

Book Reviews

Lee Artz, ed., *The Pink Tide: Media Access and Political Power in Latin America*. London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017. Bibliography, index, 209 pp.; hard-cover \$142, paperback \$41.95, ebook \$39.50.

This volume, edited by Lee Artz, professor of media studies at Purdue University, brings together media scholars from across the world who present case studies of communications experiences of Latin American Pink Tide governments. The Pink Tide is the common context for comparative analysis of role participation, civil society, ideology, populism, and power across five South American countries and in two regional overviews.

As Artz notes in the introductory chapter, Larry Rohter coined the term *pink tide* to refer to “a softer shade of progressive, even radical, politics” (2). From the 1998 election of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela through the mid-2000s, the vast majority of regimes in Latin America came to power through the electoral process with mandates to counter neoliberal economic policies, break the elite monopoly on political power, and develop more participatory forms of democracy.

Artz frames the case studies around the hypothesis that greater access to public media is a key defining characteristic of democracy. He asserts that “the conclusion for democratic media and political power is quite clear: the extent of the public’s direct access to its own independently produced media is a reliable measure of the level of democracy in any society” (xi). Thus media become an arena for struggle, where governments encourage social movements and citizens to work against commercial and corporate media, and a critical process for developing new cultural practices and social norms. The contributing authors argue that increased participatory democracy will increase public access to media, and they present valuable and fascinating accounts of innovative policy approaches and social movements for media democracy and collective communication rights.

The collection’s strengths are the general regional analysis combined with case studies, which present a variety of detailed accounts and varying levels of optimism for the Pink Tide regimes. Its weaknesses lie in the reality that, in the end, media reforms have not drastically changed the media landscape in Latin American countries, and the evidence of Internet blackouts and government filtering, for example, in Venezuela. The book also glaringly fails to consider the current troubling context of media and the press in a region that is struggling with violence against journalists and associated self-censorship. Additionally, the authors barely even mention social media, which could be an important arena for democratization of the media and for giving voice to the voiceless.

Artz is extremely, perhaps overly, enthusiastic about the Pink Tide objectives and the potential for democratizing Latin American media, but his co-authors are

more critical of recent media reforms in Latin America. They elucidate the challenges regimes and social movements have faced when confronting the hegemony of commercial media. Specific case studies examine Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Uruguay, and Venezuela, grappling with the issues of freedom of expression, media ownership, creating alternative media outlets, and redistributing media power. These chapters unveil a tension between communities' and grassroots movements' participation in media production and state control over media. The chapters present a mix of single case studies, comparative case studies, and regional analysis.

In relation to Venezuela, although George Ciccariello-Maher and Ewa Sapiezynska (chapter 2) claim that the Bolivarian process has given voice to many previously voiceless groups, Philip Kitzberger (chapter 4) highlights how problematic the struggle can be, especially with regard to the autonomy of alternative and community-based media. Kitzberger contests the idea that Rafael Correa's Citizens' Revolution in Ecuador has received active support from the masses for media reforms. He contends that media democratization still faces a number of challenges that are replicated in most Latin American countries. Kitzberger also notes the policy constraints concomitant with Correa's party alliance with traditional, procommercial media actors; the limitations on popular and democratic forces compared to media elites that resist change; and practices of censorship and self-censorship of the media in polarized contexts in which Pink Tide regimes oppose commercial media.

In chapter 3, Pascal Lupien explores the case of Bolivia, with specific emphasis on giving voice to historically silenced indigenous majorities, especially in radio, video, and film. Lupien gives an overview of Evo Morales's promotion of these outlets and voices, but emphasizes the need for more social movement involvement and autonomy. In chapter 7, Gilson Schwartz considers digital media in Brazil and the associated new network model of communications through the lens of the Internet approach of *Circuito Fora do Eixo* (Off-Axis Circuit). Schwartz posits the Fora as an example of a bottom-up, grassroots project to challenge the established media industry with an alternative business model for cultural producers. Yet Schwartz is not particularly optimistic for this "new aspect of capital accumulation," in which "Fora do Eixo is just another brick in this electronic territory" (165).

In chapter 6, Summer Harlow and Stuart H. Davis examine the situations of commercial and public access media, or alternative media, in El Salvador, Brazil, and Argentina. The authors conducted interviews to study alternative media political positions before and after Pink Tide governments took office, and found that alternative newspapers, radio programs, and websites shifted from an oppositional and radical discourse to progovernment endorsement.

Chapter 8, by Katherine Reilly, provides an analysis of the cultural and communication strategies of three regional entities created by Latin American countries since 2004: the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the Bolivarian Alliance for the People (ALBA), and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). Reilly contends that these regional organizations have fallen short in meeting their objectives to transcend national levels of decisionmaking in communication sovereignty and to promote the connection between social move-

ments and these regional political bodies, which may ultimately undermine the credibility of the Pink Tide media agenda.

In the concluding chapter, the proposed solution for this situation is radical, as Artz argues that “there is no third way. Reforms are needed, desired, but reforms only relieve; they do not end abuse and exploitation. No negotiating, no agonistic resolution can be crafted that will overcome class contradictions and subdue the capitalist interests” (190). Artz also makes it clear that “there is no one model of resistance to neoliberalism that might transition to participatory democracy and social justice” (195). Artz acknowledges the limitations, obstacles, and shortcomings of Pink Tide participatory and community-based alternative media, but wants to recognize the laudable and significant gains that have already been achieved as evidence that change is possible. The case studies present the complexity of national contexts with variable levels of both reforms and achievements, but Artz highlights common themes and processes in the region as means for identifying areas for reform and reformulation. The collection elucidates the tensions between elite resistance to restrictions of commercial media and the Pink Tide support for freedom of expression. It also revises a conceptualization of freedom of speech that goes beyond censorship or licensing to consider measures of access to public and community-based media to provide outlets for multiple, and often excluded, voices.

Thus the collection poses important questions in the area of political communications and presents detailed case studies to examine the effects of the Pink Tide regimes. The collection provides valuable policy analysis; understudied cases, especially in the areas of social movements and alternative media; and innovations, like TeleSUR, that have created lasting changes to the regional media landscape. Yet the future of media reforms becomes uncertain in light of recent events across Latin American governments, including the escalating social and political crisis in Venezuela, Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment in 2016, Lula’s imprisonment in the midst of a 2018 presidential bid, and the electoral victory of Mauricio Macri in Argentina. Moreover, further analysis of the media systems in Latin America during this period must first acknowledge the Pink Tide regimes’ authoritarian tactics of repressing, censoring, or delegitimizing commercial media messages critical of their regimes. Then any contemporary analysis must examine social media as a burgeoning outlet for free speech—with all its own inherent contradictions—and grapple with the struggle for free speech and community access.

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