



**Democratizing Global Media: One World, Many Struggles.** Edited by Robert A. Hackett & Yuezhi Zhao. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005. 328 pp. ISBN: 0247536432.

This collection of essays, mostly by media researchers with a sprinkling of journalists, provides remarkably wide-ranging empirical information concerning media democratization processes—and obstacles!—around the planet. The editors are to be commended for this timely contribution to developing the worldwide debate on media reform.

The contributions are grouped under three headings: Media Globalization and Democratic Deficits; Media and Democracy in Global Sites and Conflicts; and Modalities of Democratization. However, the headings are evidently meant more to satisfy the convention of grouping chapters into sections than as categorizations of the global media field.

Within the first section, there are essays on Eastern Europe (Colin Sparks), China (Zhao Yuezhi), India (Pradip Thomas), Latin America (Javier Protzel), and Africa (by former journalist Arthur-Martins Aginam). The second section begins with a more conceptual essay on the importance of regions within the globalization debate (Kai Hafez), a second on the development of Israeli media and political culture (Dov Shinar), and a third on US media coverage of the build-up to, and first phase of the war on Iraq (Jan Oberg). The fourth essay in this section is by media policy activist Seán Ó Siochrú, which addresses the potential for advocacy groups to have an impact on global media governance forums. The third and final section carries a further four contributions, one in the form of an edited conversation between Robert McChesney and Robert Hackett on the media reform scenario in the USA; one on the critical role of the gender dimension and of feminist activists (Annabelle Sreberny); and a third on peace journalism by journalists Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick. The volume is rounded off by a second essay from Ó Siochrú on framing transnational advocacy for media reform. Majid Tehranian provides a foreword.

There is much of value throughout this book, the distillation of three years of seminars funded by the Toda Institute. However, the exceptional contributions for this reviewer are the essays by Thomas on the current media scenario in India, Zhao on China, Aginam on the African continent, and Sreberny and Ó Siochrú on transnational communication policy activism.

There are various reasons for signaling out these essays in particular. Thomas incisively strips away some of the prevailing myths about the vigor of democracy and democratic media in India. Zhao underscores the ever-intensifying class divide in China, and the ways access to and exclusion from global communication maps that divide. Aginam, confronted with an impossible task—to analyze the media in all 53 nations of Africa!—actually manages to convey lucidly and in a condensed format a very nice blend of general and specific information, neither losing the reader in a thicket of factoids, nor promoting windy abstractions. The three activism essays take the book into political practice and thus out of the realm of pure analysis, and if democratizing media globally is to move beyond being a comforting dream, analysis and practice have to be joined at the hip. Their essays also contain a wealth of specific information concerning a slew of activist projects, which in the mass further serves to confirm that media reform is indeed a major policy issue now entrenched on the international public agenda.

The other contributions certainly have important elements in them. Sparks' toughly reasoned evaluation of the "civil society" concept and its uses and abuses in post-1989 Eastern European media developments is worthwhile (though this is an argument fairly familiar from his other publications on the region). Likewise Hafez's insistence on the

general importance of region for globalization and media analyses, rather than simply of global, local or glocal, is well taken but rather long drawn out. Shinar's focus on the very particular case of Israel, as a new nation mostly assembled from a de-globalized diaspora, nicely balances Hafez's argument, but it is a lot harder to see how he would flesh out his closing argument that Israel's uniquely "kaleidoscopic" (his term, p. 181) experience has lessons for analyzing scenarios elsewhere.

Peace journalism, as per the essays by Oberg and Lynch and McGoldrick (for some reason located in different sections), is certainly an important dimension of media in the current period, as indeed throughout the last century. Yet their analysis in whole or in part of media coverage of the current war on Iraq does not take readers anywhere especially new. There is no explanation offered of why the transcribed conversation between Hackett and McChesney was not edited into a sustained argument. Protzel's chapter on the 20 nations of Latin America is heavily weighted toward 20th century issues, which is fine in and of itself, but pulls his chapter away from the more current focus of the book as a whole.

Overall, as I have illustrated above, the book is a useful contribution to analysis of these complex and rapidly changing realities that so many media researchers are tussling with these days. It could have done with a heavier edit, and there are some passing specifics that should have been spotted, such as Hafez's amusing assertion (p.147) that in Soviet days *Literaturnaia Gazeta* was a famous *samizdat* publication (he writes "clandestine"). Nonetheless, it belongs on the shelves of anyone concerned with media democratization in the global arena.

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