

GLOCALISATION
– ELECTRONIC MEDIA IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE –

HOLGER BRIEL
EDITOR

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Holger Briel
Nicosia,
March 2009

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, two contrary social movements have become ever more pronounced: On the one hand, an ever increasing globalisation (movement of people and goods, in media, in political and economic theory, etc), and on the other, a counter-movement towards the local and regional, in Europe perhaps best demonstrated by the EU regionalization efforts.

These two movements, however, are not as distinct and clear-cut as it might seem. To take up the above mentioned example of media, on the internet it is now possible to listen to over 5,000 radio stations worldwide. And yet, perhaps also as a reaction to this development, new and very local stations have begun to appear as well. While listeners hanker for news and culture from far away places, they also seem to want an anchor from which to reach out. This anchor, of course, is problematic. Communities, neighbourhoods and regions are fragile concepts and constructs, or to say it with Benedict Anderson, imagined. What we have, then, is a constellation in which the global and the local hang together and impact on and inform each other.

Cases in point are the south-eastern regions of Europe. Due to their geographic location, they have always been intermediaries between Europe and Asia. But there also exists a temporal aspect: after the fall of communism, they found themselves all of a sudden in a position in which they had to speed from isolation to integration, to embracing Western ideals (and modes of production and consumption) in order to survive in this new world order. This was far from easy and, in the case of former Yugoslavia, led to much bloodshed and human suffering.

Furthermore, important changes do not only take place any more in the big business and social hubs of the West such as Paris, London and New York, but they appear all over the globe. Conferences in Bali, in Nigeria, in Ochrid and in many other 'remote' locations weigh in heavily in this newly glocalised world. Undoubtedly, this is a positive development. However, one may not stop there. Many of the delegates at these conferences are still the same as they were when venues were only located in the West. Zygmund Bauman refers to them as the 'mobile global elites'. And yet, things are changing. Globalisation does have its surprising moments, as when media are taken up in

unprecedented ways by prosumers originally unintended; when the internet spawns whole new (il)legal business sectors in the backstreets of Lagos; or when Macedonia becomes the first country completely covered by WLAN.

To bring these to counter-running movements together, a new concept emerged about 20 years ago: *Glocalisation*, merging in ever varied ways the global and the local. And while some of its content is perhaps nothing new (after all, relations between the near and the far have always informed social behaviour), especially the newer communication venues have immensely sped up this process.

It is against this background that the articles selected for this book attempt to look at various aspects of this phenomenon of a deeply localized area confronted with the need of opening up quickly to the rest of the world.

The first chapter, *The Will to Media*, charts the many ways in which politicians and philosophers of the West have tried to understand and subsume The Balkans under older rubrics of rationalization (Habermas), an other heading (Derrida) and issues of place and space (Schlögl). It is the author's belief that neither of these approaches is sufficient in describing the local situation and that a certain medial performativity is necessary in order to push the boundaries of description beyond their present stale-mate. This performativity, at once medial and political would begin with Benjamin, but transcend his political fears in order to arrive at a lively and liveable debate.

Katerina Kolozova's *The Project of Non-Marxism: Monstrously Radical Concepts and Monstrous Representation* takes this view further and discusses François Laruelle's concept of non-Marxism as a stepping stone in overcoming old (-fashioned) dichotomies of Marxism and capitalism. She argues that Laruelle is instrumental in overcoming a theory-practise problem whose sublation would go beyond Marxist applications without giving up on Marx's ideals. In refusing the hegemony of thought over the 'Real', Laruelle's application of non-Marxism would permit liberation from the exigencies of localized neo-capitalisms and a practical reformulation of the 'labour force', in line with Negri and Hardt, into 'the poor'. This in turn would give rise to a whole new non-Marxist concept of agency.

Senka Anastasova's *The Text, the Subject of Narration and New Technologies of Communication: Creative Media* concludes the more theoretical part of this book. It recapitulates recent changes in the understanding of texts.

She demonstrates how we now have to understand texts within ‘the hyper-modern technosphere’, created by the pairing of decentralized postmodern texts and virtual reality. Building on Derrida, Senka Anastasova speaks of the ‘data subject’ who is the subject of data received and at the same time the creator of this data. This postmodern spectralized subject then attempts to understand these codes received, but can only do so taking ‘unpredictable digital points’ as her reference.

With Dona Kolar-Panov’s *What Future for Public Service Broadcasting in Macedonia?*, we enter the more applicative part of the book. Kolnar-Panov researches the state of Public Service Broadcasting in Macedonia by telling the story of its conversion from state broadcaster under the communist regime to public broadcaster under the particular conditions of today’s South-eastern European capitalism. It becomes clear that this transition was far from smooth and that its history up until now lays open the obstacles it faces in today’s climate where private stations have taken over much of its audience and where public funding is scarce. In particular, she is concerned with the lack of revenue received from the largely inefficient system of collecting the licence fee. She is further concerned with the move towards infotainment, something the private stations understand much better than the public stations and which further undermines the latter’s ability to compete. Lastly, Kolar-Panov comments on the newest challenge for public broadcasting, namely the erosion of a unified public sphere and the arrival of transnational media.

In *A Brief History of the Macedonian Blogosphere*, Filip Stojanovski charts the history of blogging in Macedonia from 2001 to 2006. He demonstrates that the Macedonian blogosphere subscribes to the long tail model of a few overarching blogs leading the way and comments on the interwovenness of older media with the new blogs. In sum, he sees the blogosphere as still lacking the critical momentum to be a major force in the public sphere.

N. Katrivesis and Nikolaos Panagiotou’s *Political Newspaper Advertising during the Greek Municipal and Prefecture Elections of 2006: The Case of Thessaloniki and Kastoria* charts the election processes in two northern Greek cities, Kastoria and Thessaloniki. It becomes apparent, that while new media have already begun exerting much influence on election campaigns in larger cities such as Thessaloniki and making for a modern campaign, print

media and rather older-fashioned advertising still dominate the pre-modern campaigns in smaller cities such as Kastoria.

In *From Imagining the Nation to Imagining the Diaspora: Trans-nationalism and Diasporic Greek Media*, Eleni Sideri addresses a particular aspect of Greek diaspora life: the print media of the Greek diaspora in Georgia. While charting the history of this particular diasporic press, its particular problems are elucidated. On the one hand, this kind of print medium attempts to further the cohesiveness of the diaspora with its 'homeland' in order to survive a local, overbearing culture; on the other, it cannot help but attempt to forge close ties also with the culture at hand. In a telling example, Sideri relates her experiences with a local seminar in which Greek concerns, and mostly those of the homeland, took precedence over local, diasporic concerns. However, she draws the conclusion that the study of diasporic media is a rewarding undertaking in that it allows for many parameters to come together and inform each other in ways that would otherwise not be possible, be they transnationalism, the local vs. the global, the production and consumption of media products in a very localised setting, etc.

Branislav Ondrášik's in-depth *Media Ownership: Dominance, Concentration, Pluralism and the Case of Central Europe since 1990* tells the story of the Western takeover of Eastern media after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Recurring to the theories of Hallin and Mancini, he is particularly interested in how different models of media ownership competed and are still competing with each other. In particular, Ondrášik examines the cases of Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland and concludes that within a very short time period, global information flows have engulfed the mediascapes of the countries under scrutiny and that foreign media ownership is now prevalent. While under communism all media were state regulated, today, newspapers and electronic media have split up from each other and largely address different clienteles. What he sees lacking, however, is a strong regulator who guarantees content (and ownership) plurality.

Lastly, in *Journalists as Dead Political Actors: Article 301 and its Effects on Freedom of Expression in Turkey*, Esra Arsan takes on the case of Turkish media and states that they still suffer from state interventions. In particular, Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code can be used as a blanket charge against journalism, as it threatens any journalist who is deemed to have 'denigrated

Turkishness' with any of her/his professional investigations with arrest. She cites the example of murdered journalist Hrant Dink, who had been imprisoned under this law and warns that the killing of journalists is quickly again becoming a political tool.

As can be seen from this very short summary, the topics of this book are as varied as the mediascapes of the countries discussed. And yet, all chapters share a wish for liberal public and private spheres in which humans can freely discuss their thoughts, fears and hopes. This wish for free and open communication is a wish at least as old as European civilizations, indeed going back to the ideal of the Greek *agora*. And at varied points in history, for very short moments, it seemed this exchange took place. Today, many but by far not all people are able to harness more media than ever before. But the media empire has struck back, itself harnessing people by its sheer size and conformity. It is the aim of this book to chart alternatives; alternatives not only in the number of various media consumed, but also *in the way* in which the same media are consumed. Plurality of form and content remains one of the pillars of the above cited free exchange of ideas. And while this book might not be able to do much, it at least demonstrates that many of the inhabitants of South-eastern Europe are not only on the way to language, as Heidegger stated, but on the way to the languages of understanding and communication.