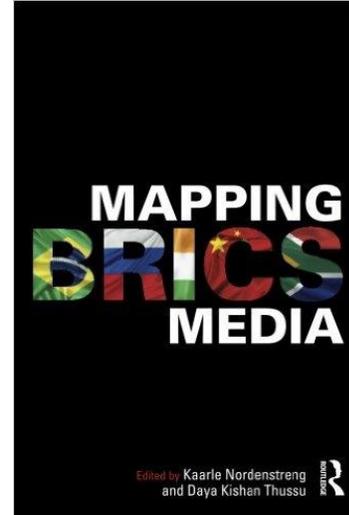


Kaarle Nordenstreng and Daya Kishan Thussu (Eds.), **Mapping BRICS Media**, Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2015, 268 pp., \$155.00 (hardcover), \$41.95 (paperback).

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As an attempt to understand media in some of the world's most powerful non-Western countries and as a preview of studies yet to come, **Mapping BRICS Media** is a welcome addition to literature on media studies. Although the work falls somewhat short of its claim to be comprehensive, it heralds a valuable comparative project, being the first of four volumes on media systems in BRICS countries (scheduled to publish in the near future). This volume also provides a helpful look at elements of the media system in each country in the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) constellation and provides useful perspectives on ways to approach further research.



This edited collection will prove useful to many, especially those looking for comprehensive but concise overviews of the current and historical states of the mass media in Brazil, Russia, India, China, or South Africa. The volume is organized into three sections. The first section brings together four authors with different attitudes about the utility of the BRICS concept, the second provides historical and contemporary overviews of the media system in each country, and the third groups three comparative perspectives on BRICS. Of particular interest are section II's factual overviews of the media system in each country. In sections I and III, the volume ventures further into theoretical territory, where it sometimes falls flat. The ideas presented, however, are engaging; together with the overviews of each country, they should prove particularly useful to scholars preparing to embark on their own studies of a BRICS country's media system. It would also serve a valuable purpose as an overview text for a graduate seminar or an excerpt source for advanced undergraduates.

In the first section of the volume, authors problematize the utility of the BRICS concept, offering a range of possible conclusions. Jyrki Käkönen examines the coherence of BRICS as an international actor by examining the policy-related actions of the group, characteristics of individual countries, and internal coherence (or lack thereof). He concludes that BRICS is "an institution" on the world stage, but that it does not currently have enough internal coherence to present a challenge to the existing Western-centric international political realm. He suggests that, in part, this is because competition among members—particularly India and China—prevents the countries from presenting a united front. Colin Sparks likewise concludes that although they share similarly high levels of corruption, BRICS nations are more different than similar. He primarily examines the respective media systems to support his conclusion, including data on press freedom, advertising spending, and Internet usage. Yuezhi Zhao and Joseph Straubhaar are somewhat more optimistic in their assessment of BRICS. Zhao suggests that although the countries have

failed to accomplish some concrete goals, such as a plan to build an undersea cable system that would circumvent U.S. control and provide Internet access to member countries, they are positioned to potentially gain power as "the U.S.-dominated old order" unravels (p. 83). Straubhaar approaches the topic from a cultural and political economic perspective, borrowing Arjun Appadurai's globalization "scapes" categories to examine the similarities and differences among BRICS nations (Appadurai, 1996). He concludes that the hegemonic power of BRICS is largely a matter of perspective. The countries may look disconnected and "emerging" from the perspective of the wealthy, core countries of the international political scene; in contrast, BRICS may look established and cohesive to smaller developing countries.

In the second section of the book, the media system of each country is presented by authors who are, for the most part, based in the respective countries. This is a valuable choice, as it suggests that the authors might bring personal as well as scholarly experience to bear in describing their media systems. The presentation strategy varies by country, which might make it difficult to use these descriptions to explicitly compare the media systems but also highlights potentially meaningful substantive differences across the systems. The Brazilian media system is examined from a historical perspective that emphasizes changes in ownership and legal context, with the authors suggesting three distinct historical periods of media patrimonialism and overlapping historic shifts in ownership and legal context as the media democratized from the 1960s to the 2000s. The Russian media system is examined primarily through the shift from the Soviet to the post-Soviet system and is heavy on details of specific media outlets, including readership and viewership estimates and names of outlets. The chapter also touches on the "complex" media-state relationship, suggesting this looks nothing like the Anglo-American media-state relationship. India's media scene is presented in terms of audience, income, and advertising comparisons between specific mediums in the country and between India and other BRICS countries. China's media is discussed in terms of historical periods from decolonization through a politically controlled phase, a development-priority phase, and the current grassroots justice-oriented phase (dating back to 2003). The latter phase owes its power to the Internet, which provides a platform for disadvantaged groups and other grassroots voices to sidestep government power, the authors suggest. Finally, South Africa's media system is examined from apartheid to the present, with sections devoted to print and broadcasting, along with online media.

The book's final section brings together three perspectives on comparative analysis of BRICS media. The first uses survey data to synthesize characteristics of BRICS journalists in comparison with each other and with the global community of journalists. The authors suggest that some common characteristics are shared among journalists in BRICS countries but that more work is needed to understand these workers. The second examines the flows and contraflows of media capital among BRICS countries to show that many of the countries in this group have media flows to and from each other. The volume's final chapter discusses the impact of digital media on BRICS countries, relationships, and media systems.

Several elements of this volume provide a welcome addition to the discussion of media and media systems outside the Western world. Anyone embarking on a research project based in a BRICS country will find the factual summaries of each country's media system to be a helpful resource, and the four perspectives in section I suggest several valuable theoretical frameworks for analyzing these

systems. In addition, the editors have chosen to incorporate a preponderance of voices from the communities studied, contributing to a much-needed diversification of voices in academia, particularly among scholars extending the geographic scope of Anglo-Eurocentric media studies. The majority of media system analyses in Part II were written by scholars working in the countries they write about, and nearly two thirds of the authors hold positions in BRICS countries, according to the volume's front matter. This contextual familiarity with the media systems lends this volume an important perspective on the respective media systems and provides a good example for scholars to emulate in the future.

Nevertheless, the volume suffers from a sometimes scattered approach that manifests through lack of clarity in theoretical grounding and use of terminology and from a variegated approach to media systems analysis that some scholars might find frustrating. Some might find, for instance, that the lack of uniformity across media system overviews provides an incomplete picture of comparative work building on these analyses. The analyses individually provide helpful information, but scholars would likely find it necessary to include additional data to construct complete, comparative pictures of the media systems discussed.

In addition, the editors suggest they will engage with theoretical frameworks useful to study BRICS media. In the introduction, they share a plan to shed light on the question of which paradigms and theoretical frameworks can best make sense of the reality of media growth in non-Western countries. In this respect, the volume falls short. Authors in Part I engage with BRICS from various theoretical standpoints, but do not fully explore the promise or pitfalls inherent in those approaches. Although the book is more or less premised on the concept that there is some practical and theoretical value in grouping BRICS countries together in study, the included chapters do not make that claim compellingly. This is evident, for instance, in the imprecise use of terminology in several chapters. Chapter 1 proposes "to try to find out whether BRICS really is an organization for advancing the collective interests of the emerging states or whether it is more an institution used by its members for advancing their individual interests" (p. 26). This use of "institution" and "organization" as interchangeable terms blurs an important theoretical distinction between two concepts that could both provide valuable insight into the functions of the BRICS entity. Institutional theory and sociology of organizations have been introduced in studies of mass media processes and organizations in the Western world, and could prove helpful (or unhelpful in interesting ways) in discussions of BRICS as well—for instance, perhaps BRICS is best seen as a set of institutional ideas that have not coalesced into a strong organizational form. However, this possibility is not addressed, nor are other theoretical perspectives highlighted effectively. Other concepts that would have benefited from further exploration and problematization include the use of Appadurai (1996)'s scapes dimensions and a discussion of flows and contraflows. Both of these concepts present potentially valuable theoretical perspectives on BRICS media systems. In particular, chapter 11 introduces the concepts of flows and contraflows differently from their traditional meanings of *contraflows* as media flows from the periphery of production toward the center; instead, "contraflows" are discussed in the context of South-South media flows within BRICS nations. This reconceptualization presents problems and promise; both are worth exploring in greater detail than that undertaken in this work.

*Mapping BRICS Media* provides a concise overview of media systems in and between BRICS countries and engages with some theoretical perspectives on global south media systems. It falls short of

its promise in the area of theoretical engagement, but critical readers will find pathways forward to pursue such goals themselves.

#### **Reference**

Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.