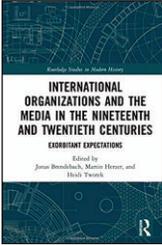


Review



International Organizations and the Media in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Exorbitant Expectations. Edited by Jonas Brendebach, Martin Herzer, & Heidi J.S. Tworek. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2018. 242 pp. ISBN: 9781138303089.

Leave it to historians of international organizations to provide useful insights into the entanglement of international organizations and mechanisms of communication since the nineteenth century. Indeed, in many ways, the field of Communication Studies itself was born out of the assumptions, anxieties, and delusions of liberal internationalism traced in this collection. However, *International Organizations and the Media in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Exorbitant Expectations*, a volume of nine well-researched essays and an introduction, knows a diminishing amount about Communication Studies and so the promise of interdisciplinary dialogue held in its title must continue to take place in the field of Communication Studies. It's too bad, because Communication Studies has something to offer, not just something to learn from these scholars. Not least, a more complex definition of communication; the editors rely on Harold Lasswell's model of effective communication, now more than 70 years old.

The book promises to reach across the divide, to bring together two “burgeoning yet largely unconnected strands of research: the history of international organizations and international media histories” (p. 6), yet includes not one scholar based in a department of Communication Studies. References to a few historians of communication may be found scattered in the footnotes but not one is granted to grand theories of communication and globalization from the likes of Armand Mattelart, Harold Innis, or Dwayne Winseck. One feels as though one has entered a parallel universe in which the political economy of communication has not been conceptualized.

Nevertheless, the volume contains much new and valuable research about empire and communication—from the more obscure Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine (the first international organization) and the Universal Postal Union to the more familiar League of Nations and its successor the United Nations, studies of

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which make up 70 percent of the book. Richard John's study of the British imagery superimposed onto stamps about the Universal Postal Union in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries offers a fascinating visual analysis of nationalism in a global network. Tomoko Akami's analysis of the League of Nations and its Tokyo office offers a less well-known perspective on the limits of propaganda for peace in the run up to the Second World War in Asia. David Allen tells the compelling story of the expensive and irrelevant League of Nations pavilion at the New York World's Fair in 1939, built even though the agency was by then almost defunct.

The bulk of the collection relates to the United Nations and its agencies, such as UNESCO and UNEP, not surprising given the organization's mid-century establishment and commitment to media. Glenda Sluga, a leading scholar on international organizations, contributes an excellent essay on the close connection between the UN and Hollywood, especially during the first postwar decade. Sluga traces the activities of Hollywood moguls, such as Darryl F. Zanuck of Twentieth Century Fox, lobbying at the UN Conference on International Organization, held in San Francisco in 1945, for "world freedom of the screen, along with radio and the press" (p. 142). However, communication scholars would be less likely to attribute this pressure to a "*confusion of economic, political, and moral motivations*" (p. 143, italics mine). She also traces the integration of the United Nations into Hollywood movie plots including, most famously, Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*.

Jonas Brendebach's meticulous history of the NWICO debates of the 1960s and 1970s makes an important contribution to the history of the entanglement of communication and development in UNESCO. He provides useful sketches of Wilbur Schramm, Daniel Lerner, and Everett Rogers' contributions to the American paradigm of communication-as-modernization, as well as James Dermot Halloran's influential alternative development thinking, with its focus on national self-determination and the right to communicate that would go on to be central in the *MacBride Commission Report* of 1978, of which he was co-author.

Monika Baár's research on the development of UNESCO's human rights-themed international years, beginning in 1959 with World Refugee Year, highlights the uneven process of decolonization at the agency. Conceived as a method of public diplomacy, the peak of year naming occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s with declarations of international years of the woman (1975), the child (1979), and disabled persons (1981). Despite the affirmation of a new world economic and communication order by this time, the years still tended to presume solutions and funding to be supplied by the Global North for problems and poverty in the Global South. Baár makes a compelling argument that when the UN shifted to global mega-concert media events around 1980, it mirrored a shift to a new communication strategy more closely aligned with commercial media platforms that saw donors as "consumers who needed to be entertained" (p. 192), in many ways an end run around the pushback against media imperialism.

The limits of international organizations in relation to both their expansive visions and their political and economic entanglements is a recurrent theme aptly reflected by the book's subtitle: "exorbitant expectations." Arthur Asseraf's chapter—to me,

one of the most compelling—argues for the “multiple internationalisms” (p. 117) of Algerians and others excluded from the League’s apparatuses in the interwar period. His essay makes a strong case for the subversion of the discourses of liberal internationalism by Indigenous and racialized colonial populations structurally excluded from membership (e.g. without national representation of their own) and also the misplaced hopes. Not only did Algerians appeal to a non-nation-based form of Islamic internationalism, but he also notes that the Haudenosaunee of the Six Nations of Grand River Territory in Canada used international law, which recognized them as a sovereign nation (with contracted treaties with Britain and the Netherlands since the seventeenth century), to ask the League in 1924 “to intervene in their disputes with the Canadian Federal Government” (p. 120). And, while ultimately unsuccessful, this and other “alternative internationalisms” (p. 124) set a precedent that continues to see colonized and oppressed groups around the world appealing to the UN in order to obtain support in their struggles against local states.

There is much in this volume that will be of interest to media scholars studying and teaching on the topic of communication in relation to international organizations. Not least, the paradigms the contributors unearth in the archives about the imagined role of information, news, visual culture, and public diplomacy in a global liberal order.

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