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*Media and Sovereignty* is a complex and ambitious book that explores the relationships between media structure, statecraft, and citizenship. Price is writing about what Vincent Mosco has referred to as the ‘spatiality of communication’—the constitutive power of media to affect the social structure of places, and the role that governments and other actors play in harnessing and channeling that power (Mosco, 1996, pp. 173-211). Price rejects the oft repeated thesis that advances in communications technology have made regulation impossible and states increasingly irrelevant in a globalizing world. Instead, he posits that while the world is changing dramatically, the nation state has proven to be not only resilient but tenacious, asserting itself in new ways, in the service of both domestic solidarity and foreign policy objectives.

Price’s argument is that media and state sovereignty are not undermining each other; rather, each is acting as a catalyst for change in the other. States, for example, can no longer productively regulate broadcasting the way they once did. Because of changes in technology and the propensity to see media texts as tradable commodities, there has been a shift from inward forms of state control to outward-looking, regional, or multilateral approaches, as well as a shift from direct regulation towards negotiated agreements with other states and media corporations. While this new posture is not as majestic as absolute sovereignty, it is nonetheless proving effective both domestically and internationally.

Within their own borders, states have long sought to control the mix of voices that are heard in the public sphere. Drawing on the duality of ‘space’ as a physical location, and ‘place’ as the social and political construct by which spaces are organized and controlled, Price expands on the idea of the ‘marketplace for loyalties,’ a concept he introduced in a previous work (Price, 1995). This marketplace is the metaphoric arena in which “large-scale competitors for power, in a shuffle for allegiances, use the regulation of communications to organize a cartel of imagery and identity among themselves” (p. 31). The competitors could be the national government, dissident groups both inside and outside the territory, foreign governments, corporations, and civil society groups, each of which hopes to affect the opinions and behaviours of a group of citizens.

States are actors in their own markets for loyalties and in those of other states, actively working to change media structures so that their own perspectives are given the most prominent and credible place possible. States can act unilaterally through restrictions by force, structure, or law as is the case with Cuba’s jamming of the Radio Marti signal, but increasingly, even powerful states are acting multilaterally, negotiating with other nations or media conglomerates as Condoleezza Rice did when she conference-called network executives to ask them not to broadcast Osama bin Laden’s video tapes. Similarly, states work to restructure the media space of foreign nations, through actions as unilateral as NATO’s bombing of radio transmitters in Serbia, or the negation of market access for a nation’s media firms.

The organization of *Media and Sovereignty* appears awkward at first. The book is divided into three sections: The first, Remapping of Media Space, outlines the argument above, and the third section, entitled Negotiating the Changed Media Terrain, discusses the implications of this remapping for public policy and foreign policy in particular. The middle section of the book is devoted to a worthwhile tangent into the Tropes of Restructuring, in which Price explores the relationship between language, lexicons, public policy, and the construction of social realities and national cultures. Although the chapter is rich with examples, it is not always apparent how it ties into his broader thesis. That said, careful readers will be rewarded for their patience. Without being esoteric, Price shows how linguistic tropes such as ‘ensuring national security,’ ‘strengthening national identity,’ ‘guar-
anteeing the right to receive impartial information,’ ‘protecting the marketplace of ideas,’ ‘establishing free and independent media,’ or ‘preserving public service broadcasting’ are used to construct the discourse of policy, which is subsequently used to write the policies that shape media structures and social space (p. 89). Although somewhat off topic, this section is worthwhile, and could have stood alone as a text in its own right.

The final section, is a continuation of the first section with insights from the second, exploring the ideas of a foreign policy of information space, public diplomacy and the future of public service broadcasting. Although in some respects these concepts are insufficiently differentiated from each other, the section presents an interesting history of American international communication in the last ten years, culminating in a description of the current state of international broadcasting, “the elegant term for a complex combination of state-sponsored news, information, and entertainment directed at a population outside the sponsoring state’s boundaries…what was once with pride called propaganda” (p. 200).

Price does a good job of situating the impact of the September 2001 terrorist attacks on American’s information foreign policy and its efforts in public diplomacy, showing both the changes and continuities in U.S. polices towards information spaces. He writes that “The discovery that minds were being honed over years in ways unseen and unanticipated, in ways that could convert individuals into instruments of violent destruction forced a response” (p. 200). While international communication took on a radical new importance after 2001, Price is careful to link the policies of the last three years to the lessons learned from NATO’s intervention in Yugoslavia, the Rwandan genocide, and the policy debates of the previous decade.

As a theoretical work, Media and Sovereignty is a book that wanders, and this might be its greatest weakness. The three sections are relevant to each other, but the flow between them is neither linear nor direct. With that criticism in mind, it is also true that Price’s work is rich in tangible examples, well researched and grounded in public policy in a way that is unusual for such a theoretically ambitious work. Although the organization of the piece is problematic, this is more than compensated for by the richness of the text.

Also, although the first two sections of the book draw examples from policies of a number of countries in the 1990s, the last section focuses almost exclusively on the United States. As the author acknowledges, “Government responses following September 11 reinforce an emerging realization: that there are information foreign policies everywhere. In Armenia, there is an information foreign policy concerning Azerbaijan. In India, there is an information foreign policy concerning Pakistan. In Turkey, there is an information foreign policy concerning the use of media by the Kurds abroad” (p. 197). While the thoroughness of the U.S. analysis was beneficial, the section would have been more powerful if the author had been as cosmopolitan as he was in the first two sections.

Considering the polarized nature of contemporary politics, Price’s text was refreshingly apolitical, neither defending nor vilifying those who seek to influence the global flow of information. Media and Sovereignty assesses how states are restructuring information space, what they hope to achieve by doing so, and provides a framework for understanding the globalization of political communication in this decade. In balance, Media and Sovereignty is a worthwhile book for scholars interested in international or public broadcasting, media globalization, media ownership, propaganda, and public diplomacy.

References

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