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“Standing Out in a Crowded Field – The Global Media Anthology Turns 15.” *International Journal of Communication* 6 (2012): 390-395

Radha S. Hegde, **Circuits of Visibility: Gender and Transnational Media Cultures**, NYU Press, 2011, 336 pp., \$25.00 (paperback), \$9.99 (e-edition).

Rohit Chopra and Radhika Gajjala, (Eds.), **Global Media, Culture, and Identity: Theories, Cases, and Approaches**, Routledge, 2011, 280 pp., \$36.04 (paperback).

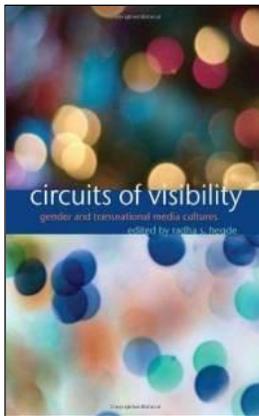
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Globalization anthologies have proliferated over the past 15 years, addressing such topics as media change, spatial disaggregation, and social crisis. In a troubled academic publishing market, these books make economic sense because they are relatively low-overhead productions (for the publishing company, not the editor!), distributing labor among the contributors. Furthermore, because these anthologies tend to group chapters by regional focus, they facilitate adoption for undergraduate media survey classes. If university instructors don't want to assign the whole book, they can always have it disassembled into customizable course readers, courtesy of the ubiquitous photocopying chop shop that has devolved into the bottom feeder of the copyright-clearance food chain.

There are, of course, more intellectually substantive reasons for the prominence of the global media anthology. At their best, these books demonstrate the benefits of collective academic research on media globalization over "flat world" platitudes. Yet media anthologies also can be prone to a pleasant but aimless globe-trotting, with chapters moving from place to place like a traveler in search of a destination. When this happens, wide-ranging collective academic labor can become a symptom of liberal internationalism rather than a critique of its shortcomings. Global media anthologies need to balance geographical coverage and thematic coherency. The two books under review here accomplish this task admirably.



Radha Hegde's edited volume, *Circuits of Visibility: Gender and Transnational Media Cultures*, focuses on the relation between global media networks and the production of gendered subjectivities. Hegde's ambitious and well-crafted introduction outlines the ways in which sexuality and gender are entangled in transnational configurations such as celebrity, immigration, activism, religion, fashion, and war. The framing of identity within these global assemblages maps across an array of visibilities: the arrangement of bodies and practices across space and in time; the transnational circulation of media images; and the very imagination of connectivity. The imperative of Hegde's volume is not simply to produce a gendered understanding of visibility, but to show how a gendered optic might render visible the structural inequities of globalization.

Circuits of Visibility is divided into four parts. The first, "Configuring Visibilities," traces the transnational routes and material process through which gendered forms become visible. The second part, "Contesting Ideologies," considers the gendered normativities that inform the

social experience of transnational belonging and exclusion. Part three, "Capital Trails," is more explicitly concerned with media technology, commodity circulation, and the question of how gendered subjects are immanent to the trajectories of transnational economic circulation. The fourth and final section, "Technologies of Control," examines the relationships between governmentality and gendered subject formation, focusing on alternative practices of citizenship.

With a variety of signs, commodities, and processes to draw upon, Hegde and her collaborators examine the economies of transnational labor that structure the exchange of bodies and knowledge, focusing on a tension between the celebrity and the migrant worker. Both are labor subjects made possible by global mobility, with one predicated on a kind of spectacularly visible work and the other on the invisibility of everyday labor.

Almost half of the essays in Hegde's anthology address the work of stardom, including Balkan "turbo-folk" divas, transnational *latinidad*, Islamic televangelism, and Bollywood icons. These essays show how the charismatic authority of Ceca, Salma Hayek, Aishwarya Rai, Angelina Jolie, and the Dalai Lama is legitimated by the global mobility of publicity and recognition. At the same time, our investment in the lives of celebrity fosters intense attachments that collapse public and private worlds. As Saskia Witterborn's essay on the Uyghur activist Rebiya Kadeer shows, these affective investments can effectively promote authenticity as a national cultural resource. Kadeer's strategic deployment of tropes of motherhood creates a collective form of intimacy that "reclaims domesticity as a location from which to articulate a politics of recognition" (p. 279). In this case, celebrity embodies a powerful affective politics capable of transforming the material conditions of dispossession.

The flip side to this production of celebrity authenticity is the emergence of Western star as global social activist. As Spring-Serenity Duvall shows in her indictment of celebrity humanitarianism, Angelina Jolie's use of her maternity as a qualification for her activist work reinscribes the gendered tropes of benevolent care characteristic of colonialism and its aftermath. Jolie's profligate commitment to transnational adoption, argues Duvall, "situates aid to foreign countries as rooted in individual adoptions of underprivileged children rather than in other forms of political activism" (p. 144).

In seeming opposition to the visibility that attaches itself to the labor of the famous is the invisibility of the subject who works behind the scenes. A number of chapters in *Circuits of Visibility* address these laboring subjects and the politics of difference that situates their location within transnational forms of exchange. For example, Jan Maghinay Padios' chapter shows how transnational migrant marketing frames the consumption practices of Filipinas working overseas. Here, advertising's rhetorical deployment of the "homeland" supports economic repatriation, and labor flows through a cultural logic of familial reconnection. In her chapter on an Indian high-tech outsourcing economy, Hegde locates media attention around the rape and murder of a young woman call-center operator within the sexualized visibility of night work. Here the eruption of sexual violence within what is touted as the egalitarian culture of transnational work shows how labor mobility is configured within a gendered technospace.

In these and other chapters, *Circuits of Visibility* deploys a dichotomy of laboring subjects to illuminate the uneven mobilities of transnational work that are enabled by racial and sexual normativities. One chapter, however, stands out in its reconciliation of this dichotomy, calling attention to the embodiment and imagination of transnational work in the figure of “the maid as metaphor.” Bringing together an understanding of sentiment, embodiment, and political economy, Wanning Sun’s excellent chapter on Filipina and Chinese domestic work frames a long-standing interest in Chinese subaltern labor within another fundamental contradiction. Legally disenfranchised and confined to the private household, the migrant maid remains segregated from the public domain of the city and goes unrecognized in labor law and transnational activism. Yet, despite this invisibility, the figure of the maid features prominently in media narratives and television dramas as a symbol of national industriousness and exploitation. In the television serial, for example, the maid functions as a *crossover* celebrity, embodying the contradictory aspirations that link China to the rest of the world. Commercial media’s role in the aspiration of transnational mobility that is predicated on social marginality suggests, as Sun puts it, that the “social-spatial imagination is as important as the physical act of border-crossing” (p. 209).

The contradictions of global displacement and the relationship between mobility and media is taken up in depth by Rohit Chopra and Radhika Gajjala’s edited collection, *Global Media, Culture, and Identity: Theories, Cases, and Approaches*. By examining how media shapes relations between place, culture, and identity, Chopra and Gajjala acknowledge major shifts in the direction of critical scholarship away from theoretical debates that were once dominated by developmentalist and cultural-imperialist paradigms in international communications research.

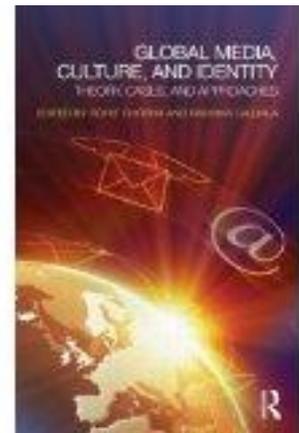
An early forerunner of development communication brought together communications and empowerment in Latin America in the 1940s. From these early roots in emancipation politics, development communication shifted to the discourse of emulation in its North American iteration after World War II. This U.S. uptake was informed by modernization theory, which claimed a central role for communication in the aspiration of the societies of the East toward the socioeconomic prosperity of the West. This civilizing agenda played a critical role in the institutionalization of mass communications in the United States. It also won the support of the Ford Foundation and other American organizations that set up communications infrastructure around the world.

Cultural imperialism inverted development’s ideological unipolarity. Emerging from radical social movements of the 1950s and 1960s, and rooted in a political-economic understanding of the structural dependency between the West and “the Rest,” the concept of cultural imperialism served as a powerful indictment of the one-way flow of global influence and imagination. In a shattering reversal, theorists of cultural imperialism showed how development was linked to the maintenance of global inequality rather than its resolution.

Clearly, development communications and cultural imperialism offered very different assessments of the modern world system. But for all their divergent politics and priorities, both traditions tended toward bifurcation as a master trope, ossifying the indigenous and the foreign into world-historical blocs.

The disciplinary intervention of *Global Media* is structured around the question of how critical research has responded to these postwar mass communications paradigms. This is clear in the editors' decision to bookend the work with short pieces by Emile McAnany and Daya Thussu, two key figures in the reconceptualization of media globalization. McAnany sees the decline of postwar paradigms of development and cultural imperialism as having had an effect on the broadening of intellectual inquiry, fostering "a democratization of diversity" (p. 233) in media scholarship. Similarly, Thussu sees more recent global media scholarship as informed by the reorientation of political and economic power to the G20 nations and calls for transformative accounts that acknowledge "a multipolar world no longer shaped by the West" (p. 234).

Rohit Chopra's introduction is a useful map to *Global Media*, illustrating the constitutive links between subjectivity, territory, and technology. As a whole, the book is diverse in scope, extending the conventional boundaries of media scholarship to such areas as public health and the pharmaceutical industry. For example, Cindy Patton's essay looks at the medical reporting industry and how online sources have contributed to disease modeling and epidemic monitoring. Many of the other chapters, however, are more explicitly concerned with communication technologies—primarily television and advertising, with film and music playing significant but supporting roles. The book also offers a sustained engagement—across several chapters—with the state of the written word, from medical reporting, overseas newspaper printing, and film subtitling to other forms that stretch globalization back to 19th-century literary production. In this way, the book extends the reach of the field beyond traditional considerations of textuality.



Across a range of textual practices, the linkages among the chapters in *Global Media* come across as somewhat implicit, but because each essay begins with an extended abstract that clearly identifies its intervention, the volume is protected from the thematic disaggregation that characterizes other works in the field. This thematic coherence is facilitated by the distinctions between the three sections of the book: "Geographies and Currents of Global Media and Identity"; "Entanglements of the Global, Regional, National, and Local"; and Digital Mediations in the Global Era." The third section, on digital media, is especially innovative.

This "digital mediations" section approaches the digital in a broad way, cutting across historiography, textuality, and institutional transformation. For example, Paul Arthur looks at the ways in which digital media has transformed the discipline of history, creating new forms of research, collaboration, and assessment that are partially located in new fields such as digital humanities but animated by long-standing conversations in the discipline. Perhaps the most innovative chapter in this section is Gajjala, Anca Birzescu, and Franklin N. A. Yartey's examination of online microfinance. Using digital gaming and social networking paradigms, the authors convincingly show how the traditional hierarchies between lender and borrower are reembedded in new social relations, even as "cybertyping"

prejudices reinscribe racist typologies of poverty and consumption developed in historical forms of institutional lending.

Differences in priority and emphasis between *Circuits of Visibility* and *Global Media, Culture, and Identity* can be appreciated by looking at essays that take on similar objects of inquiry. For example, individual essays in both volumes analyze *The World* (2004), the critically lauded Chinese film directed by Jia Zhangke. Set in a famous Beijing theme park and concerning the lived reality of park workers, Jia's film addresses the complexities of mobility and social attachment in Chinese life after globalization. In *Global Media*, Hudson Moura's "Subtitling Jia Zhangke's Films" discusses *The World* in terms of film and video intermediality, posing a technological question about medium specificity. In *Circuits of Visibility*, Sun's essay, "Maid as Metaphor," opens with a discussion of the film's representation of labor migration and national integration, focusing on the friendship between a Chinese and Russian park worker. Moura's essay is concerned with technology and discursivity, focusing on the movement between words, while Sun is more interested in transit and mobility and a movement between spaces. There are interesting parallels between these two approaches to the film: the first focuses on translation between different media, and the second addresses the untranslated words of support that draw the two park workers together. But with their respective focus on the technology and sociality of communication, the essays illustrate the slightly different priorities of the volumes that house them.

Despite the differences, the anthologies also have much in common. Both focus on comparative methods that usefully complicate the local, national, and global as stable frames of reference. Both books prioritize textual analysis over content analysis; both are concerned with representation and practice; and the two volumes work through ethnography and historical methods as well. Both employ the idea of the circuit as an aestheticized form of imagining global circulation while also invoking the more machinic tropes of network and assemblage as a way to signal the disjunctures between center and periphery in contemporary global power. Furthermore, many essays in both books are animated by an interest in disentangling the status of the media object from the ideas of structure and agency that informed the once-ubiquitous neologism of "glocalization."

It would have been useful for the editors to assess, rather than employ without significant comment, the contemporary frameworks that inform much work on global media, from Manuel Castells' "space of flows," Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities," and Arjun Appadurai's various "scapes"—especially since these paradigms feature strongly in many essays. What accounts for the resiliency of these approaches other than that they resulted from transformations in various disciplinary formations, ranging from economic geography and sociology to literary history and anthropology? The editors also might have focused more strongly on contemporary globalization work that draws on the Latourian imperative to "follow the thing," building on 30 years of historical work in the sociology of culture and more than a century of anthropological inquiry into circulation as practice. Yet neither of the anthologies spends much time thinking about material culture as a way to trace the commodity in circulation. A notable exception is Minoou Moallem's excellent essay on the gendered labor of Persian carpet production and distribution in *Circuits of Visibility*, which shows how the trade in colonial collecting was measured by the development of a connoisseur's knowledge and the production of expertise via models of intuition and

appreciation. In Moallem's account, the Orient does not simply name a desire or a destination, but a knowing made possible by seeing, a mode of perception achieved through a means of training.

There are a few other missed opportunities in these two anthologies. Given that both volumes are invested in demonstrating how media shapes identity and the experience of space, sport is curiously absent, as is an examination of social media and attendant claims on the political outside the conventional domain of citizenship. Media studies readers looking back on 2011 might expect to find material investigating how political activism was (or was not) enabled by social media technology in the Arab Spring or the Occupy Wall Street movement, but surely future anthologies in the pipeline will address these contemporaneous events.

It should be noted, in closing, that the editors of both books have engaged with South Asia in their own scholarship, focusing on India in particular. India is an interesting vantage point for transnational cultural studies to rewrite the developmentalist and cultural imperialist script, especially given that the country is often described as having skipped forward to the final chapter of the late modern (with catastrophic results for many involved). Once, globalization theorists declaimed the death of the nation-state, thinking that it would be ripped apart by capitalism's centrifugal and centripetal tendencies. But the "rise of India"—as referenced by many journalists, policy makers, and academics alike—has demonstrated the remarkable elasticity of the nation to accommodate what seemed an irresolvable tension between territory and circulation. In a welcome departure from these accounts, Hegde, Chopra, and Gajjala have, in their own work as well as in their editorial stewardship, rejected the unreconstructed nationalism that follows in the wake of such rapt fascination. Their more sober assessments of contemporary media globalization are a welcome addition to the field.

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