Media and Democracy in the Age of Globalization

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Agents of participatory democracy or purveyors of consumer capitalism? Guardians of the public sphere or lap dogs of the power elite? Much of the debate about media's role in the "democratization" of various societies around the world demands an examination of the implications of such questions. For starters we might consider if mass media engender, as Marshall McLuhan once envisioned, a "global village" where democracy is encouraged along with universal understanding and the cultivation of a cosmic consciousness. Or is media transformation within new democracies nothing more than a tool of global economic powers to colonize previously "untapped" social domains via information, entertainment, and new technology? While perhaps seeming to be artificially oppositional in the face of today's complex political and cultural landscapes across the globe, these questions are nevertheless useful points of departure in that they suggest how media might serve to alter, enable, or disrupt the cultural sovereignty of nations and political potency of communities. Indeed, variations of these themes have been at the heart of controversies regarding the scope and legitimacy of regional trade agreements (Galperin, 1999a, 1999b), and within them resides the core issue of in whose interest and benefit are media and new communication technologies being used to reshape nations and "democratize" the flow of information and capital. In short, what "kind" of democratic reform is taking place, and how are media involved?

Negotiating Democracy: Media Transformations in Emerging Democracies is an attempt to register and make sense of these questions by looking specifically at the relationship between media and democracy within the broader phenomena of globalization. The book takes as its focus the place of mass media in the political and cultural life of nations negotiating democratization while simultaneously contending with economic liberalization and privatization, the changing role of the state, and the reformation of civil society. In doing so, the collection addresses issues that have defined the challenges and consequences of media transformation faced by new and emerging democracies. These issues include the dismantling of national broadcasting systems, the promotion of private independent and pluralistic media, the clash between liberal democratic and authoritarian political traditions, the proliferation of commercial media channels and programming, the development of new opportunities for civic engagement, the socioeconomic impact of transnational broadcast partnerships and linkages, negotiations about the appropriate broadcast language, the potential for a free press and for freedom of speech, new roles for entertainment media, and the development of new legal and administrative frameworks for broadcasting. While partial, this list nevertheless identifies challenges and tensions that have become consistent enough in a diversity of nascent democracies to suggest core areas for investigation and analysis. Moreover, these points are important because of their intimate connection to the evolving political profile of a given nation-state.

Indeed, it is through the media that public discourse about the scope and nature of democracy is circulated, even—or perhaps, especially—in fledgling democracies. Peruvian communication theorist Rosa Maria Alfaro (2006) asserts that

> today the media constitute a crucial source of civic education and legitimization of democratic power. Political elites legitimize themselves or join dissident discourses through their interactions with newspapers, magazines, radio and television. Notions of political authority, political values and general understanding of a nation's political institutions are consolidated through the daily programmes of the mass media and particularly via news. The national and international agenda emerge from daily mass media processes of production and consumption. Both the concept and feeling of nation and of the world are also articulated in the production and consumption of media. (p. 303)

It is in this context, therefore, that "[q]uestions of media access, diversity, ownership and content regulation define the type and quality of public sphere at work within a nation or region, because the media have become the key scarce resource in the struggle over 'publicness' in contemporary political systems" (Galperin, 1999a, p. 629). Additionally, as Hallin and Papathanas-

sopoulos (2002) remind us, the path to democracy is a slow and uneven process tied to historical patterns. "It is not simply a matter of lifting censorship and holding competitive elections, but involves the transformation of many political institutions—including the mass media—and of the relationships among political, social and economic institutions" (p. 184).

POLITICAL, HISTORICAL, AND CULTURAL ISSUES

To understand the interrelationships among these dynamics, it is therefore crucial to put them into a broader historical framework by making note that the cultural and economic factors that demark what is now commonly termed "globalization" (King, 2000; Tomlinson, 1999), and that are informing the unfolding of democratization in various regions, are intimately tied to past waves of transnational and transcultural exchanges and confrontations. Colonialism, for instance, not only involved the physical occupation of the territory of non-Western nations and the extraction of their resources but was also a period of intense cultural syncretism. In fact, one of the most important lessons learned from the colonial period that foreshadowed current processes of cultural hybridization unfolding today was the role that symbolic factors played in social change (Kraidy, 2005). That is, even though colonization was based on control of structural and material relationships and secured through military, economic, and political forces, it took root and "made sense" (or at least, was made sense of) through culture and language. That is why even today understanding the colonial ties that many developing countries have is important as it not only tells us about a given nation's past, and elements of its "deep structure," but also helps us construct a fuller appreciation for how democracy is being elaborated and in relation to what sorts of cultural "ingredients" (e.g., religion, ethnic minorities, immigration patterns, linguistic groups).

The commitment to understanding media and democracy through geopolitical histories also applies for an appreciation for how cold war politics attempted to operationalize "modernization" in the Third World beyond military and economic power. This agenda centered squarely on the transmission of ideas and technology transfer (Sussman, 2003). Within the push for modernization, communication was perceived of as having a central role in cultivating "progress" in the Third World (Lerner, 1958; Schramm, 1964), and in fact the UN proclaimed the 1960s as the "Decade of Development." Everett Rogers's (1962, 1969) theory of diffusion of innovations, in particular, emerged as a road map for the application of media use that was, by design, meant to engender modernization. Thus for much of the 60s and 70s, communication, progress, and modernization became a Third World leitmotif as both discourse and practice. Importantly, it was an agenda that dovetailed almost seamlessly with what might more broadly be seen as cold war politics'

normalization of "free world" economics—an intervention which has been characterized as an invention of the US that still serves as "the mantra of the 'new' globalizing economy" (Agnew, 2005, p. 120).

But the faith in communication and technology to reshape nations and liberate traditional societies from their "fatalism" and "backward" practices was not received without criticism. Leading the charge were critical scholars, who argued that rather than serving as vehicles of progress and tools for overcoming underdevelopment, the newly established media systems were in fact agents of capitalist domination and dependency (Mattelart, 1972, 1977; Schiller, 1971/92; Wells, 1972). Indeed, Johan Galtung (1971) declared that his motivation for publishing his seminal "Structural Theory of Imperialism" was not only to identify the tremendous power imbalances between center and periphery nations, but more pressingly to offer a theory of liberation to "counteract inequality as one of the major forms of *structural violence*" (p. 81; emphasis in original). Importantly, through his theory Galtung stressed that while there was a "disharmony of interests" between center nations as a whole and periphery nations as a whole, by itself this assertion was highly misleading because it led to "the belief that imperialism is merely an international relationship, *not a combination of intra- and inter-national relation*" (p. 84).

While developed more than thirty-five years ago, Galtung's emphasis on the combination of intra- and international forces as defining global relations deserves perhaps even more attention today from media scholars, as indigenous (national) cultural industries around the globe have become increasingly linked to and developed in relation to transnational media conglomerates. While the process is not uniform throughout the world, and indeed Galtung's conceptual elaboration of the notions of center and periphery have become increasingly problematic since the work was first published (in no small part, due to technological innovation), global patterns nevertheless indicate that it is unfolding in relation to foreign direct investment, horizontal and vertical integration, joint ventures, and other strategies benefiting from neoliberal reforms (Albarran & Chan-Olmstead, 1998; Galperin, 1999a, 1999b; Gershon, 1997, 2000, 2005; Herman & McChesney, 1997). In fact, it can be said that it is precisely through such collaborative agreements that media have facilitated the deepening of intra- and international relations over the past few decades (Artz, 2003). Specific initiatives that have been identified to promote global-local success by the media industries include language and content adaptations in film and television programming, working with local/country advertising firms, and the use of cable and satellite broadcasting to create regionalized economies of scale (Kraidy, 2002; Strover, Burkart, & Hernández, 1999). Even unauthorized initiatives that erode the profit margins of corporate interests such as pirate reproduction extend those interests, ideological range, and influence.

Needless to say, these initiatives and relationships do not foster the constitution of a transparently "global" global sphere, as the flow of media between

and among nations is usually asymmetrical. Rather the various strategies and relationships operate through an ongoing and flexible concentration of culture and capital, which interconnects the global with the local and the national. As Hall (2000) asserts, it is a global cultural sphere founded on a

> form of capital which recognizes that it can, to use a metaphor, rule through other local capitals, rule alongside and in partnership with other economic and political elites. It does not attempt to obliterate them; it operates through them. It has to hold the whole framework of globalization in place and simultaneously police that system: it stage manages independence within it, so to speak. (pp. 28–29)

It is through this embrace that we need to recognize not only the power and presence of global corporate hegemony, but also that nation-states still exercise substantial power and elicit identification in a multitude of ways. In other words, as Artz (2003) has argued, "contrary to the claims that capitalist globalization has superseded the nation-state, in each case governments have promoted global capitalism and legalized activity within state boundaries" (p. 4). Indeed, rather than disappearing, the nation-state has transmuted into a new sort of structural network, organized "across different types of governance with respective institutions interacting at local, national, regional and supranational levels" (Zuberi, 2005, p. 107). In the process, nation-states have become less concerned with public service and cultural activities, "either abandoning them to the private sector or increasingly working alongside these market interests to modify cultural production and consumption" (Zuberi, 2005, p. 107).

PRIVATIZATION, LIBERALIZATION, AND DEMOCRATIZATION

In terms of media and communication technologies, many of the structural networks and relationships of capital described above began to surface in different countries around the world in the 1980s, as nations changed their telecommunication structures and polices to eliminate trade barriers, promote competition, and create opportunities for economic development. Gershon (2005) notes that "the common motivation for such regulatory and economic reforms was the perceived inefficiency of central planning and government-protected monopolies, which were characterized by poor financial performance, overstaffing and dependency on government subsidies, and poor export performance" (p. 20). While exemptions and side agreements regarding the cultural industries abounded in regional trade agreements, marking the tensions between economic initiatives and cultural sovereignty (Galperin, 1999a, 1999b; McAnany & Wilkinson, 1996), the restructuring of

telecommunications "markets" nevertheless exploded in the 1990s. In fact, to nurture and guide this process, on January 1, 1995, the World Trade Organization (WTO) was created and tasked with enforcing international trade agreements and setting a global agenda for privatization and liberalization while removing protectionism. The creation of the WTO coincided with an unprecedented number of international mergers and acquisitions among transnational media corporations, which aggressively pursued the opportunities that privatization provided.

These transnational developments have largely supported the national and regional dominance of some of the world's most powerful "second-tier media firms" of newly industrialized nations, such as Brazil's Globo, Mexico's Televisa, Argentina's Clarín and Venezuela's Cisneros Group—Latin American firms that have "extensive ties and joint ventures with the largest media TNCs, as well as with Wall Street investment banks" (McChesney, 1999, p. 12). The cultural and political power that these media groups weld and the economic integration they enjoy are firmly rooted in the *laissez-faire* agreements and clientelism established early on with the state in most Latin American countries (Fox, 1988, 1997; Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002). Privately owned and commercially operated, it is perhaps not surprising then that the overriding media model that emerged has been generally supportive of the political parties in power (Fox & Waisbord, 2002). Thus when the state in most Latin American countries eventually sought ways to privatize public services and liberalize their economies, the commercial media were already in a prime position to take an even greater role in shaping the contours of the "public" sphere. Interestingly, throughout Latin America this dynamic has in large part coincided with an on-going era of democratization. But liberalization was undertaken to create opportunities for big business and relieve government of some of its burdens, not deepen democratic participation. In response to this new climate, media regimes have pursued business, not public service goals, thus extending a broadcasting history defined by a narrow ideological range of ideas, limited opposing voices, and constricted debate (Fox & Waisbord, 2002; Hernandez & McAnany, 2001).

Other regional trends, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe, parts of Asia, and even to some measure in the Middle East, bare witness to a transition into democratization that has emerged alongside the dismantling of national broadcasting systems and the reformation of the role of the press connected to authoritarian regimes, the promotion of private independent and pluralistic media, and/or the proliferation of new media channels. In sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, during the 1990s internal pressures to privatize mounted at the same time as the IMF and World Bank were applying external arm twisting for the region to liberalize its economies. These dual internal and external forces produced significant tensions in the political and cultural landscapes (Bourgault, 1995; Heath, 2001; Kasoma, 1997). Polit-

ically, the most significant result of these pressures has been a renewed belief in democracy, with a new media climate facilitating the transition. Culturally, a new wave of broadcast languages, cultural expressions, and processes of identification has emerged as an indicator of the power and presence of "global culture" in the lives of many Africans (Blankson, 2005). As a result, mass media have become one of the most pronounced areas of African society where democracy is being exercised and culture being reinterpreted, as they have served as avenues for public education and discourse on the tenets of democratization, the free market, and consumer culture.

The examples briefly sketched out above only trace the outlines of media transformation and democratization in those regions, and the complexity of what is unfolding there and beyond far exceeds what is presented. Still, from a global perspective what they reveal is quite significant; which is to suggest that developing patterns of media ownership, trade practices, and the discourse of democratic promise are beginning to obfuscate the previously more salient markers of the "disharmony of interests" and global imbalances of media flow and representation (e.g., foreign versus national; north versus south, center and periphery; external versus internal hegemony), despite the distinctions that still exist between and within nations. That is, the media in various nations may look, sound, and feel national and/or regional, but they also privilege certain conceptions of public life that have historically had much more to do with the cultural ethos of the "center" than the "periphery."

Indeed, within the emergent mediascapes, what democracy should "look like" and how it should function is often packaged in terms of consumer choice and the freedom to choose. In other words, in many nations around the world, the contours of democracy are framed by the commercial media systems' privileging of the accumulation of up-scale lifestyles and material goods, even in news productions (Juluri, 2003; LaPastina, 2004; Martín-Barbero, 2006; Murphy, 2003). What is perhaps most troubling about this dynamic is that it links the commercial media structure and content to the formation of audiences' assumptions about political practice, suggesting that the kinds of democracies evolving in various locations may be conflated with consumerism (Alfaro, 2006). In many newly industrialized and developing countries such patterns are now quite characteristic. This is due in no small part to the development of a global media market and related commercialization of national media systems, a transformation that provides "an informational and ideological environment that helps sustain political, economic and moral basis for marketing goods and for having a profit-driven social order" (Herman & McChesney, 1997, p. 10). Thus in the name of democracy, commercial media serve to cultivate the idea that market forces and small government rather than participatory democracy are the stewards of progress and guardians of public interest.

HEGEMONY AND HOPE

Even with the power and pervasiveness of TNCs, second-tier media firms, and newer emerging commercial media interests, to characterize the hopes and dreams tied to democratization as nothing more than a superficial echo of neoliberal ideology would be to fail to recognize that there also resides a more hopeful sense that transitions from state control to private ownership can foster an open and diverse flow of information and ideas. As such, the potential for media to stimulate democratic participation and engender the creation of civil society are responses worth searching for in any attempt to understand the regional and national negotiations of democratization and media transformation.

Indeed, mass media have served remarkably well as a means to globalize the democratic exchange of ideas and issues capable of challenging authority and of fostering an atmosphere of optimism. And while the degree to which a civic discourse has found a way to take root varies, when it does arise it is often in conjunction with citizen-based media. As the efforts detailed by various authors have shown (Cleaver, 1998; Dagron, 2001; Downing, 2001, 2003; Poblete, 2006; Rodriguez, 2001; Santiago-Valles, 2003; Trejo Delarbre, 1994; Wilpert, 2004), the citizen-based media models that have been used to challenge the free market system and that have demanded more voice in the exercise of democracy have emerged largely in spite of the limited political spectrum provided by commercial media systems. These efforts have surfaced in conjunction with a growing grassroots model of radical populism and are performing the normative duties that the "watchdog media" of the corporate systems is supposed to: break silence, expose corruption and inequality, and demand political reform.

Nevertheless, no matter how regionally specific, complex, or contradictory processes of democratization may appear to be, these processes and responses are predicated on global interrelationships that reflect certain economic philosophies, political discourses, and institutional frames. Thus, along with history, "structure" and ideology (e.g., free market fundamentalism versus democratic idealism) remain important areas for inquiry when we talk about media transformation and political practice in the age of globalization, even if that focus is on "public ignorance" and the unruly nature of the public sphere (Habermas, 2006), or on deliberate engagements, such as radical or counterhegemonic media activities. Additionally, the promises of democracy rest on the rights and responsibilities of each nation's citizens. How these citizens respond to such an opportunity not only is a question of political organization but also has much to do with how they have been encouraged to think about and participate in democracy through the news and entertainment media citizens (Alfaro, 2006). Are media in this dynamic serving as agents of democracy or the free market? That is, are media the "Trojan horse"

that works to further concentrate capital and accentuate existing global-regional disharmony of interests? Or, are the intra- and international forces of globalization being presented, worked on, and enabled via mass media helping nations carve out a sovereign and productive (and indigenous?) vision of democracy? The chapters that follow in this collection provide a detailed and grounded exploration of these issues and how they have been experienced in specific locations.

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