1.1 Hatshepsut, Known for Her Skillful Ability to Curry Public Favor and Strong Leadership Qualities

SOURCE: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

But this talk of the growth of public relations is really about the increasing presence of institutional structures to define its practice and to legitimize it. Although public relations has been studied as a social science and formalized only in the 20th century, evidence of its practice can be traced back to ancient civilizations in Egypt, Babylon, China, Greece, and Rome, to name but a few. In medieval India, *sutradhars*, or traveling storytellers, spread rulers' messages, serving a common public relations function. Egyptian leader Hatshepsut, the first woman Pharaoh, might not have been able to hire a public relations agency to help improve her image, but she was surrounded by advisors who guided her using public relations techniques (Photo 1.1). The elements of public relations are as old as ancient Egypt and older, and they have developed over the years around the globe in various ways.

Because of the varying forms of public relations in much of the world, the field is fraught with inconsistency and varied international views of its purpose and practice. There is still no

overarching definition of public relations, and there is little consistency among practitioners for describing their profession. In Asia, public relations professionals commonly see their work as tantamount to sales and marketing, in Latin America event planning might be viewed as public relations, and in the United States it is often called a strategic management function. The gap between these forms of public relations is evident in the lack of a truly international public relations theory that addresses disparate nations, varying economic and sociopolitical systems, and different cultures. Recent scholarship has made progress toward addressing some of these needs. Still, the practice of public relations is far more progressive than its scholarship.

This book addresses these issues by using a cultural studies approach to develop international public relations theory that is culturally sensitive, reflexive, and dynamic. Its purpose is to provide a comprehensive theoretical base to inform the wide array of global public relations practices and to demonstrate its applicability in formulating and executing campaigns around the globe. As a caveat, you'll find that public relations resists easy categorizations. It's too new and its practice too uneven to generate a uniform and logical narrative. Instead, you might find the discussion of international public relations in this book unpredictable, complex, and even illogical at times. This is the peril of studying public relations around the globe; it rarely makes sense, even less so when terms such as *international* and *culture* are applied.

This chapter centers on fundamental issues in public relations by attempting to define it and summarizing how it's practiced around the world. We begin by examining various definitions of public relations as a foundation for what it means to do and to study international public relations. The next section illustrates some types of public relations practice around the world to demonstrate the breadth and diversity of the field. The final part of the chapter brings this information together to provide a context for the remainder of the book, which informs international public relations theory development. A logical starting point is an issue that has puzzled scholars for decades and continues to divide practitioners around the world: What is public relations?

❖ IN SEARCH OF AN IDENTITY:
DEFINING PUBLIC RELATIONS

Pick up any textbook on public relations from anywhere in the world, and chances are it begins with a chapter devoted to defining public relations. The practice of public relations is most formalized in the

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United States, which has the greatest global concentration of public relations education programs and degrees, public relations agencies, and associations and generates a disproportionate amount of public relations scholarship. Many U.S. textbooks present their own definition of public relations, often citing researcher Rex Harlow, who compiled more than 470 definitions of public relations before creating his own 87-word definition. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) promulgated a shorter, widely accepted definition in 1988: "Public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other."

More recently, scholars have sought to develop more parsimonious definitions and, rather than providing a definition per se, identify key words that describe the practice of public relations. A study of U.S. public relations educators and practitioners (Reber & Harriss, 2003) identified four words linked to the profession: *strategy*, *managerial*, *tactical*, and *responsive*. The researchers found public relations too complex to fit into a single definition. Hutton (1999) and Bruning and Ledingham (1999) offered relational definitions that emphasize the management of strategic relationships. Other descriptive definitions commonly include words such as *reputation* and *credibility*, which describe general concerns of public relations that shape its form.

Another approach is to develop a composite definition of public relations from the Web sites of international public relations agencies, including Burson-Marsteller, Weber Shandwick Worldwide, Fleishman-Hillard, Porter Novelli, and Edelman. Such a definition might be as follows: A form of strategic communication directed primarily toward gaining public understanding and acceptance and the process of creating a good relationship between an organization and the public, especially with regard to reputation and to communication of information.

The individual definitions public relations agencies use to describe their field reflect the collective definitions espoused by public relations associations worldwide. Consider those of the Middle East Public Relations Association ("the discipline that looks after reputation with the aim of earning understanding and support, and influencing opinion and behavior") and the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) in the United Kingdom ("the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behavior. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics."). In the Netherlands, a professional public relations organization met for the express purpose of defining

public relations and eventually gave up, concluding that such an endeavor was fruitless (van Ruler, 2003).

These functional definitions of public relations are balanced by **normative approaches** to defining the field, which *describe what public relations should be and give us guidelines for practicing public relations*. In the United States, the dominant definition among scholars is that of Grunig and Hunt (1984, p. 6): "management of communication between an organization and its publics, best accomplished using two-way symmetric communication." This definition illustrates the sweeping scope of public relations practice; an organization could be a few individuals rallying around a cause or a multi-billion-dollar corporation. Publics could include internal publics, such as employees, or external audiences, such as other governments, nongovernment organizations (NGOs), stockholders, strategic alliances, and citizens.

The range of publics in the public relations arena is one of the factors that complicate efforts to provide a functional definition of the field, tilting it toward normative approaches. Skeptics of normative approaches and theories contend that there is a difference between how things should be and how things are, and that's where normative theories fall short. This book focuses on describing rather than prescribing to complement the strengths of normative stances while recognizing the key role ethics plays in any practical communicative endeavor.

Normative theories are based on empirical research, so they are likewise grounded on observation and data. That research is then extended to make inferences about public relations under given circumstances. The problem is whether those theories apply in circumstances that differ from the research that developed them. In international public relations, it is especially important to reflect critically on theory and whether it effectively translates across borders and socioeconomic and political systems different from its country of origin. Western European countries and the United States are the countries of origin for many public relations theories. These same regions have led the way for defining public relations. We'll examine the implications of the Grunig and Hunt definition, including how it privileges a certain perspective and its relevance to international public relations, in more detail in chapter 3.

Defining public relations is even more complex when semantics are considered internationally, that is, in different countries and languages. The term *public relations* was coined in the United States. Where the term has been adopted around the world, the functions associated with it in the United States have also tended to be adopted. The Japanese language has no word for public relations, and many

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European languages such as German similarly don't have a commensurate term (Sriramesh, 2003; Valin, 2004). Public relations in Japan has meant "press relations" (Cooper-Chen, 1996). In South Korea, an idiomatic expression for public relations, *hong-bo*, is often used (Kim, 2003). Romania has a term for public relations, but it's often confused with *relations with the public*, which describes the customer and information service desk function (GAPR, 2004). Undermining the definitional complexities of public relations is the extent to which public relations practice varies by region of the world.

Regardless of the hundreds of definitions of public relations, there is one certainty: **Public relations** is a *communicative process; that is, it involves some form of communication, whether it be written, verbal, or neither, as a purposeful choice, and it is a process.* As such, it isn't static, fixed, or immutable; rather, public relations is largely about creating and recreating ideas and generating meaning. Such a nonlinear view of public relations defies strict parameters and complicates the quest for a single definition. Yet this view offers a rich vein for reanalyzing concepts that have blurred public relations internationally, such as propaganda and persuasion. These are just two contested meanings that merit some consideration in discussions of international public relations processes.

We believe that international public relations must be inclusive to accurately reflect the diversity of worldwide communication processes. In this light, a single definition of public relations may be less important than an informed worldview that embraces diverse meanings and the recognition that meaning in international public relations is a generated and iterative process.

❖ MYRIAD FORMS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

A wide base of public relations research, generated mostly in the United States, holds that public relations exists only in certain conditions, which commonly include democracy, economic and press freedom, and civil liberty. Significant parts of the world fail these conditional criteria, and we believe those areas have much to offer the development of a theory that is truly international in scope. In those areas, public relations is practiced in some form or another, although that form might differ from the U.S. conception of public relations as an organizational function that precludes propaganda and persuasion. Most U.S. theories posit that two-way communication is needed, with an organization using research to initiate a dialogue with targeted

publics. Through that research, traditional symmetric theory holds, it's possible to build meaningful relationships by adapting and remaining flexible. One-way concepts of communication, such as propaganda and persuasion, are subsequently rejected, cast into an ill-defined area other than legitimate public relations.

But what are we to make of some Eastern European countries, where propaganda is still seen as a tool of centralized governments? Or countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, where government control of information and media conflict with democratic principles? Or the many countries around the world that hardly differentiate between public relations, propaganda, and persuasion? Our position is that these questions must be explored to inform public relations as an international practice: Public relations is being practiced around the world, independent of Western theories and definitions, whether or not traditional theories have adequately accounted for that practice and its diversity.

Research suggests that propaganda can be either a phase in a process that leads to traditional public relations or synonymous with public relations, particularly in countries emerging from dictatorships and authoritarian governments. When propaganda is considered as a form or relative of public relations, it becomes part of a process of generating meaning, influenced by cultural norms and perceptions depending on region of the world. This idea explains why "public relations" in one country might be "propaganda" or "information" in another.

This section describes international public relations in the 21st century by examining some of the developing dominant forms of practice, including regional perceptions of public relations and the roles of government, economies, and politics, among others. Collectively, these considerations have shaped the global form and development of public relations. Note that organizing international public relations in this manner is a departure from many studies of international public relations that group its practice into regions through country-by-country case studies or continental overviews.

With increasing globalization, shared situations transcend national lines and contiguous boundaries as key factors. Globalization has dissolved national boundaries into a distinct set of situational particulars. The new chips on the international game board include governments shifting to democracy, nation building, multinational corporations (MNCs) envisioning expansion, NGOs trying to boost development and monitor global issues, and nations branding themselves to attract tourism and investment. Culture is the layer that doesn't lend itself to monolithic designs of national identity. In sum, by observing how

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shared situations and cultures clash and assimilate, we can identify common areas of practice.

Emerging Democracies, Developing Public Relations

We've already suggested that public relations is present to varying degrees in all countries and all sociopolitical systems. That supposition doesn't explain why the United States has emerged as the worldwide leader in codifying public relations. One reason is because it has an open communication environment bound by democratic systems and principles. The U.S. legacy of a free press and a marketplace of ideas has spurred the industry's rise in associations, conferences, and practices since the beginning of the 20th century. In the United States, the growth of public relations has corresponded with institutional structures, such as public relations agencies, that could define their work and value to society. Conversely, many countries don't have the same constituencies to define their work.

The plurality of voices and structures in the dialogue of what it means to define and practice public relations is limited in countries with centralized governments. Some scholars have pointed out that authoritarian governments abase Western notions of public relations by restricting media and squelching dialogue with target publics. In these countries, government is the preeminent voice and might be associated more with propaganda than public relations.

Many scholars have pointed out the historical association between public relations and propaganda. That link is still fresh in Latin American countries such as Chile, parts of Africa, Asian countries including China and the Philippines, and Eastern European countries such as Poland, Slovenia, Romania, and Russia. In these countries, public relations isn't a wholly separate concept from that of propaganda.

Reforming communication from the pejorative of propaganda to the accepted realm of traditional public relations is a slow process. In Russia, propaganda was associated with oligarchies until the launch of McDonald's in the country in the late 1980s. At that time, the Russian government was slowly divesting its power, giving way to privatization. This shift arguably created the need for public relations and redefined it. No longer was the emphasis on government communication and one-way messages pounded into powerless publics through propaganda. Now it could be used in new ways by private organizations. The contested definition of public relations changed as the political paradigm shifted in Russia, making it more varied, open, and flexible than ever before.

Nation Building

Many African nations gained independence from their colonial rulers in the 1960s. In the early 1990s, the Soviet Union dissolved into individual countries including Latvia, Belarus, and Georgia. The slow process toward democracy in the former Soviet Union centered on *perestroika*, which loosely translates as “restructuring” in English. The term became a symbol for change and signaled a branding of new republics as divorced from the old legacy of communism. More recently, East Timor became a nation in 2002.

Conversely, the United States has had more than 200 years of independence and more than 200 years to initiate and refine its nation-building strategies. The other countries just mentioned have had far less time to conduct nation-building activities; they are new to nationhood, not far removed from a colonial legacy. They’re almost all developing countries with the challenge of building a national identity not inherent in the artificial geopolitical boundaries imposed by former colonial rulers. Many developing nations are working to build a national identity along these lines, which often cross traditional cultural boundaries.

Nation building is a concentrated government effort to achieve domestic and international goals. Domestically, governments might strive for national unity or consensus for a national cause or effort. Internationally, nation building is an effort to bring a country into a global stream of credibility and awareness, often for economic support from other governments or aid organizations. One trend is the number of developing countries worldwide, including Russia, the Philippines, and Nigeria, that have used Western public relations agencies to develop and execute nation-building public relations campaigns. Such countries dot the globe, bound only by their global status as developing countries.

As newly formed countries emerge from the ashes of colonialism or invasion, conditions often are ripe for terrorism, destruction, and power struggles as competing interests vie for control or try to undermine nascent government structures. In East Timor, for example, pro-Indonesia militias resisting East Timorese independence were blamed for killing approximately 1,400 Timorese (CIA, 2006). In such cases, building a new nation is punctuated by adversity and human rights concerns.

Among the challenges any communication apparatus faces in some developing countries are geographic size, ethnic and religious diversity, and linguistic barriers. The African continent comprises more than 50 countries and more than 1,000 different languages (African

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Cultural Center, n.d.) and as uneven a level of development as one might imagine. In the Sudan alone, for example, there are an assumed 400 languages and dialects (Federal Research Division, n.d.). Ponder how a public relations practitioner might launch a public relations campaign to promote national unity in the Sudan, where the number of languages is overshadowed by development statistics that would preclude many Western public relations tactics.

According to the CIA (2006) *World Factbook* statistics for Sudan from 2003, 40% of the population was illiterate, 40% lived below the poverty line, 0.9% of its citizens had Internet access, and average income was 115,328.90 Sudan dinars (US\$460). U.S. scholars have noted that “there is little opportunity for practicing public relations in the Western sense of the term” in African countries such as Sudan (Van Leuven & Pratt, 1996, p. 95). When Harare, Zimbabwe, embarked on a major public relations campaign to improve the city’s image, one resident said, “No amount of public relations would stop sewer lines from blocking and roads from developing potholes” (“Harare Embarks,” 2002, ¶ 8), demonstrating that public relations is far less important than basic human needs. The same holds true for many other parts of the world, where public relations faces a terrain vastly different from that of its practice epicenter, the United States.

Best Foot Forward Public Relations

The complexities of international public relations are also reflected by a cultural emphasis on social relations, notably in parts of the Middle East and Asia. In the former, it’s important to take into account the historical and ideological context of the region, often based on the Qur’an in Islamic countries. Cultural differences give rise to distinctly different communication traditions between most Arabic nations and the United States.

In Arab nations, “a press release, for example, may read more like a political proclamation than a news announcement” (Zaharna, 1995, p. 255). United Arab Emirates practitioners view public relations not as a communication function but as a social relations one, placing a great deal of emphasis on receiving delegations (Creedon, Al-Khaja, & Kruckeberg, 1995). Most Egyptian universities don’t differentiate between sales, marketing, and public relations, and practitioners consequently often view public relations as a hospitality-related function (Keenan, 2003). In the Middle East, hospitality functions for dignitaries have constituted public relations (Ayish & Kruckeberg, 1999). Guest relations and translation services were similarly early forms of public

relations in China (Culbertson & Chen, 2003). In Singapore, public relations often is seen as a sales and marketing function and is used heavily by the government (Chay-Németh, 2003).

Business-Driven Public Relations

For economic titans such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany, international public relations often consists of MNCs establishing presences abroad and large agencies branching into different countries. These examples place business and corporate interests at the forefront of international public relations. Harold Burson (2003a), co-founder of Burson-Marsteller, said the agency's efforts to become a truly global business hinged on opening offices in Europe, Australia, and Asia. Well-known public relations agencies in the United States almost all have exported their business around the world by opening offices or partnering with local firms. Edelman, which bills itself as the world's largest independent public relations firm, maintains 43 offices around the world, according to its Web site.

For every well-known corporate behemoth such as Nike or Coca-Cola, scores of other businesses are expanding abroad and recognizing public relations is a necessity, not an option. Gone are the days of riding roughshod into other countries, opening shop, and watching money pile up in the company safe. As technology has linked the world, public perceptions of corporations and concomitant practices are some of the indicators of effective business practice. Nike's corporate reputation has been scorched by charges of operating sweatshops in countries such as El Salvador and China. Web logs (blogs), maintained by cause-minded individuals and groups, and watchdog group Web sites have supplemented traditional news media to make Nike's public relations challenges truly global.

Growth in technology and the emergence of regional trading agreements such as the European Union (EU) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have paved the way for international public relations to thrive. Hundreds of case studies chronicle the public relations pitfalls and successes of MNCs. These case studies have increased our understanding of the multitude of issues an MNC or any organization might face as it commences operations in a new country, including

- Negotiating language in culture and vice versa, where meaning often is not literal
- Understanding cultural practices that extend far beyond language

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- Balancing short-term corporate demand for economic results with the time needed to build relationships
- Working through and within asymmetric relations of power on many different levels
- Clashing with local and national governments over legal issues
- Raising awareness in countries with many languages and media systems

These are just a few of the challenges any organization or cause might face, and this list doesn't begin to address all the other domains where international public relations is practiced. Consider, for example, how worldwide health organizations raise awareness of pressing international health concerns, how governments and tourism associations promote their countries abroad, or how sporting events and activities relate to international public relations. This is to say that international public relations is more than a corporate, organizational, or government undertaking; it operates at an inestimable number of points of contact, where actors on an international plane interact with each other through any form of exchange or communication. As Botan (1992, p. 153) reminds us, we need "a definition of practice not tied to any one set of assumptions, particularly the assumption that public relations is a management function. We need a view that focuses on the process at the center of public relations—using communication to adapt relationships between organizations and their publics."

❖ CULTURAL RELATIONSHIP CONSTRUCTS

Asia offers layers of cultural constructs essential to understanding Eastern forms of public relations. Cultural constructs don't affect public relations practice; they are the essence of public relations practice. Korea has *cheong*, for example, an idiomatic expression that loosely relates to respect between two individuals (Rhee, 2002). At a 2002 public relations conference, one author saw a Korean scholar spend more than 10 minutes trying to explain *cheong* in English before giving up, saying he couldn't give the term due justice in English. China similarly has *renqing*, a set of social norms one must be able to negotiate to function effectively in Chinese society (Huang, 2001). The different cultural practices in relation to gender and age in Eastern cultures are minefields for unsuspecting public relations efforts that fail to negotiate the Eastern landscape, where sophisticated and systematic social relations define society.

Other cultural relationship constructs aren't formalized through terminology. They often exist as invisible webs that link people through relationships. Nu Skin, a multi-billion-dollar company with more than 1,000 employees worldwide, encountered unexpected problems when it sent a manager in his thirties to head its operations in Malaysia. Nu Skin didn't take into account the status accorded to age in Malaysia. The manager was deemed too young to head such a large organization, creating a perception that Nu Skin wasn't wholly committed to its Malaysian operations (Wakefield, 1999).

Nu Skin's failure to recognize and negotiate this invisible web of culture isn't uncommon. In many African countries, for example, aunts and uncles are regarded as parents. The expatriate manager of CBG, Guinea's largest bauxite mining company, noted that absenteeism ran as high as 20% as employees traveled to remote villages to mourn deaths of parents, aunts, and uncles (Auclair, 1992). Imagine a multi-million-dollar business steeped in capitalism moving into a new country and having one fifth of its employees absent to attend to family matters.

To a native Guinean, this example is hardly noteworthy. To a non-native, however, it offers a lesson that all cultures are necessarily complex, and international public relations practitioners often are outsiders looking in, trying to access the web of spoken and unspoken norms that constitute culture. The complexity of these concealed webs varies by culture, and public relations has struggled to access those webs, raising questions such as these: Does a one-size-fits-all approach to public relations work? Who should develop and implement a public relations program abroad: a host individual or agency? One lesson learned is that language skills aren't enough to execute a public relations campaign abroad. The idiosyncrasies of culture are as important to providing an environment for effective communication as is the language itself.

❖ INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS TODAY

Clearly, culture matters in international public relations. Its practice varies greatly around the globe through competing definitions of public relations and semantic nuances that suggest links to propaganda and persuasion. On a larger level, it's the cultural subtleties that alter not only definitions of public relations but also what it means to do public relations internationally. Culture represents the layers public relations must contend with to get to shared situations at the core of international public relations, whether building nations, attracting

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tourism, spurring economic growth, or quelling discord from opposition groups or nations. The layers of culture extend across international lines, from developed to developing countries, from democratic nations to authoritarian regimes.

Although it's important to define public relations practice, such an endeavor can also limit theoretical scope. Definitions privilege world-views, establish power relations, and affix names to communicative processes that are constantly in flux, shaped by global forces that include economic and cultural tides. Many ongoing efforts to grapple with definitions of public relations fail because they're limited by Western notions of democracy and capitalism, forcing a foreign frame onto indigenous cultural constructs.

At its most basic level, culture is manifest in the daily interactions many of us take for granted. Those interactions can mean the difference between failure and success in a media relations campaign. For example, according to the International Communications Consultancy Organisation (ICCO, 2004, p. 5),

German journalists like small press briefings, but UK journalists prefer one to one interviews. The Italian press are OK with breakfast meetings (not too early though!) but don't like dinners or parties—evenings are for private, family time. Belgian press don't like breakfast meetings, but enjoy a lunch or dinner (including beer).

This chapter has sought to describe what international public relations looks like today, not how it ought to be practiced or why it should be practiced a certain way. Observing public relations on its own terms around the world is a critical component of this book. How it has progressed and come to mean so many things to so many people across so many different cultures provides the descriptive patterns generating the international public relations theory in this book.

In chapter 2 we take a closer look at international public relations by examining two cases: Coca-Cola in India and image cultivation campaigns in South Korea and Swaziland. These cases point to the need for a cultural studies approach as the theoretical framework for the book because of its emphasis on issues of culture, identity, and power. In chapter 3, we introduce the circuit of culture model, examining how it can inform global public relations theory and practice. The chapter introduces you to the moments that constitute the circuit: production, representation, consumption, identity, and regulation. Each

moment—and how they relate synergistically—is framed within the launch of New Coke®.

The next five chapters examine each moment of the circuit in greater detail, again integrating theory and considering how the moments interrelate as a process. Chapter 4 studies the regulatory environments of global public relations practices by examining the role of political, economic, and technological infrastructures and cultural norms in shaping global public relations practices. Chapter 5 discusses the moment of representation, including the ways in which cultural meanings are encoded in the content and format of public relations campaigns and materials. Through examples in Russia, Asia, and the Galápagos Islands, we explicate the role of power at the basis of global public relations practice and demonstrate the role of public relations in building individual, media, organizational, and national agendas.

The constraints and conditions under which practitioners work and how meaning is imbued in their work is the theme of chapter 6, which focuses on the moment of production. Examples from around the world illustrate how the cultural process of production often is gendered and racialized, making globalization a site of competition for power in production. The circuit stresses that the moment of production cannot be isolated from the moment of consumption because meaning resides not in an object itself but in how that object is used.

That use is part of the moment of consumption, discussed in chapter 7. The chapter demonstrates that simply encoding a dominant meaning in public relations materials doesn't guarantee that consumers, particularly in other cultures, will decode those meanings in the same way. Chapter 8 rounds out the circuit by focusing on the moment of identity. Public relations campaigns create identities for publics and for products and services, organizations create brands to differentiate themselves from the competition, publics appropriate meanings to create new identities for themselves, and nations create identities to situate themselves within the power flow of world politics and economics. Identities are framed as continuously created, appropriated, defined, and redefined, as much a process as the circuit itself.

Chapter 9 is a macro-level discussion of the entire circuit of culture at work in a practical setting and proposes the cultural-economic model of practice. It identifies public relations practitioners as cultural intermediaries who can fulfill boundary-spanning roles by shaping and packaging issues at the nexus of culture, identity, and power. Those considerations provide the thrust behind chapter 10, which introduces a practice matrix to help you develop and apply a worldview. The

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move from theory to practice is manifest in the practice matrix, which provides a roadmap for the ongoing machinations of the circuit of culture.

Chapter 11 centers on ethical considerations in global practice. The circuit is used to establish a situation ethic in which moral decision making is grounded in the absolutes of each moment yet adaptable to various situational particulars. The final chapter looks to the future, providing new ways of thinking about how public relations practitioners serve as cultural intermediaries. It seeks to solidify the traits of practitioners and scholars with worldviews that enable them to grasp multiple viewpoints, recognize power issues, factor in exigent variables, and develop sound public relations campaigns.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Public relations is a process of communication, whether written, verbal, or neither, as a purposeful choice to create and recreate ideas and generate meaning.
- Public relations is practiced around the world, often without formalizing local structures to define its practice and role in indigenous society.
- Notions of public relations vary greatly around the world because of different cultures, languages, and socioeconomic and political conditions.
- The evolution of public relations has had a different path in all cultures, depending on historical, political, and economic development.
- Recognizing cultural diversity and nuances of culture are keys to understanding diverse public relations practices around the world.

2

Opening Global Gateways



I was struck by the thought that although I was advising a banana company, I was actually fighting in the cold war.

—Edward L. Bernays, on his work for the United Fruit Company in the early 1950s (1965, p. 766)

As a communicative process, public relations constitutes certain forms of representation. These forms of representation comprise innumerable texts, more commonly known as public relations tactics. Embedded in each tactic is a multitude of symbols that are both visual and verbal, spoken and unspoken, visible and invisible. How these texts are chosen and how the symbols are interpreted are influenced by culture, making it the glue in the process of meaning creation. When practitioners are formulating a public relations campaign, for example, they're ideally considering the strategic big picture to develop tactics that meet a desired goal. Traditionally, public relations has defined success by how well its target publics absorb those tactics.

Exactly what is being represented often is not easily determined in international public relations, however. U.S. public relations pioneer Edward Bernays realized this in his work for the United Fruit

Company (UFCO) in the 1950s. If we consider public relations as a text encompassing countless symbols, Bernays was a master at determining what text was needed and how its symbols should be arranged to meet a certain objective. In the case of the U.S.-owned UFCO, it was maintaining its stronghold over the Latin American country of Guatemala. UFCO relied heavily on countries such as Guatemala to import bananas into the lucrative U.S. market (Photo 2.1).

When a reformist government threatened to undermine UFCO's monopoly over banana production in Guatemala by nationalizing land, the company hired Bernays to protect its interests. Although there was little evidence the reformist government was communist, Bernays capitalized on the rampant fear of communism in the United States at the time by developing a campaign to discredit

Guatemala's democratically elected president, Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán.

In this process, Bernays's efforts to represent UFCO were more than just representing a company in Guatemala. He was representing a cause by embedding it in the sweeping U.S. fear of communism. The campaign included staging events, writing leaflets and brochures, and flying U.S. reporters to Guatemala in carefully orchestrated junkets to see the communist evils of the Arbenz regime firsthand. The end result? By using public relations techniques for UFCO, Bernays helped overthrow the Arbenz government, thrusting Guatemala into decades of brutal dictatorships.



As Edward L. Bernays found in his work for UFCO, public relations work for multinational corporations often has larger political implications.

Photo 2.1 United Fruit Company Workers Pack Bananas for Shipment to the United States

SOURCE: Photo courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.