

Global Media Journal

German Edition

Book Review

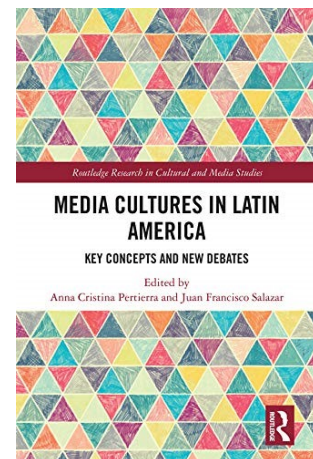
Media Cultures in Latin America. Key Concepts and New Debates

Pertierra, Anna Cristina & Salazar, Juan Francisco (eds.) (2019): Media Cultures in Latin America. Key Concepts and New Debates. New York: Routledge. 208 pages. ISBN 9781138353954.

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To cite this article: Santos, Augusto & Cazzamatta, Regina (2021). Review: Pertierra, Anna Cristina & Salazar, Juan Francisco (eds.) (2019): Media Cultures in Latin America. Key Concepts and New Debates. *Global Media Journal – German Edition*, 11(1).

This publication revises and broadens the current global comprehension of Latin America media and cultural research, pointing out how scholars in the region have developed a distinctive way to approach media practices. The book is an invitation to deepen our knowledge of historical and epistemological approaches from the Latin American research tradition, in which the interchange between media and culture takes the centre stage. Chapters one to four, the first part of the volume, present the theoretical concepts that will permeate the following sections, focusing on the critical mediation's idea while offering perspectives beyond traditional positivist views. The second part explores media activism cases related to decolonial thinking based on more hermeneutic and anthropological approaches.



Several developments have shaped the international academic community's understanding of Latin American media research – e.g. the consolidation of cultural studies around the 1980s; the movement for social change of the 1990s, and the spread of community and alternative media at the dawn of the new millennium, as

clearly pointed out by Pertierra, Salazar and Valdez in their introductory chapter. The authors lay the groundwork by discussing how and why Latin America set in motion such a particular method to approach media and cultural studies. They highlight the thematic interconnections among the chapters, along with presenting important intellectual considerations from the region. However, despite a growing interest in Latin American conceptual developments such as the notion of mediation proposed by Martín-Barbero or the idea of García Canclini's hybrid cultures, the authors claim that the broader range of Latin America intellectual production is still not reasonably recognised in other world regions. Among other reasons, such as the prevalence of Western perspectives in the field, this is because most of these studies have not been published in English but in Spanish, which restricts access to academic discussions in Latin America.

The vital concept of mediation pervades the entire volume. Grounded in the Latin American tradition, it does not present the phenomenon solely as intermediation, mediatisation or an attempt to create a more mediated society. Nor does it explain mediation as a link between producers and viewers, as observed by Rincón and Marroquín (chapter 2). The scholars open the book with an analysis of the mediation notion from a regional stance (i.e. strongly marked by authors such as Manuel Martín Serrano, the Spanish-Colombian Jesús Martín Barbero and the Mexican Guillermo Orozco Gómez). The cornerstone of this chapter is the concept of mediation proposed by Barbero, a crucial reference for the field of media and cultural studies inside and outside Latin America. In particular, the authors accurately observe that debates on mediation tend to overlook the fact that this concept is also rooted in the realm of politics. In this vein, based on Barbero's perspective, they suggest that "mediation is the articulation of the mass-mediatised on three levels—with popular, ancestral, and Indigenous cultures—from a perspective that enables political activists, social movements, and territorial disputes" (p.29).

The notion of hybridity, another crucial theoretical aspect that marks the Latin American research tradition, is critically reviewed by Heriberto Yépez (chapter 3), who explores the historical origins of the concept, later developments and discusses its critical neo-colonial characteristics. The author criticises the apprehension of the postmodern and neoliberal contextualisation of Néstor García Canclini's prominent theory of hybrid cultures for disregarding circumstances of colonial relations, ignoring the processes of violence, deprivation or even the official appropriation of the transcultural. Based on analyses of contemporary border aesthetic in Tijuana, on the US-Mexico border, the author proposes a shift from hybridity to what he describes as 'garbology', an approach oriented no longer to the register and classification of the diversity of cultures and identities but the "management of the waste and ruins of others" (p.34).

Also oriented toward Canclini's theory of hybrid cultures – in which artists may find opportunities for their productions without necessarily surrendering to the elite prospects and capitulating to the capitalist logics – Radakovich and Pertierra

(chapter 4) reconsider the meaning and usage of the notion of popular culture in a profoundly transformed Latin America. Their chapter is equally an example of mediation as a framework for better comprehension of the articulation between types of culture, i.e. mass, popular and political cultures. Popular culture evolved due to the interplay between cultural managers, audience, cultural organisations, elites, the cultural industry and regional groups. Nowadays, popular culture is not exclusively associated with popular classes anymore since all social strata have enthusiastically accepted and welcomed it. However, the author demonstrates how adjustments and compromise were necessary to obtain the higher classes' esteem in popular expressions such as carnival, cumbia funk or tango.

From chapter 5, the main thread of the collection is media activism. Against a backdrop of long-standing structures of oppression and systemic exclusion in the region, communication technologies have enabled the creation of various forms of resistance. Coupled with this, Latin America's media cultures are significantly developed in response to the public invisibility of marginalised groups. This is because, in many countries, media systems are characterised by the dominance of media oligopolies and the prevalence of elite-oriented discourses. Consequently, mainstream media fail to represent the region's diversity of voices. Rodríguez and Alfaro (chapter 5) illustrate this scenario by bringing to light the case of radio soap operas in Pamplona Alta, Peru, which have enabled women from poor communities to exchange knowledge. The author relates this project to the liberating education concept developed by the Brazilian philosopher and pedagogue Paulo Freire. According to him, marginalised citizens are deprived of their cultures in that they assimilate the voice of dominant classes and discredit their own communities. Thus, communication should act as an antidote against this process, helping people triumph over alienation, segregation and voicelessness.

The construction of counter-hegemonic spaces of communication also encompasses media practices centred on memory activism. As Kaiser (chapter 6) discusses, communication and artistic movements have produced memorials to bridge past and present from a decolonised perspective. Hence, they focus on personal accounts, usually ignored by official narratives and mainstream media, to recall episodes of exploitation and injustice, such as the human rights violations committed by authoritarian regimes in power in the majority of Latin American countries throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Also essential in this context of resistance is the indigenous people's struggle to make themselves heard and seen. Magallanes-Blanco and Treré (chapter 7) rightly stress that digital platforms have enabled them to extend the reach of their demands and to form transnational networks of activism. In this vein, Salazar and Córdova (chapter 8) draw our attention to the cross-border networks of indigenous producers engaged in creating and distributing movies and documentaries to echo demands for territorial and cultural recognition. Another case in point is the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). As Ferron (chapter 9) argues, after en-

joying constant and positive attention from the Mexican press, the radical movement lost its 'newsworthiness' in response to constant criticism from the EZLN's spokesperson regarding the lack of pluralism within the country's media sphere. Therefore, this led to, first, the creation of their own media outlets and, second, the development of a transnational network of activists committed to distributing the group's messages. Ferron pertinently observes the contribution of supporters, who were not part of the state of Chiapas, the indigenous cradle, in bringing the Zapatistas' agenda overseas. These outsiders helped by offering their 'cultural capital' – e.g. intercultural and linguistic competence – to intermediate the cross-national communication and elevate the global visibility of the movement.

Citizens engaged in alternative media practices in Latin America also tackle imposed Western understandings of the world. In other words, these citizens oppose colonised knowledge. As Coryat (chapter 10) debates, this is visible in the 'eco-territorial turn' promoted by social movements whose actions are infused, for instance, with the concept of 'Buen Vivir'. This notion derives from the Quechua culture and, in essence, emphasises the centrality of nature for the common good. Indeed, the types of knowledge that constitute the 'eco-territorial turn' draw on Southern epistemologies as they challenge traditional/colonial/destructive models of extractions.

In sum, as the editors themselves acknowledge, the book of course does not cover the broad diversity of media cultures in Latin America. However, this does not diminish its valuable contribution. In particular, the collection helps catalyse the de-Westernisation and decolonisation of media and communication studies. For example, the book assembles updated perspectives on theoretical frameworks developed in Latin America. Besides this, it brings a compilation of remarkable media practices developed in the region, which have given rise to regional, national and transnational alternative spaces of public debate, representation and collective learning. Moreover, considering that media and communication literature produced in Latin America is published largely in Spanish and Portuguese, it matters a great deal that this book is available in English. In fact, this helps to popularise Latin American media studies/media concepts outside Latin America. Lastly, we agree with Nick Couldry when he writes in the afterword that this compilation represents "a different way of listening to the world and its complexities, one that instead of starting from the narratives of big institutions and what 'ordinary people' do with the productions of large-scale power, listens for other voices and forces in the social terrain" (p. 186). Thus, the unique intersection of theory and practice presented throughout the chapters is an invitation to rethink the directions of our field of study.