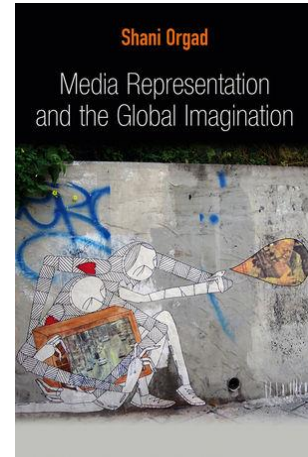


Shani Orgad, **Media Representation and the Global Imagination**, Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2012, 296 pp., \$24.95 (paperback).

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The increasingly diverse and networked nature of contemporary global media has opened up new problems for understanding how media representations structure people's imagining of themselves, others, and their place in the world. In ***Media Representation and the Global Imagination***, Shani Orgad develops "global imagination" as a theoretical framework to analyze how processes of representation in a global media environment are implicated in complex and contested power relations over what stories are told, how, and by whom, while exploring consequences of such telling through a range of case studies.



Representation, "the process of producing meanings through the creation of symbolic forms and content" (p. 15), has been studied as a route to understanding the power of media texts, particularly insofar as such representations reproduce ideologies and create knowledge and "truth" (Foucault, 1980). As much as globalization and a proliferation of new media platforms have added complexity to these issues, Orgad notes that research of media representation in a global context has been constrained by "methodological nationalism" (Beck, 2003, p. 16), local/global binaries, Western-centric subjects, and a lack of attention to how meanings change and transform across boundaries. *Media Representation and the Global Imagination* is meant to foster more nuanced understandings of the power of media representations in a global era.

Conceived as a "symbolic space characterized by social imaginaries (carried largely in mediated representations), which people around the world share, but which they simultaneously compete and struggle over" (p. 46), the "global imagination" is a site at which to examine ongoing struggles between media's conservative function—to continually reinforce and reproduce a status quo—and their transformative potential. For example, a proliferation of international news channels such as CNN, Sky, Reuters, and the like has challenged the dominance of national news in representing the nation, while also inviting viewers to imagine the world as a single space with a coherent identity. At the same time, with growing access to digital formats such as YouTube videos, blogging, news comment sections, and other interactive media, individual voices have emerged to challenge stereotyped coverage of marginalized regions and peoples, fracturing the discourse of a unified world. This combination of global media and digital media has created new forms of "visibility" (Thompson, 2005) characterized by contestation, as actors work to gain recognition and exercise power through visibility in the media, and new forms of "mediated intimacy at a distance" (Thompson, 1995, p. 219), through which media viewers may increasingly feel that they know and can relate to far away others.

That sense of knowing, the means through which it is produced, and various tensions and contests that emerge therein are examined in a series of chapters on imagining others (through natural disasters), imagining ourselves (as the nation), imagining possible lives (through migration), imagining the world (through New Year celebrations), and imagining the self (explored in relation to the previous examples). These case studies follow an introductory chapter that synthesizes and compares critical theories of representation, drawing out the reliance on representations for making sense of the world and assessing perspectives for understanding how this reliance is implicated in power relations. Orgad studies a range of mediated texts using interpretive qualitative methods, inspired by critical discourse analysis and visual analysis, and draws from a Foucauldian approach focusing on meanings generated by representations. Throughout the book, Orgad confronts various tensions characterizing studies of representation, tensions she claims are normally constructed as binaries, but to which she attempts to add complexity and new dimensions: Between seeing strangers as different—even dangerous—and strangers as united by a common humanity; between seeing the world as a whole (united), and seeing it as fragmented (hostile); between seeing ourselves as part of a nation or as part of a world; between seeing the self as unique, and seeing the self as a representative site through which to understand all others.

Beginning with the question of strangers, Chapter 2 compares representations of distant “others” who have suffered natural disasters. Orgad demonstrates how representations have become increasingly intimate. For example, while victims of a 1755 earthquake in Lisbon were portrayed in European discourses as being “far away,” the lyrics and imagery of the 1985 “We Are the World” celebrity benefit song attempted to erase distance (and difference) by collapsing far away Africans into “ourselves” (“we are the world”) and by showing only the celebrities on camera. In a follow-up version benefiting Haitians after the 2010 earthquake, a new celebrity video empowered Haitians as agents through their inclusion in the lyrics and visual imagery. However, Orgad argues that while the remake highlights individual agency, it may also deflect concerns for suffering and occlude demands that institutional forces be held accountable. Ultimately, even as the representations in the recent video attempt to make up for what was lacking in the original (the subjects themselves), the distressed Haitians become a spectacle, and suffering is packaged as a commodity to be consumed.

Chapter 3 highlights challenges to collective understandings that occur when global media and digital media create representations of the nation that are very different from those presented through national platforms. An in-depth case study presents how global media coverage of the 2005 riots in France portrayed a country experiencing political unrest, with massive societal problems to blame, while national media covered the riots as a *unique* situation, with stories framed as crime and its enforcement rather than as a larger political and social issue. As global and digital media contribute new perspectives to the stories told about the nation, audiences are able to see themselves differently; through such experiences, they are perhaps able to see others differently as well.

Chapter 4 combines previous themes of otherness and the nation to understand how media representations of migration inspire people to imagine possible lives. With migration represented as both a utopian dream and a nightmare (for both migrant and host society), Orgad turns to digital media examples, such as interactive chat functions of websites, video games, and blogs, and shows how these platforms allow migrants to address each other and host citizens directly. These interactions create a site

for what Appadurai (1996) refers to as "local imagining," where macro-level events and global issues work their way into localized understandings.

Chapter 5 assesses how the macro-level is created through global media events, focusing on representations of New Year celebrations around the world through a comparison of CNN's coverage, a short documentary about New Year in Gaza shown on Al Jazeera TV, a family YouTube video of a home celebration in Cameroon, and the Chinese Lunar New Year shown on CCTV. CNN presents a simple view—the world as both a "space of sameness" and a competitive space marked by distinction, two views encapsulated by capitalist logic framing the world as a "market" (p. 145) —creating what Harvey (2001, p. 211) calls "empty geographical knowledges" that serve to maintain geographical ignorance. At the same time, Orgad argues that the inclusion of a variety of alternative New Year discourses across varied platforms helps to create new, contested geographical knowledges.

Chapter 6 marks the main contribution of this project to scholarship on media and globalization. Here, Orgad "explores the centrality of the self in media representations," arguing that, "the self has come to constitute a primary site for the cultivation of a global imagination" (p. 160). Returning to the previous sites (the other, the nation, possible lives, and the world), Orgad demonstrates how contemporary representations and media platforms create the self as a symbolic "conduit" through which those broader narratives can be digested and intimately understood. While the self provides a useful site for digesting the complexities of a globally connected world, a tendency to collapse everything into the self also risks "eliding difference as it is collapsed into the recognizable same" (p. 182).

The concluding chapter contains suggestions for how representations might become more inclusive and just. Arguing that representation is too focused on finding "narratives," Orgad ends with a discussion of how we might ditch the narrative form and become more comfortable with fragmentation, distance, mediation, and incompleteness. It is unclear here if "we" refers to scholars, media organizations, citizen journalists, or viewers, and this ambiguity points to the risk an author faces in moving from the critical to the normative. The reader may be left wondering just who holds the agency, and the responsibility, to broaden the spectrum of representation, and, as Orgad suggests "we" should, "to accept incompleteness, lack of closure and discontinuity in the ways in which we represent and imagine the world" (p. 198).

This book will be of interest in a number of ways to those studying media in a global context. The "global imagination" framework developed in Chapter 1 through an extensive synthesis of constructionist, semiotic and structuralist, and poststructuralist theories of representation will be highly useful for graduate students and scholars of globalization and media studies grappling with how to theorize representation in a global age. The case studies in the remaining chapters are very accessible and will be of interest to undergraduate and graduate students in courses addressing a variety of concerns and issues arising in an age of globally interconnected media platforms—issues involving representation in humanitarian and human rights-driven campaigns, global media events, self and national identities in a global era, and the politics of digital and global media.

Although the author is careful to portray the global imagination as a heavily contested space, I wonder if it might make more sense to speak of global imaginations, plural, just as Berger and Huntington (2002) suggested we recognize that there are many globalizations. Still, the framework provides a useful heuristic for considering how media representations circulating through varied platforms may create a sense of the world that is both shared and debated by many, and Orgad provides a series of well-researched case studies to demonstrate the contours of these debates in a global media environment.

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