

Clemencia Rodríguez, Dorothy Kidd & Laura Stein (eds.):
Making Our Media: Global Initiatives Toward a Democratic Public Sphere, Volume One: Creating New Communication Spaces
Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press. 2010

Laura Stein, Dorothy Kidd & Clemencia Rodríguez (eds.):
Making Our Media: Global Initiatives Toward a Democratic Public Sphere, Volume Two: National and Global Movements for Democratic Communication
Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press. 2009

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The recognition that small media can play a crucial role in democratic social movements, civil society and political resistance against the state (and powerful non-state institutions) has received a huge boost from the significant uses of the Internet, cell phones, hand-held video, and alternative news networks by protesters in the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, Spain, Greece, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere throughout the last year.

Making Our Media: Global Initiatives Toward a Democratic Public Sphere is a two volume set that seeks to examine how small and alternative media are being used around the world to transform communication practices in more democratic ways. Although the 24 studies in these volumes all predate the current movements by several years, and predominantly focus on places that have not subsequently erupted, the contemporary wave of democratic and liberatory movements using small and new media makes these books especially timely.

The work is scholarly, but also, and intentionally, advocacy, as can be seen in the central terminology of the title. "Our Media" refers to media used by people outside the structures of the corporate-dominated market and the state, especially media technologies harnessed by ordinary citizens to promote political change and enhance their participation in civil society.

In a closely-written and thought-provoking introduction to the first volume, Dorothy Kidd and Clemencia Rodríguez situate "our media" into the historical evolution of the non-aligned movement, as well as describing intersections with new media, grassroots activism, and social movements against neoliberalism.

Consistent with their subject matter, these books offer a "contrapuntal" approach in which the essays are supposed to be engaged in a stimulating intellectual conversation with one another, rather than offering a single coherent model or new paradigm for understanding "our media." In fact, the structure of the books reflects a typical academic conference, in which disparate papers employing different theoretical models by authors who mostly have not read one another are uneasily grouped into topics, their common themes teased out after the fact by a discussant.

That said, the editors do an extraordinary job of contextualizing these studies through the thoughtful and articulate introductions to each of the themes that organize the books' seven sections.

There are four of these themes in the first volume. The first involves the use of studies of "our media" to question theoretical paradigms in communication, which have largely grown out of the study of (to coin an obvious phrase) "their media", that is, the media of the state and corporations. Nick Couldry contributes an essay on this topic, pointing out that scholars choose what topics they will explore, and to which aspects of practice they will give their attention. This essay introduces case studies of Mapuche media in Chile and Argentina (Juan Francisco Salazar), on-line grassroots news gathering (Christopher Anderson) and South African Bush radio (Tanja Bosch).

This last example, titled "Theorizing Citizens Media", is emblematic of how case studies can push theoretical boundaries. Bosch presents Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome model, describing media as a multibranching network encompassing many different kinds of people engaged in different sorts of activities. She uses her description of this South African community radio station to show that such an approach is far more useful than distinct studies of media production and audience analysis, which by their very nature construct media as a product to be consumed rather than a set of activities in which to be engaged.

In the second section, "Communications for Social Change Projects", Dorothy Kidd argues that "participatory" has become such a plastic term that detailed case studies are needed to re-examine theoretical and practical dimensions of this concept, in order to illuminate "the value of popular participation in communication and social change" (p. 90). The case studies presented here include community radio projects in India (Vinod Pavarala and Kanchan Kumar Malik), participatory video making by the African Women Filmmaker's Trust (Chido Erica Felicity Matewa), and citizen's radio in Colombia (Clemencia Rodríguez).

"An irritating question" frames the third section, introduced by Ellie Rennie: "Why can't community based media work better?" (p. 156). The case studies offered here, including community radio in Australia (Michael Meadows, Susan Forde, Jacqui Ewart, and Kerrie Foxwell), Indymedia in Canada (David Skinner, Scott Uzelman, Andrea Langlois, and Fré-

déric Dubois), and on the Internet (Lisa Brooten and Gabrielle Hadl), explore some of the structures, forms, and dynamics that both enable and constrain community media.

Studies of Mexico, Chile, and Wales inform the final theme of the first volume, which examines relations between "our media" and states. Jenny Kidd looks at the role of the BBC in creating community Digital Storytelling initiatives in Wales. Antoni Castells-Talens examines what happens when "our media" belongs to the state, as when 25 grassroots, participatory indigenous radio stations are owned by the Mexican government. Rosalind Bresnahan offers a historical account of changes in the relations between alternative media and the state during Chile's 17-year dictatorship under Pinochet, and its 16-year "transition to democracy" under the leftist *Concertación*. All three studies, as John Downing writes in his introduction to the section, "[...] address the uncertain social justice movement's middle ground" (p. 244) between the Marxist workers' state model and the anarchists' anti-statist vision. The most important insight from all three studies is the reminder that states are not unitary, monolithic entities, but are comprised of multiple and competing groups, visions, and social goals.

The second volume, *National and Global Movements for Democratic Communication*, edited by Laura Stein, Dorothy Kidd, and Clemencia Rodríguez, focuses on the relationships between alternative media and the peoples they are intended to serve. It uses case studies of radio, video, film, and Internet projects, and media reform social movements in a variety of local, national, regional, and superregional venues to "introduce readers to a range of national and global initiatives, spearheaded by civil society groups around the world, including people's and community-based organizations, civic groups, media organizations and associations, and others, that seek to fundamentally alter the cultural landscape" (p.1).

The first section, "National democratic initiatives", is introduced by Clemencia Rodríguez, who situates the study of "national movements for the study of media/ICTs" firmly in the realm of social movement theory (p. 27), and emphasizes the need for processual accounts that attend to "the ant-like work that takes place for years—and sometimes decades—before more visible uprisings capture everyone's attention" (p. 28). The theme is illustrated by case studies of "militant documentary cinema in Argentina" (Christian Dodaro, Santiago Marino, and María Cristina Rodríguez), a citizen's movement that achieved significant media reforms in Peru (Rose María Alfaro Moreno), and an experiment in using the Internet to increase citizen participation in the budgeting process in a Brazilian city (José Ignacio Porres).

The next section, introduced by Laura Stein, takes us into transnational communication policy issues, focusing particularly on the UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). Bart Cammaerts draws on surveys of participants in the WSIS and a similar regional project, the Convention on the Future of Europe, to argue about the shifting meanings of "participation" and the ease with which this concept can be reduced to mere "access". Gabriele Herdl and Arne Hintz show the difficulties "our media" faces in finding a place in international policymaking, where corporate and state media institutions already dominate public and policymakers' notions of what constitutes "the" media. And Joanna Arevalo and Dalida Maria Benfield examine the successes and frustrating failures of the "Media Justice"

delegation at the WSIS. In the final chapter, Osvaldo León, Sally Burch, and Eduardo Tamayo examine a smaller transnational communication movement, the *Minga Informativa*, serving a number of varied civil society organizations throughout Latin America.

Section three completes the shift from local case studies to transnational and global initiatives to change and set policy. In "Reframing democratic rights", introduced by Patrick Burkart, we read four accounts of "ways by which media activists are building a communication movement's public image, self-image, and a communication-based agenda for a global civil society" (p. 154). These include a thoroughly researched account of global resistance to intellectual property rights (Christine Schweidler and Sasha Constanza-Chock) as well as a localized account of on-line activists forging resistance to copyright regimes in South Korea (Kwang-Suk Lee). There are also two related articles on Internet accessibility, one focusing on the dialectic between US and UN debates on the digital divide (Caroline Cunningham), and one on "the emerging global movement on communication rights" (Claudio Padovani and Elena Pavan).

In spite of frequent warnings against "utopianism" that run throughout these many papers, there is a universal and perhaps utopian assumption that media, especially "small media", can, and should, play a liberatory role in the lives of ordinary people. This is to be expected in a project whose specific intent is to include practitioners, activists, and policy advocates, as well as academics, and whose motives are to push for change, not merely study it. As Rodriguez writes, "[...] academic research should be *at the service of praxis*" (p. 133, her emphasis). The excitement many of the authors feel for the projects they describe is palpable, and goes a long way toward energizing what could otherwise be a lengthy and difficult text to wade through.

The study of "small", "alternative", and "social" media – i.e., "our media", as the editors of these volumes would have it – has long been sidelined in the vast field of political communication in favor of larger-scale media or attention to how state and corporate actors use alternative media to reach publics. Recent events in the Arab world, the Mediterranean (Spain and Greece), Africa, the UK, the US, and elsewhere, will necessarily force mainstream scholars to attend more closely to social and alternative media. As they do, this exhaustive collection will provide an excellent resource for contextualizing, historicizing, and globalizing emergent work examining the role of communication in popular uprisings and movements for democratization.

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