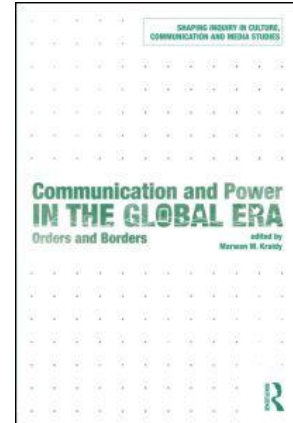


Marwan M. Kraidy (Ed.), **Communication and Power in the Global Era: Orders and Borders**, Routledge, 2013, 208 pp., \$39.95 (paperback).

Review by
Mark Hannah
University of Southern California



Scholarly research on the variegated, shape-shifting, and ideologically ambivalent global media environment has become, itself, variegated, shape-shifting, and ideologically ambivalent. This is one conclusion drawn from Marwan Kraidy’s illuminating new edited volume, **Communication and Power in the Global Era**. That the field of global communication studies has become as knotty and disjunctive as the object of its inquiry is neither a necessary corollary nor, to this reader, a sufficient state of analytical affairs for the kind of ongoing academic endeavor that deserves the designation “discipline.”

In his introduction, Kraidy (1) candidly acknowledges the “dizzying array of approaches and perspectives” (p. 1) that have come to characterize this “post-paradigmatic stage” of international media research, (2) helpfully points to the idea of power—whether as an unarticulated assumption or as a major concept” (p. 2)—as a shared interest among this research, and (3) expeditiously—but judiciously—dispenses with the cultural imperialism and cultural globalization theses as “intellectual orders that may have exhausted their usefulness” (p. 3).

In this state of the disunion, Kraidy prepares the reader for the diversity of perspectives that ensues. He signals that one common thread throughout the included scholarship is the abstinence from “asserting power as a monolithic determinant of global communication processes and outcomes” (p. 7). This intellectual commitment to more textured analyses that look beyond the cultural imperialism thesis unites the contributions to this book even though its expression varies significantly. A broader epistemological or methodological unity for global communication studies is neither pursued nor produced, as Kraidy brooks the diverse theoretical and empirical approaches of the edifying work he hosts.

Divided into four sections, the book confronts (1) the changing nature of the nation-state, both as an actant and as a unit of empirical analysis, (2) nation branding as a commercial and cultural endeavor, (3) modernity’s grand narratives within a postmodern era, and, finally, (4) mediated resistance and social transformation.

If Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* illustrated the way in which print capitalism enabled and encouraged national identity through common language and experience, Hector Amaya’s chapter on the emergence of the Spanish language media in the United States provides a provocative challenge to nationalism as the predominant ordering identity. Amaya elucidates the ways in which

language is politicized through the tension between national and international affinities, modern mobility, and "nativist liberalism."

Amaya asserts that "there are weaknesses to global media theory because language typically becomes subsumed under other analytical categories" (p. 18), and he laments later in the chapter, "How can we, as a community of media scholars, believe that language codifies culture, cognition and experience while disregarding the importance of language to individuals in the political life of communities?" (p. 20). After pleading a strong case for the centrality of studying language within global media research, Amaya cites an economic and a political factor, respectively, that contribute to the marginalization of Spanish media within the American mediascape: the commodification of the Spanish language in the corporate sphere and the political primacy of monolingualism as a vehicle for liberal governmentality.

Linking colonialization that historically used "language as a blunt tool of coercion" to the "desirability of monolingual states [as] . . . the result of particular ways of thinking about governance, state and community" (p. 23), Amaya seems to be suggesting that, in permitting market imperatives to drive minority language programming and enacting assimilation-oriented educational policies, the United States is somehow acting as an agent of neocolonialization within its borders. While giving us an illustrative example of the need to rethink the analytically sovereign nature of national borders, Amaya's analysis steers close to the "assertion of power as a monolithic determinant" (p. 7)—where culture is more a product of political and economic forces than a meaningful influencer upon them—that the volume disavows. An alternative analysis might draw upon the research of Tomlinson (1999) or Appadurai (1990), both cited in Kraidy's introduction, to cast the rise and restraint of American Spanish language media amid globalization's inherent tension between heterogenization and homogenization. Put otherwise, the article might have analyzed the power invested within the culture of Spanish language media in addition to the economic and political power to which it is subjected.

Leading into the second section of the book, which takes up nation branding as a sort of joint venture between statist and capitalist interests, Andrew Crocco introduces and paraphrases Aniko Imre's article on nation branding in the "new Europe": "Under market logic, nations can recreate themselves through carefully crafted campaigns designed to inspired 'loyalty beyond reason.' This fuzzy feeling of in-group self-confidence eschews participatory politics, along with the conflict it necessarily entails" (p. 52).

Having reviewed, in this journal, recent research on media transformation and political marketing in the new Europe (Hannah, 2013), I'm struck by the possible empirical irreconcilability, in the neoliberal media context, of theories about the polarizing effects of political marketing (Lees-Marshment et al., 2009) and theories about the homogenizing effects of nation branding. On its face, the above assertion from Crocco might be equally valid when replacing "under market logic" with "with state-owned media enterprises."

To be sure, Crocco and Imre are not referring to the market logic of media institutions themselves, but rather that nations themselves have become branded and commoditized, each with its own brand equity and identity, in a global marketplace. As Imre describes, brands are "almost spiritual

entities, which create affective semiotic environments around lifestyles and habit and also inevitably extend into civic participation" (p. 75). How this civic participation is influenced is not immediately clear. Imre demonstrates that, in the case of Romania, the dominant and most internationally recognizable icons, Nicolae Ceausescu and Count Dracula, have overshadowed Romanian national culture. She argues that the promotion of a positive national brand is "hindered by Western investment in the dictator and vampire, the last nostalgic reservoirs of Eastern European otherness" (p. 90) and that the "new narratives have caused further internal division and . . . increas[ed] citizens' suspicion about opportunistic governments who betray what is perceived as the true national cause and sell out the country" (ibid.). Imre's analysis is thorough and her argument is persuasive. Nevertheless, this reader, reflecting on various countries' tourism posters from the 1970s, is left wondering how and whether the reductive, externally oriented, and self-conscious projection of national identity typical of "nation branding" represents a genuinely new phenomenon precipitated by neoliberalism rather than the application of neoliberal terminology to a more enduring phenomenon.

The influence of neoliberalism upon nation branding is taken up by Koichi Iwabuchi in his chapter, "Culture and National Border Administration in 21st-century Japan." Iwabuchi astutely points out that "the 'national' imagination and framework have paradoxically become stronger and more mundane . . . as cross-border flows and connections are regulated by the interplay of states, media and cultural industries" (p. 96). How the state and media industries prevail upon each other, however, is less clear. Which is predominant: a political imperative to promote market interests or a market imperative to promote political/national interests (and identity)? Can we identify market interests that are inconsistent with—and counterproductive to—national identity? How precisely does a "neoliberalism mode of industry-state alliance" (p. 97), as Iwabuchi characterizes it, lead to the "essentialist reassertion of what constitutes a national culture" (ibid.)? Are there examples where, in a neoliberal context, the adversarial and heterodox nature of commercial media (relative to statist media models) encourages oppositional voices or promotes cultural diversity?

On the last question, Iwabuchi identifies a paradox wherein "cultural globalization eventually accompanies a 'peculiar form of homogenization' as [it] foster[s] and promote[s] a particular kind of diversity that is governed and structured by the logic of capital that cultural diversity sells" (p. 99). This leads him to conclude with the (analytically unhelpful) broad stroke, "The world is becoming more diverse through standardization and more standardized through diversification" (ibid.).

The simplification—if not conflation—of nationalist and capitalist logics is evident in the premise that Iwabuchi articulates: "The market-driven promotion of national cultures has been institutionalized at the expense of the advancement of cultural engagement with making marginalized voices expressed and heard in the public space" (p. 97). An explication of how the market inhibits "marginalized voices" or an empirical analysis of how this is occurring in Japan, however, is as unaddressed as the aforementioned claim that homogenization results from "the logic of capital that cultural diversity sells" (p. 99). These lead Iwabuchi somehow back to (a "new mode" of) the cultural imperialism thesis, given his conclusion that the "pattern of border control of ethno-cultural flows for the sake of national interests eventually marks the country's international standing" (p. 108).

Moving from the spatial to the temporal aspects of communication and power in the global era, the book's third section confronts modernity and the need to situate international media research historically. Paddy Scannell's chapter on the persisting centrality of television takes a phenomenological approach. He breaks down the objects of his investigation into their component parts and carefully parses the ongoing scholarly conversation to which he is contributing. For Scannell, the "conditions of scarcity" among traditional national media were "strongly normative," but in recent decades, "the monopoly and with it the authority (the moral hegemony) of central, national media institutions collapsed" (p. 119). He attributes this to "the end of channel scarcity" and the "rapid rise of digital, interactive media" (ibid.). Critiquing the argument that media institutions have been de-centered, Scannell invokes and updates the ideas found in Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz's *Media Events*, which create a context for understanding television—even in the present moment and against the second thoughts of Dayan and Katz themselves—as a propagator of "shared experiences," "social integration," and "national unity."

By chronicling the ways in which societies do indeed have centers, and how most countries continue to "have central media institutions that provide news, entertainment and other services that are distributed to all parts of the country" (p. 123), Scannell reclaims the centrality of television (broadly defined). He acknowledges the new challenges—mostly from new interactive media—to the narratives promoted by central media, but insists "it is an agonistic rather than an antagonistic relationship; one that is contested rather than conflicted, one of growing interdependence and interaction in which either may set the agenda" (p. 126). In Scannell's view, this represents a contribution, not a corrosion, of central media, with new vehicles for pluralism representing a latter-day expression of modernity. Spurring both ideological analysis and an analysis of ideology (and provocatively suggesting that "we live today in a post-ideological world") (ibid.), Scannell layers keen observations about the modern media environment, resisting both a hermeneutics of suspicion and a hermeneutics of credulity. He persuasively redeems central media institutions as components and proponents of a national culture, liberating them from the role of mere ideological apparatuses that determinedly degrade or detain culture.

Power is indeed the thread woven throughout this volume. In Scannell's telling, power resides within and among the media institutions, sustaining modernity amid the postmodern cacophony. Arguing in the Weberian tradition that central institutions are centers of economic, political, and cultural power is, to Scannell, stating the obvious. More critically for Scannell, these central institutions (including media institutions) "are devices against death and the ruin of mortality. They are the necessary preconditions of any *complex* human existence" (p. 127). They outlast even empires, "independent of any power struggle over them in any particular place in time" (ibid.) to the point where "world-creating, world-sustaining central societal institutions, transport and communications infrastructure, have been slowly, imperceptibly modified, refined and (yes) improved to the point at which we have arrived now" (ibid.).

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