

Michela Ardizzone and Chiara Ferrari, **Beyond Monopoly: Globalization and Contemporary Italian Media**, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009, 300 pp., \$75.00 (hardcover).

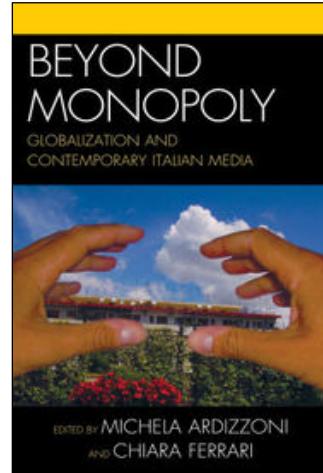
Reviewed by

Annie M. Rice

University of Southern California

In the past decade, Italy fought to establish cultural identity through media. As it adjusted to new technology, Italian media attempted to renegotiate its role with the Italian government, within the European Union, and on an international front. The ideological slant of Italian media has long been under scrutiny since media mogul Silvio Berlusconi was elected prime minister in 1994. During his controversial reign, he has censored content, merged public and private programming, and relaxed ownership rules in his favor (p. 172). Finally, after years of trying to assert its legitimacy, the Italian media established its niche in contemporary global media.

In their collection, *Beyond Monopoly*, Michela Ardizzone and Chiara Ferrari try to capture the Italian media's role in an international context. The two professors draw on their rich cultural and educational backgrounds in communication, culture, cinema, and media to compile a series of provocative perspectives. These studies explore the effects of globalization on different facets of the media during the past decade. This informative compilation offers insight into the schizophrenic world of Italian media. It is organized thematically in four parts: (1) globalization, policy and technology; (2) television flows and formats; (3) new and alternative media; and (4) immigration and diversity.



Part I addresses the intersection of technology and globalization, and in particular, how the introduction of Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) into the market, coupled with the reach and influence of News Corporation, one of the world's largest media conglomerates, helped put Italy onto the international media's map. Media research consultant Alessandro D'Arma examines the transition from analogue to Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT), a service that, through digital compression, allows for several programs to be transmitted through one frequency channel (p. 10). To protect his own commercial interests, Berlusconi helped pass amendments that promoted the service to secure a market position for Mediaset. D'Arma argues that the introduction of this new technology disrupted the existing market and regulatory provisions. DTT allowed the European Union to apply a higher degree of influence away from the center-right controlled by Berlusconi.

Part II investigates Italy's search for an identity. Ferrari delves into the difficulties of translating American pop culture, in particular, reformatting *The Simpsons* for Italian approval. Since 1989, *The Simpsons* had become a fixture in homes across America, but it wasn't until its 15th season (in 2004) that the popular show could be shown in Italy. Ferrari illustrates that, although the concepts behind the television show have global potential, cultural references, including names, accents, and joke, had to be

altered to suit the perceived preferences of the audience (p. 103). Many characters were changed to accommodate different regional Italian stereotypes. For example, Fat Tony, an Italian-American mobster, was voiced over with a Sicilian accent to imply criminal activity, and the Scottish groundskeeper, Willie, was re-established as a Sardinian to make it easier for Italians to relate to the character. The show became extraordinarily popular in Italy and proved that global breadth could be achieved through cultural adaptations to a format. In essence, Ferrari shows that the localization of content was critical for encouraging and solidifying Italian identification with media.

In Part III, Ardizzi explores alternative forms of media. A new platform called street television emerged, allowing Italians to creatively resist corporate media. Telestreet uses empty frequencies to transmit a signal to regular televisions. Although the practice is not legal, users have evaded penalty by evoking the Italian constitution, which "prohibits censorship," as it permits citizens "freedom of expression with any means of communication" (p. 174). Ardizzi emphasizes that street television became a democratic alternative to mainstream media, helping circulate civic, environmental, religious, local, and international issues. Telestreet repeatedly demonstrated that there are creative forms of resistance to the monopoly controlled by Berlusconi. Ardizzi suggests that as Italian media becomes more globalized, that resistance is likely to continue and grow stronger.

In Part IV, the final section of *Beyond Monopoly*, Media and Communications scholar Rinella Cere examines globalization's effect on content, and in particular, the media's negative portrayal of immigrants, who currently compose 4.5% of Italy's population (p. 204). Cere extensively discusses the aftermath of 9/11, which exacerbated negative Islamic reporting. She examines the double-edged sword of globalization, which provides enlightening exposure to international cultures, but also increases levels of fear of and intolerance for the distant stranger.

Structurally, the book's transitions prove rough at times. The editors' introduction promises an enthralling account of the history of Italian media. But the chapter that follows on digital television policies bogs down with names, dates, facts, and long citations that confuse rather than clarify. Prior knowledge of Italy's media culture and government is a must for readers, who otherwise are likely to stumble over Italian acronyms. The persistent reader will, however, be rewarded by intelligent, insightful perspectives. Most contributors are critical of the monopoly and the high levels of state control by Berlusconi. The authors provide a rich and varied history of contemporary Italian media—from its first exposure to global media to its currently integrated state.

This volume also provides a useful contrast to American media developments. A cross-cultural comparison of Italian and American media may at first seem counterintuitive, but media conglomerates, like Murdoch's News Corporation, while threatening to homogenize culture under the concentration of ownership, still offer the opportunity for niche markets across diverse platforms. Both countries have rapidly adjusted their models to accommodate globalization within the media.

Ardizzi and Ferrari have successfully compiled a cross-section of essays that reveal Italy's struggle to define itself in a global context despite local unrest. They expose Italy's widespread problems, but also describe the strides that the country has taken over the past few decades. Berlusconi challenged

the growth of Italian media, but improving technology is proving to be a stronger force than his political agenda. The citizens' pursuit of alternative media such as Telestreet suggests that Berlusconi's self-interests can be circumnavigated. These creative routes, which have emerged to give Italians a voice, predict a hopeful future framed by less proprietary structures.

The editors effectively address the conflicting social, political, and economic concerns that Italian media has and will continue to face in an increasingly globalized world. The contributors mostly see globalization as a largely positive force for Italian media that allowed the country to grow and achieve higher levels of international recognition. But the essays also make clear that this international integration comes at a cost: the loss of cultural identity, the perpetuation of old stereotypes, and the creation of new, harmful ones. Perhaps new alternative media can overcome these adverse impacts and create a more democratic, creative, and expressive media that unites the local and global. The jury is out.