While the term “media hegemony” has become familiar shorthand to designate the expansion of corporate media practices on a global scale, the complexity of that process is often in danger of being characterized as a static consolidation of power where a handful of powerful firms stalk the Earth, seeking out new audiences and obliterating local cultural expression. The accomplishment of The Globalization of Corporate Media Hegemony is its emphasis on local specificity and the varied ways in which the corporate media insinuate themselves within different cultural, political, and social contexts. By emphasizing Gramsci’s original formulation of hegemony as the “process of moral, philosophical and political leadership that a social group attains only with the active consent of other important social groups” (p. 10), these essays expose the globalization of the corporate media not as all-encompassing or inevitable but as the precarious balance between power and consent, underlining the potential for resistance.

The book is organized into five thematic sections, the first outlining the conceptual framework of the collection. Lee Artz’s introduction provides a succinct review of the key debates between political economy and cultural studies approaches to the study of the global media, where the validity of examining global economic phenomena has been challenged by the ethnographic turn and emphasis on local audience interpretation. The concept of hegemony bridges the debate by “placing cultural activity in its socioeconomic and political context, recognizing both the structural constraints of power and the creative agency of conscious political activity” (p. 8). Further, the concept urges us to return to questions of social class in the study of how the media buttress economic globalization in two important ways. First, communication and information technology are used to organize capital’s transnational flows in the circulation of information, money, and commodities and in the global division of labour. Second, the global media, in concert with the interests of the transnational elite, disseminate the content in which capitalist relations of production are justified, undermining the capacity for people to understand their own class conditions. These issues are taken up separately by Gerald Sussman’s essay on a world systems approach to transnational communications networks and by Patrick Murphy’s thought-provoking piece arguing that the fragmentation and openness in media content so celebrated by postmodernist theories should be understood instead as a “refined and increasingly nuanced ideological hegemony” (p. 57).

The collection then examines the process of media hegemony in the global north and periphery, concluding with two essays on radical media and resistance. The bulk of the volume involves a range of case studies from diverse regions and countries, detailing specific patterns of communications and media ownership in the global south. While diverse in geographical perspective, these essays are similar in their research orientation and analysis, which will be familiar to students and scholars in the field of communications. For example, many demonstrate how the global media hegemony works through state leadership in privatizing national communications systems, where the exigencies of transnational capital align with both the national privately owned media and the interests of the national elite. Others detail cases where film, television, and radio producers freely adopt a U.S.-style commercial model and incorporate Western consumer values, narrative styles, and idioms into local content.

The more interesting contributions are those that go beyond these standard observations and get to the ambivalent and often contradictory nature of consent, underscoring hegemony as a multiscaled and dynamic process. Vincent Mosco and Patricia Mazepa’s essay on “high-tech hegemony” in Ottawa is an exemplary case of the co-ordination...
achieved between private capital and federal and local levels of government who use the rhetoric of the “information society” to present economic restructuring in a benign way that masks its implications for greater class inequality. Ece Algan’s essay on the privatization of Turkey’s media in the 1990s provides a strong analysis of local consent to corporate media, noting that audiences “tolerated, even sought out, this capitalist commodification of culture because it permits positive representations of their ethnicity and class culture and/or identity” (p. 188). Lyombe Eko reminds readers that the corporate media hegemony must be analyzed alongside historical processes, re-orienting us to colonial antecedents that contribute to the imbalance of information and media flows in African countries. Eungjun Min brings into view how Hollywood film and cultural resistance movements coexist in a complex relationship in South Korea, where independent filmmakers focus on bringing an indigenous perspective to audiences but make concessions to the dominant mode of film production. Rounding out the volume are Santiago-Valles’ case studies from Guyana and Belize in which community organizations use local radio for the purposes of popular education and John Downing’s piece that considers the now familiar practices of Independent Media Centres (IMCs), Le Monde Diplomatique, and the Zapatista movement in establishing transnational communications networks to protect and promote intensive dialogue (p. 288).

Combined, these essays broaden our understanding of the global expansion of the corporate media through the detailed observations documented in each case study. The collection should also be applauded for bringing non-Western perspectives to the study of the global media. However, as one progresses through each case study, there is the sense that some of the broader conceptual issues are displaced by description and important questions are treated unevenly. For example, are we satisfied with portraying the globalization of communications as the confrontation between industry and audiences? Does not the theory of hegemony understand the production of meaning as co-constitutive rather than a dominant group imposing meaning on another? Are these distinctions between structure and agency adequate for understanding social class and the global division of labour? To be fair, Artz notes in the opening paragraph that the collection’s emphasis is on journalistic description and observation, arguing that “the disagreements over globalization, hegemony and class will not be resolved in texts . . . but only in the course of ongoing social struggles” (p. 3). Nevertheless, in order to substantiate observation and make academic discourse meaningful, perhaps it is time to reflect these disagreements in our writing by engaging in these struggles ourselves.

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