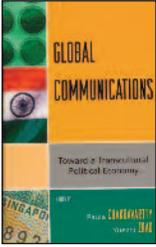


Reviews



Global Communications: Toward a Transcultural Political Economy. Edited by Paula Chakravartty & Yuezhi Zhao. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008. 359 pp. ISBN 9780742540446.

Many books on the topic of globalized communications take the singular perspective that the state and the market act exclusively, and mutually, as sites of oppression. In *Global Communications: Toward a Transcultural Political Economy*, editors Paula Chakravartty and Yuezhi Zhao expand on this perspective by indicating that it is possible for the state and the market to also be sites of empowerment. The text discusses the topic of neoliberal globalization by melding disciplinary boundaries, combining cultural studies, postcolonial theory, sociology, and theories of political economy. The intent of the editors is clear: neoliberal globalization continues to perpetuate dominant systems of political economics. The goal of combining empirical study with theoretical analysis of state, market, and civil society that approaches the problematic through lenses that unveil and critique social inequalities is, I would suggest, integral for creating substantive change and is refreshingly incisive.

Intentionally rejecting organizing of the text by geography, this anthology uses a relational understanding of domination and resistance as distinctive forces, declaring them as not mutually exclusive, but rather as forces in continual play. The anthology consists of 14 chapters organized into three sections and all written by junior to mid-range scholars. The sections are: 1) The State and Communication Politics in Multiple Modernities, 2) Embedded Markets and Cultural Transformations, and 3) Civil Society and Multiple Publics. These sections culminate in a transcultural political economic analysis to describe unequal power relations between cultures.

The line of argument features analyses of uneven flows of global communications by means of capital and imperialist constructions of “growth,” with the goal of providing a route to challenge unequal transcultural power relations. A lens of critical cultural imperialism that separates “development” from “capitalism,” one that understands these concepts as different and variable, is deployed. What becomes clear is the combination of multiple intersections of modernities with different points in history, lending to an unfolding of dominant ideologies. Transcultural analysis recognizes legacies of colonialism, allowing a greater understanding of neoliberal globalization in terms of social and cultural practices, thus providing further context for social inequalities and national differences in shaping communications.

The volume mentions the distinction between globalization as consisting either of political-economic or of cultural dimensions, however not every chapter adheres to this distinction. And, while there is much focus on an Americanizing influence over

global political economics, there is no discussion in this volume involving the U.S. exclusively. In fact, the only chapter written specifically on imperializing nations is one discussing the European Union. Leaving out such global hegemonic influence may seem odd, but perhaps this was a strategic move to de-centre Western-dominated political economics by simply *not* paying homage with such focused attention.

Section one, "The State and Communication Politics in Multiple Modernities," discusses globalization as part of a process. This process continually makes reference to the subjective past as a way to plan for the future in a global context. Social inequalities that are generated by late capitalism exist within a neoliberal political structure driven by competitiveness. Singapore, for instance, a capitalist society with socialist characteristics, is used to illustrate how those less skilled and less mobile "accept that competition is not only fair but necessary" ("Regional Crisis, Personal Solutions," Sim). Another instance explains that with state transformations since post-1989, communication and culture in China has changed. Capitalist development politics have been employed, while fixating on class polarization and ideological and social issues of continuing traditions of socialist policies (Zhao). Venezuela is featured as an example of subaltern resistance strategies that challenge the mainstream media system; community media allows for a rethinking of the dichotomy of statist versus autonomous media strategies and social formations ("Media, Democracy, and the State in Venezuela's 'Bolivarian Revolution,'" Duffy and Everton).

In "Embedded Markets and Cultural Transformations," globalization today is acknowledged as primarily being Americanization. The tone of this section is one of acknowledgement of 9/11 influences: regimes of power surge and strongholds on politics, society and culture emerge as interlocking systems of control. The destruction of global cultural powers is not the goal; instead, decentralization of the empire that dominates media structures is pursued, enabling a dispersion of transnational power ("Cultures of Empire," Iwabachi). The commodification of culture is considered in the context of *adinkra* cloth of the Asante region in Ghana. Issues of agency and domination are considered as shifts in power occur in global commodification of goods; agency exists in control over production and cannot be simplified as strictly victimizing ("Local and Global Sites of Power," Boateng). This section then considers theoretical issues of mass mediated political economic structures of Arab reality television as a laboratory of transcultural media industry practices, discussing discursive forces and the display of culture ("Critical Transculturalism and Arab Reality Television," Kraidy). Finally, questions of standardizing and commercializing pan-ethnic Latino identities are considered for both empowerment and assimilation ("Rethinking the U.S. Spanish-Language Media Market," Castañeda).

The last section of the book, "Civil Society and Multiple Publics," analyzes competing covert power relations between the market, state, and civil society as changed according to cultural and political economic practices in the last decade; diverse publics have come to coexist. In not practising reflexive examination, Western feminist practices are suggested to support the war on terror with the assumption that all women share the same struggles. Despite the noble intentions of Western feminists, some actions are seen as legitimating aggression and rule of law in the Middle East ("Gender and Empire," Thobani). Ushering in cyber technology, a newer area of market expan-

sion is considered, involving Internet and computer accessibility programs that target the employable population, particularly in societies that have limited control over their borders and economy (Souri). This last chapter examines complexities in the relationship between the state and stratified categories of both workers and civil structure in India's unequal information society ("Labor In or As Civil Society?" Chakravartty).

While this text does not purport that liberation is simple when considering complexly intertwined global political economics, it does speak to the possibility for empowerment at local levels typically regarded as oppressive. The volume reads as an explicitly fused and persuasive effort of engaged scholarship. The implicit message therein is one of localized community empowerment, used to deconstruct typically regarded oppressive global political and economic interconnectivities.

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