

INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNICATIONS AND
POLITICAL PRIORITIES:
A Review of Recent Literature

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ELECTRONIC COLONIALISM: THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING AND COMMUNICATION. By THOMAS L. MCPHAIL. (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1981. Pp. 259. \$9.95.)

CRISIS IN INTERNATIONAL NEWS: POLITICS AND PROSPECTS. By JIM RICHSTAD and MICHAEL H. ANDERSON. (New York: Columbia University, 1981. Pp. 480. \$28.50 cloth, \$12.50 paper.)

COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE: CRITICAL STUDIES IN MASS MEDIA RESEARCH. Edited by EMILE G. MCANANY, JORGE SCHNITMAN, AND NOREENE JANUS. (New York: Praeger, 1981. Pp. 341. \$20.95.)

COMUNICACIÓN DOMINADA: ESTADOS UNIDOS EN LOS MEDIOS DE AMÉRICA LATINA. By LUIS RAMIRO BELTRÁN and ELIZABETH FOX DE CARDONA. (Mexico: Instituto Latinoamericano de Estudios Transnacionales, 1980. Pp. 176.)

LATIN AMERICAN MEDIA: GUIDANCE AND CENSORSHIP. By MARVIN ALISKY. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981. Pp. 212. \$16.50.)

CARIBBEAN MASS COMMUNICATIONS: A COMPREHENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY. By JOHN A. LENT. (Waltham, Massachusetts: Crossword Press, 1981. Pp. 152. \$20.00.)

The development of electronic technology in the last twenty years has made possible the rapid transfer of information from one end of the world to the other. But the possibility of a better-informed population using the acquired knowledge to improve the quality of their lives has not materialized as expected. The disparity of socioeconomic conditions between industrial and less-developed nations has been reinforced by the technological revolution in communication systems. The benefic consequences of this revolution are enjoyed only by the more advanced and prosperous nations. The books reviewed here deal with this problem in a worldwide context, but the review will focus on Latin America.

The media communications industry is one of the largest in the

world today, and its importance lies in the power it holds over human minds. After World War II, the United States was the only country to emerge intact, able to spare money and men and to apply the experience acquired in developing weapons to the new technology. As it became the undisputed leader of the free world, it began producing magazines, films, and television programs and exporting them all over the world. If the less-developed countries (who became the markets for the North American entertainment industry) did not welcome this trend, their objections were not heard. Also in the late 1940s, four major agencies—Associated Press International, United Press International, Agence France Press, and Reuters—located in New York, Paris, and London, established a monopoly on news distribution in Latin America and the rest of the world. Some independent news agencies were formed in Latin America over the years with varying degrees of success, but none had the money or the technological means to compete with the Big Four.¹

Latin Americans receive overwhelming amounts of U.S. and European news, but very little from their neighboring republics or the rest of the less-developed world. In turn, a minimum of news from Latin America is broadcast in the United States. News from the Western world is judged to be first priority, while news about Latin America deals mostly with government crises, natural disasters, or the “exotic.” This trend is consistent with the average North American’s manifest lack of interest in the outside world, but it nevertheless has been hard for Latin Americans to accept. U.S. newspapers and broadcasts are designed for the average American, who is usually ignorant about, or at least uninterested in, Latin America. Even those people who find Latin America “fascinating” have no understanding of the people behind the stereotypes. Moreover, the U.S. concept of what constitutes news is something out of the ordinary happening. Hence, Latin American news is always “bad news,” and stories about normal developments get very little coverage.

The hegemony of the U.S. media may be waning, as the less-developed countries—the Third World—have found strength in numbers and a forum in UNESCO. UNESCO was organized in 1946 with twenty member-states, grew by 1980 to 154, and is becoming an active force in international affairs. At the beginning, UNESCO was dominated by the big powers—England, France, and the United States. Now most of the new member-states are independent nations, former colonies who joined with other unaligned nations to become a majority. In 1970 they introduced a series of resolutions concerning what they perceived as a serious imbalance in the flow of news and cultural influence imposed by the Western world. Some Latin American countries are part of the non-aligned group and all are considered Third World, but they are not new nations, having been established between 1810 and 1820.² Nevertheless,

Latin American countries definitely are part of the information poor, both in what they receive and in the international image they project.

Several UNESCO meetings took place in Latin America in the seventies (Bogotá 1974, Quito 1975, San José 1976). Out of these meetings came a demand for a New World Information Order (NWIO) that caused much debate and some tensions within UNESCO. From that debate arose the idea of creating the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, named the McBride Commission after its chair, Sean McBride. The commission was formed in 1979 with sixteen members: Canada (Marshall McLuhan), Chile, Colombia (Gabriel García Marquez), Egypt, France, India, Indonesia, Ireland (Chair McBride), Japan, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Tunisia, the USSR, the United States, Yugoslavia, and Zaire. The commission labored for two years and produced a 484-page report that acknowledges problems and makes recommendations.³ The report makes a rather general statement of the obvious and has no claim to originality. It is a conciliatory document that advocates literacy as a goal and recommends the strengthening of communications systems in all countries and an increase in book production. One recommendation refers to the rights of women and minorities; another decries colonialism and religious and racial discrimination. A more significant recommendation addresses the need for research into the possibility of increasing the supply of paper.⁴

Thomas McPhail's *Electronic Colonialism: The Future of International Broadcasting and Communication* is a clear and objective account of the UNESCO debates over the adequacy of information around the world and the demand for a New World Information Order. McPhail examines the history of the press in Western countries and its principles of freedom and objectivity, which are highly valued in democratic nations. He offers the necessary background for understanding the incompatibility between the developed and underdeveloped countries. The roles of religion, economics, and libertarianism are evaluated, as well as the struggle that took place in England to end the licensing of printing and the 1735 landmark Zenger trial in New York that first brought attention to the issue of freedom of the press. He goes on to examine the development of the media since World War II and concludes that radio and television have failed as educational media and at this point are counterproductive for those who complain of cultural invasion and the imposition of foreign values.

Another problem that McPhail sees looming in the near future concerns frequencies for radio and satellites. A special agency of the International Telecommunications Union, the World Administration Radio Conference, has been meeting every twenty years since 1959 to assign frequencies routinely on a first-come, first-served basis. Such a system automatically benefits those countries with the technology to put

satellites in space, namely the United States and the Soviet Union. The numerous countries now represented in the International Communications Union are already making demands for more equitable spectrum allocations. According to McPhail, "countries with 10% of the world's population have control of 90% of the spectrum" (p. 152).

While McPhail admits that the distribution of communications media is unfair, he assigns no blame for the situation. He disagrees with the proponents of a NWIO who call for imposing controls on information. Although McPhail tries to be objective, citing studies of U.S. domination of the media and insensitivity to cultural patterns, his conclusions are negative: he cannot accept government control of media, which he sees as a tool for propaganda. Nor is he sympathetic to demands for the news media to support governmental goals for development or to enhance the cultural values of each country. In the tradition of Western scholarship, McPhail insists on a free press, which may not be completely value-free as it supports the status quo and instills and disseminates Western social values, but which is not afraid of dissenting opinions. (Latin Americans in the United States never fail to notice the impunity with which newscasters criticize and cartoonists ridicule the president and other political figures; they remark that something like that usually could not happen in most of their countries. The closing of the Argentine humor magazine *Tia Vicenta* for being disrespectful to President Onganía is one of many incidents illustrative of that lack of freedom [Alisky, p 175].) In a statement that contradicts his previous discussion on cultural dominance, McPhail suggests that to be able to rely on profitable foreign markets in the future, there is some need to develop a consumption mentality in the less-developed countries (p. 243). But a "consumption mentality" is precisely one of the main characteristics of North American industrial capitalism that Latin Americans find most objectionable.

In his conclusion, McPhail reflects rather somberly that as populations continue to grow, so will illiteracy, making large segments even more difficult to reach; moreover, prices will rise as the cost of energy, labor, and newsprint go up, and the numbers of foreign correspondents will have to be reduced, resulting in even less news from the less-developed countries. Yet he believes that the NWIO will not go away and that major changes will have to be effected in the media systems, although it remains to be seen whether the changes will aid international communication or restrict it. Ultimately, he believes, a law of communications conference might be helpful. McPhail's book is valuable because it explains a politically charged issue that has been ignored by the media and of which most people are totally oblivious. Each chapter includes bibliographical references; the book contains an author index, but a subject index also would have been helpful.

Jim Richstad and Michael Anderson have edited a collection of essays on the topic of international communication, *Crisis in International News: Policies and Prospects*. One indication of their evenhanded treatment of the issues is the two-part foreword consisting of "A First World View" by Stanley M. Swinton, Vice President and Director of the World Services Division of the Associated Press, and "A Third World View" by Narinder K. Aggarwala, Regional Information Officer for Asia and the Pacific of the United Nations Development Program. Both speakers are interested parties on opposite sides of the question. Swinton sees the solution to the problem of an unbalanced flow of news in the broadening of literacy and the expansion of media in the Third World, that is, more newspapers and more broadcasting stations focusing on educational, regional, and international developments. He also suggests that national news agencies post correspondents in neighboring countries and let the world agencies cover nations further afield. The large agencies, he believes, are eager to provide free training for journalists of developing nations because they would derive mutual benefits from it. Aggarwala, on the other hand, defends what he calls the New International Information Order (NIIO) from the attacks of the Western press who, he says, do not understand what it is, yet "hurl poisonous darts at NIIO . . . or UNESCO."

The book is divided into four parts entitled Global Perspectives, News and Information, Transnational News Agencies, and Evolving Directions in International Communications. Twenty-three essays examine the dissatisfaction of the Third World concerning communications, the major news agencies, and trends that may affect the future of communications. The articles have been well selected to cover and clarify all aspects of the controversy over "free" versus "balanced" flow of news. Another contributor, Mort Rosenblum, identifies a major problem with the transnational agencies (TNNAs) as being the usual lack of qualifications of journalists sent to Third World countries. He characterizes them as being young and inexperienced, ignorant of the language, and therefore overreliant on inadequate translators. Furthermore, they are unfamiliar with the customs and thought processes of the people they are covering. Rosenblum sees possibilities for improvement in cooperation and in the defense of free-flowing information.

In a chapter on transnational news agencies, Keith Fuller describes a reaction that seems to be one of wounded sensibilities. Agency spokespersons claim that their profits are minimal and that their aim has always been to be fair and unbiased in their reporting. They complain that finding out what goes on in Latin America in order to report it is a very difficult job. Frank Tremaine of UPI claims to "have no political bias, no point of view" (p. 278). He further maintains that newspaper editors and broadcasters select the news they want to use and do not use all that

is received on a given day. John Merrill makes the same point, adding that Third World editors employ the same criteria for selecting news as do U.S. editors, namely, they look for the negative and the sensational. He also points out that news of other Third World countries is sent to the newspapers but is not used. Merrill denies that changes are needed, maintaining that there will never be a balanced flow of news any more than there will be a balanced flow of water, oil, money, or food. Based on his experience as a journalism professor, Merrill suggests some areas of worthwhile research: first, a definition of what constitutes "news" in the Western and Third World countries; second, research to determine the flow of news, how much actually crosses boundaries; third, usage studies to establish what news actually is being used by the editors; and fourth, readership studies that would indicate the real value of news to readers.

Several other articles deal with the two major agencies that distribute television news: Visual News and UPI Television News. These corporations are largely British-owned and between them, they cover 90 percent of the globe. Jonathan King and Peter Marshall detail the magnitude of the operations and the process of selecting news and other programs. King states, "Without the economies of scale enjoyed by Visnews the operation would be prohibitive . . ." (p. 291). This view would guarantee that the less-developed nations would remain on the receiving end for a long time. King stresses the conditioning effect that London- and New York-based television shows have on other countries as they export British and American values and show a way of life that may seem desirable to emulate. He recognizes the power to influence that these transnational companies have, while simultaneously protecting their own profit interests in preserving the status quo.

One must admit that a certain degree of homogenization *is* inevitable at this point. As societies become urbanized, they strive to attain a certain standard of living; phones, refrigerators, and washing machines become necessities. It would be counterproductive to hold back modernization to keep cultures pure; however, manipulation in the name of freedom is highly objectionable. As José Manuel Arias Carrizosa, Minister of Communications in Columbia, said: "We cannot keep our people marginated from technology. We cannot tell them: everybody has cars, but as we do not have gasoline here, you will have to return to your horse" (Beltrán and Cardona, p. 113). In addition to its relevant studies, the Richstad and Anderson collection includes appendices containing six international declarations on these issues, as well as a useful bibliography and a list of key journals.

The collection of studies on *Communication and Social Structure: Critical Studies in Mass Media Research*, edited by Emile McAnany, Jorge Schnitman, and Norreene Janus, is eye-opening. These studies compel

even those who do not believe in a capitalist conspiracy to revise their opinions and to explore new possibilities regarding the issues covered. All the articles, which are written from a Marxist point of view, proclaim that the Western media establishment views the whole world as a market. If one accepts this premise, it is easy to see how U.S. media, when exported to less-developed countries, act as socializing mechanisms. By using psychology and behavior analysis, the media elicit the desired response. The book examines various aspects of society as to their susceptibility to media influences. It is divided into three parts: "Communication Theory and Critical Research," "Critical Research Issues in U.S. Mass Communication," and "Critical Research Issues in International Mass Communication." Particularly interesting to Latin Americanists are these chapters: "Economic Protectionism and Mass Media Development: Film Industry in Argentina" by Jorge Schnitman, "Advertising and the Mass Media in the Era of the Global Corporation" by Noreene Janus, and "Communication and Cultural Dependency: A Misconception" by Ingrid Sarti. Anyone interested in the negative possibilities of media should read "The Economic Context of U.S. Children's Television: Parameters or Reform?" by Armando Valdéz and "The Role of Popular Media in Defining Sickness and Health" by June Fischer, Oscar Gandy, Jr., and Noreene Janus.

Schnitman's study analyzes the effects of North American competition on the Argentine film industry. He correctly concludes that protection of the industry was essential, but determines that Perón's subsidies effected between 1946 and 1955 were not sufficient to provide incentives for better films. Schnitman observes that "many sectors of the Argentine middle class public preferred to watch old film reissues or other forms of entertainment altogether." But he neglects to mention that the Argentine middle class stayed away because they looked down on Argentine films, which they considered much less sophisticated than the American productions, and also because they were unsympathetic to the regime. This same attitude was apparent in regard to other subsidized industries from which the public would not buy domestic products because they preferred more expensive foreign goods. The Latin American middle class is attracted to American consumer goods and way of life, which it consequently imitates.

Ingrid Sarti's article takes a different approach in denying the theory of cultural dependency that is implicit in Schnitman's study. Sarti maintains that the "passivity" of dominated societies is being produced within these societies. Dependent ideologies, after all, serve the interests of the local ruling elites, whose economic dependence on the metropolitan countries fosters an equally subservient cultural outlook. Active U.S. cultural intrusion is not necessarily the only cause of the dependent situation. Sarti adds, "the local ruling classes are capable of dominating

their own societies without the aid of instruction from abroad." Schnitman fails to consider the connection between the affluent consumer groups in Latin America and the cultural values of the metropolis. In short, he neglects the crucial issue of cultural imperialism.

Another essay portrays the American health industry as being far removed from the ideal of healing, actually just another industry in need of a market. As scanners, artificial hearts, and interchangeable human parts are being perfected, this industry conducts the best-planned advertising campaigns to sell them. Fischer, Gandy, and Janus convincingly argue that news, human-interest stories, and television shows (like "Trapper John, M.D." and "General Hospital") are all means for introducing the viewer to the medical miracles available to save and prolong lives. Thus the media create a demand that a regular commercial could not accomplish. In her article on advertising, Janus describes the multi-million-dollar advertising firms operating in Latin America and attempts to prove that they actually have created a demand for convenience foods like instant coffee, canned soup, and frozen meals through advertising. She claims that they are changing traditional habits and making "good consumers" in the North American mold out of the Latin American public in order to serve their own interests. "In Latin America, using processed baby food represents a major cultural change from the practice of preparing such food at home. Moreover, food prepared at home for babies is usually more economical. To gain consumer converts, Gerber promotes its product as a service to parents" (p. 300). As noted before, this collection is a book that will open minds and provoke discussion. It is enhanced by numerous bibliographical references and an excellent index.

In *Comunicación dominada: Estados Unidos en los medios de América Latina*, Luis Ramiro Beltrán and Elizabeth Fox de Cardona approach the subject of media communications from the "imperialistic oppression" point of view. Very little original research is reflected here and the authors' heavy-handedness and sloganeering are somewhat disturbing. Drawing heavily on a large number of Marxist writings, they conclude that the United States dominates Latin America economically, politically, and culturally through broadcasting, publishing, film corporations, and news agencies. Citing research done in the early seventies, the authors make a good case for the manipulative possibilities of media advertising and entertainment. They maintain that those possibilities are exploited by the U.S. government in alliance with the big corporations for the purpose of colonizing Latin Americans. One means is to propose role models and life styles for imitation from early childhood through television programs such as "Plaza Sésamo" and comic books like *Pato Donald*;⁵ another is to create a demand for U.S. products through advertising and entertainment. The children's program Sesame Street, in existence

since 1969, seems to be a particular target of Marxist criticism. In the United States, it has won major awards and is considered by educators and parents to be an excellent way of teaching through entertaining.⁶ It is effective in teaching young children their first letters and numbers, as well as health and safety habits and open-minded attitudes toward different ethnic groups. Naturally, the show simultaneously instills in the children the norms and values of the society from which it originated and for whom it was created. It could also be argued that the harmful influence of Donald Duck has been largely exaggerated in that it has been read in Latin America by at least two generations and any ill effects are not apparent. A majority of television programs shown in Latin America, however, are imported from the United States, and the authors have a case in complaining about this pervasive influence. The fact that the North American public is equally manipulated, as studies by Valdéz and by Fischer, Gandy, and Janus in the McAnany collection attempt to show, suggests that some serious research is needed in that area. The Beltrán and Cardona work includes a bibliography, but no index.

Marvin Alisky's *Latin America Media: Guidance and Censorship* does not deal directly with the question of a New World Information Order. He addresses himself to freedom of the press (strictly in the sense of governmental noninterference). With this criterion in mind, he divides Latin American countries into three groups: those with "media guidance" (Mexico, Peru, and Brazil), those with "media freedom" (Venezuela and Colombia), and those with censorship (Cuba, Argentina, Uruguay and Chile, along with Central America).⁷ The problem of foreign ownership of media and cultural influence from the United States are barely mentioned. Although Alisky does not address the question of the NWIO or the McBride Commission, he does point out individual issues introduced at UNESCO meetings. One of these is the status of journalists, which CEISPAL (the Centro de Estudios Superiores de Periodismo para la América Latina, created under UNESCO auspices) is attempting to upgrade through professional training. Some attention is given to the UNESCO resolution encouraging government control of media, a move that he views negatively. Another issue is the proposal to establish regional news agencies, which was voted down in 1978. Alisky observes that local reporters usually have less access to government sources than do foreign news services, even though news agencies have long existed in larger countries, such as Argentina.

The overall picture that Alisky presents of freedom of the press in Latin America is grim. All Latin American nations have experienced some kind of censorship at some time, and freedom, when and where it exists, is tenuous. The fine distinction that Alisky makes between censorship and guidance has its merits. Bribes, caudillismo, and paper rationing are not as obvious as closings and arrests, but they are coercive

nonetheless. Alisky brings years of first-hand experience in journalism and teaching political science in Latin America to the subject. His book will be invaluable to students for its factual and statistical information on literacy and readership. Particularly well documented are the histories and vicissitudes of most newspapers and broadcasting stations in all Latin America. The book includes a list of bibliographical references and copious notes at the end of each chapter plus a useful index.

Although the Caribbean is not generally considered part of Latin America, John Lent's *Caribbean Mass Communications: A Comprehensive Bibliography* is of interest as it relates to mass communications and because it adds substantially to the sources on Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti. Its materials are arranged by area, within each area by country, and then subdivided by subject (such as films and advertising). The area divisions are Commonwealth Caribbean, French Caribbean, Netherlands Caribbean, and United States Caribbean. The Guyanas are included under the first three, while Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti are treated separately. A preceding general section lists works on Latin America as a whole and general works on the Caribbean. Entries are in English, Spanish, French, and Dutch; some are annotated. Included are books, chapters in books, journal articles, and unpublished papers. The bibliography lists 521 items under Cuba, 49 under the Dominican Republic, and 33 under Haiti.

The six books reviewed in this article address themselves to the crucial problem of cultural relationships between the industrial, highly technologized nations and the gradually awakening, but economically powerless, Third World. The works by McPhail and Richstad and Anderson describe the structure of international communications and attempt to give the reader an objective, value-free, and hence politically neutral analysis. The McAnany collection and the Beltrán and Cardona volume place politics and values center stage and provide a radical critique of the structure that the first set of authors dispassionately analyze. The implicit debate in such works is the debate between "is" and "ought," between things as they are, and things as they should or could be. Alisky's book makes no commitment and abstains from drawing controversial conclusions, but like the Lent bibliography, it will be of great value to those studying and researching international communications.

NOTES

1. Eleazar Díaz Rangel, *Pueblos subinformados: las agencias de noticias y América Latina* (Caracas, 1967). This study mentions fifteen agencies.
2. McPhail's Appendix A is a list of "Alignments of the Nonaligned" that is divided into three groups: radicals "generally leaning towards Russia or China" (Cuba), conservatives "usually tilting towards the West" (Argentina and Bolivia), and independents "remaining unaligned with any superpower" (Nicaragua, Panama, and Peru). This

- categorization leaves the remaining countries ungrouped. The data comes from *Newsweek*, 17 September 1979, p. 50. At the New Delhi meeting of the nonaligned in March 1983, Colombia and Ecuador were listed as members by *Latin America: Weekly Report*, 25 March 1983, with Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, and Chile listed as observers.
3. For an in-depth analysis, see McPhail, pp. 207–39, and Richstad and Anderson, pp. 380–427. The McBride Report also appeared as a book entitled *Many Voices, One World* (UNESCO, 1980).
 4. Alisky points out that regulation of scarce paper is one means that governments use to effect censorship of newspapers.
 5. Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic* (New York, 1975); and Armand Mattelart, “El Imperialismo en busca de la contrarrevolución cultural: *Plaza Sésamo*, prólogo a la telerrepresentación del año 2000,” in *Comunicación y Cultura* (Santiago de Chile) 1 (July 1973): 146–223 (cited by Beltrán and Cardona).
 6. Gita Jane Wilder, Gerry Ann Bogatz, and Samuel Ball, *The Sesame Street Generation: The Year After* (New York: Children’s Television Workshop, 1971).
 7. Alisky includes Costa Rica, a country that enjoys freedom of the press, as an exception in his chapter entitled “Censored Central America,” rather than putting it in the chapter with other countries that suffer no censorship.