

Book Review

Media Governance: A Cosmopolitan Critique

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Ana Bizberge

Author information:

Dr. Ana Bizberge is Professor at Universidad de San Martín and Universidad de Buenos Aires in Argentina. She is also a researcher at Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET) [National Council for Scientific and Technical Research], affiliated with the Centro de Estudios en Industrias Culturales [Cultural Industries Center] at Universidad de Quilmes. Her research interests include audiovisual policy and digital transformation, Internet governance, and digital rights.

For more information: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8267-4700>

Email: anabizberge@gmail.com

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Media Governance: A Cosmopolitan Critique is an invitation to question the dominant view (Western canon) on media governance with the aim of moving forward towards a methodological proposal (cosmopolitan iteration) of knowledge building from a decentralized, peripheral and polyphonic approach.

The book, brilliantly edited by Sarah Ganter and Hanan Badr, takes inequality as a starting point and places it at center stage to encourage a conversation about the scope and limitations of the concept of media governance through the discussion of national and regional cases. The underlying idea is the academic work on the transformations of the media landscape in the context of digitalization and global Internet platforms from the plurality perspective, that is, with the objective of generating conditions for the decentralized recognition of knowledge.

The book consists of 14 chapters organized along three themes: the epistemological and ontological deficiencies in the use and adaptation of media governance; the criticism and ambivalences of researchers in the use of the concept of media governance; and the perspectives and new conceptualizations. Based on this structure, there are at least three aspects that I would like to highlight: the scope of the object of study; the key topics; and the methodological proposal.

First, the approach to the media is understood in a broad sense that includes “new” and “old” media, as well as their relationship with institutional frameworks, regulatory traditions of each country and region and the academic traditions that are brought into dialogue.

Secondly, it is important to pay attention to the topics. Questions such as power relations, sovereignty, identity, inequalities, the role of national and global state and corporate actors, the local specificities of global problems, the dynamics of participation, among other aspects, are cross-cutting to all the chapters.

More specifically, the chapters included in the first part of the book that address concepts and epistemology offer alternative approaches to media governance. For example, Sanjay Asthana suggests the idea of “cosmopolitan media and information commons” (p. 16) to distance himself from the dominant conception of media governance. Naomi Sakr focuses on the non-visible and informal mechanisms in the process of policy making and implementation to understand the mechanisms in which the suppression of voices occurs in Arab countries. For his part, Rodrigo Gómez explains the limitations of the media governance approach in Latin America, arguing that these are countries with young democracies. On the other hand, he argues that approaches such as that of political economy of communications have made it possible to better analyze which interests are mobilized in the context of global capitalism and which perspectives are marginalized. Judith Pies emphasizes the importance of making comparative analytical efforts that are sensitive to national contexts, hence she proposes the concept of media accountability instead of media governance.

The second part of the book addresses the ambivalences of the concept of media governance mainly through national cases (Nigeria, Brazil, Egypt, Korea). Ufuoma Akpojivi calls for cosmopolitan media to reflect the lived realities and experiences of Nigerian citizens through robust engagement among media actors. In their study of fake news in Brazil, Afonso de Albuquerque and Lucineide Magalhães de Matos observe a new regulatory model based on the principle of media governance whereby different actors (media, philanthropic foundations, social media platforms, universities, the judiciary) reclaimed the role of public speech regulators, especially in social media, justifying their authority in technical terms. However, the authors warn that, “at a practical level, the exercise of this power revealed a political bias against not only far-right disinformation agents but also the left-wing alternative media” (p. 140). Rasha Allam argues that the limitation of importing Western models and concepts in a country like Egypt lies in the fact that the country has not yet passed the transition phase and is experiencing a tension between the push to transition and a neo-authoritarian pull that is reflected in the media system, under full or partial government control or interference. Lastly, Hyejin Jo and Dal Yong Jin argue that the trend of platformization in Korea is an effective way to expand the cultural dominance of the West, facilitated by foreign media companies.

The chapters in the third part of the book address new perspectives of study in the context of the Internet. Hong Shen argues that nation states remain a central actor in the international communication ecosystem. On the other hand, María Soledad Segura and Alejandro Linares highlight the unequal power relations between state, global, corporate and civil society actors in the policymaking process. They highlight the centrality of the state and social mobilization in limiting the capture of communication policies and participatory institutions by political and economic elites in Latin America. Trust Matsilele and Bruce Mutsvairo analyzed the use of social media by political elites during election campaigns in South Africa and how the enactment of new laws on social media and other online platforms threatens the survival of small parties, the possibility of mobilization and legitimate political debate. Preeti Raghunath proposes the Deliberative Policy Ecology (DPE) approach for the analysis of the emancipatory public policy making process, with the aim of generating parity of voices. She concludes that the influence of media governance and the DPE approach will lead to sustainable media governance “rooted in openness and deliberation, enabling voice parity, espousing and making way for plural norms and rationality, and the co-existence of a multiplicity of perspectives and praxes” (p. 278).

Finally, Sarah Ganter and Hanan Badr uniquely link the different chapters to arrive at their methodological proposal: moving from cosmopolitan critique to cosmopolitan itineration. A number of central elements are highlighted here: the recognition of inequality (of gender, class, race, geography) and disagreement as constitutive of knowledge sharing; the importance of addressing the media and ICT systems within the framework of the social relations in which they are produced and not as abstract

molds. In short, the authors propose a roadmap from the margins to generate a shift in the field of media governance studies.

There are several publications that address media systems through case analyses and comparative studies as complementary perspectives. In some cases, focusing on a particular aspect, for example, concentration; or proposing methodological strategies for researching media policy and economics, just to mention one of the possible approaches. In short, comparative approaches are essential to understand how certain traditions (conceptual, technological, regulatory, etc.) are adopted and to embrace new perspectives in order to promote processes of change. In this regard, the distinctive contribution of this book lies in the contextualization it offers on the limits and pitfalls of the field to address the problem, identifying an area of vacancy based on hard data. At the same time, the editors offer a masterful reading that not only threads together the chapters and their different approaches through the recognition of difference and inequalities, but also, they offer some guidance to move forward in the debate along different dimensions: scholarly, pedagogical and institutional.