

Paula Chakravartty and Katharine Sarikakis, **Media Policy and Globalization**, Edinburgh University Press, 2006, 211 pp., £24.99 (paperback).

Paula Chakravartty and Yuezhi Zhao, **Global Communications: Toward a Transcultural Political Economy**, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007, 359 pp., \$93.50 (hardcover).

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Chakravartty and Sarikakis begin their tour of global media policy issues by emphasizing the peculiarity, possibly even uniqueness, of the bifurcation in English between the words 'policy' and 'politics', and how this duality has so often been summoned up to support the claim that 'policy' is for technocratic wonks, whereas 'politics' is for those of us red in tooth and claw. With the further implication that nirvana could practically be within reach, no longer through the transcendence of class struggles in a communist utopia, but by somehow rescuing 'policy science' and 'policy dictates' from the ghastliness of clashing social and economic agendas. For them, the split in meaning is a charade: policy is indissolubly fused with politics, whether in agendas or procedures.

Their book is made up of an introductory chapter, followed by three sections of two chapters each: the first on the contexts of communication and media policy-making, the second on the linked domains of telecommunications infrastructure and broadcasting practice, and the last a critical evaluation and history of two policy paradigms, the 'Information Society' discourse, and 'Civil Society' public communication activism. Their summaries of the empirical issues, the global institutional actors, and the recent history of the negotiations and policy coups that have punctuated the development of this saga, are packed with information.

On one level, the book is a masterpiece of compression. Yet at times, especially in the earlier chapters, this virtue also sometimes becomes its vice. The details of the argument are so densely delivered, the thickets of information so tightly clustered, that for a student reader, at least, it would make distinctly heavy going, and would need additional commentary from an instructor to handle. There are also from time to time allusions to concepts (Fordism, post-Fordism) or conceptual approaches (the *régulation* school of political economy) that go unexplained and unelaborated, which would equally make the argument difficult to follow properly for readers less than expert already in the field.

Notwithstanding this drawback, the book's particular merit is to link together telecommunications and broadcasting issues, resolutely eschewing the spurious 'culture vs. infrastructure' division of academic labor that has muddied overmuch published research in the field. The analyses of European Union broadcasting policies (ch. 4), and of the struggles of 'civil society' initiatives to establish the public's interest in global communication policy outcomes (ch. 6), are well handled. The international variety of the changes entailed in the globalization process is given due weight in the book's illustrations and tables.

The original contributions assembled in the *Global Communications* reader edited by Chakravartty and Zhao consist of comparative case-studies, rather than the global overview of communication policy provided in the text just reviewed. They spread pretty widely around the planet, focusing in Asia upon China, India, Singapore, the East Asian region, and Afghanistan (Zhao, Chakravartty, the late and sadly missed Soek-Fang Sim, Koichi Iwabuchi, and Sunera Thobani); in Europe on Russia, and the EU (Olessia Koltsova, Katharine Sarikakis); in the Americas on Venezuela, and on U.S. Spanish-language TV (Robert Duffy & Robert Everton, Mari Castañeda); in Africa on Ghana, and on the sub-Saharan nations at large (Boatema Boateng, Arthur-Martins Aginam); and in the so-called 'Middle East' on Arab Reality TV, and on the Internet in the smothered Palestinian occupied territories (Marwan Kraidy, Helga Tawil Souri). These studies are grouped under three headings: the State and Communication Politics in Multiple Modernities (China, Russia, Singapore, EU, Venezuela); Embedded Markets and Cultural Transformations (East Asia, Ghana, Arab region Reality TV, U.S. Hispanic media); and Civil Society and Multiple Publics (films about contemporary Afghanistan, advocacy media NGOs in sub-Saharan Africa, Palestine, India).

It is rich fare, and thus very hard to summarize adequately in the course of a review. As is frequently the case, not all the contributions can be made to fit within the confines of the categories provided, but frankly this is not of great moment in this instance, as each of the studies is a worthwhile contribution to our knowledge, and the whole reader is easily imaginable as a very stimulating course text. Its sub-title — *Toward a Transcultural Political Economy* — reasserts the conceptual framework of the first book reviewed here, and in so doing moves beyond the Cultural Studies/Political Economy divide that was for so long the occasion of a ritual lament, but beyond which, for quite a while, rather few researchers tried seriously to advance. This collection provides some very valuable materials for that task, though not all the contributors engage as systematically as others with the conceptual issues involved in a transcultural approach.