

Alexa Robertson. *Media and Politics in a Globalizing World.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015. xiv + 239 pp. \$24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-7456-5470-6.

Reviewed by W. Joe Watson (Baker University)

Published on Jhistory (February, 2017)

Commissioned by Robert A. Rabe

Toward an Understanding of Global Media, Politics, and Research

Shortly into Alexa Robertson's examination of the interaction of global media and politics, the reader will quickly realize the daunting scope of her mission. After all, models of government shift with every border crossing and media systems vary enormously around the world. Even within a single government model, such as democracy, one nation might embrace a commercial media model while another is shaped by a public service tradition. It soon becomes clear that getting a handle on the ways in which media and politics mix around the world is an intimidating task.

Those searching for a definitive record of the history and development of media and politics are likely to be disappointed. This is not that book. In the early pages, Robertson acknowledges that her text is a guide to shape research. Indeed, her approach to laying out information, which ranges from basic foundations to theories to more complex concepts, makes this an ideal book for the classroom. Advanced undergraduates might do well with the text but it is graduate students and those conducting research who will benefit most. In addition, the book does not necessarily strike a balance between the two areas in the title. This is largely a text about media, although political sci-

entists will certainly find value in Robertson's work.

The early chapters of the book are somewhat introductory in nature. What are media? What are politics? Who are journalists? And how does each impact the lives of audiences and readers living under a particular system? Advanced scholars will no doubt find these early chapters relatively fundamental, but they provide valuable underpinnings for students from which to study these phenomena. From the Arab Spring and WikiLeaks to audiences adapting to newer and more high-tech delivery methods, Robertson offers real-world examples in each chapter to illustrate the concepts discussed. Even the Eurovision singing competition and the science fiction drama *Battlestar Galactica* earn nods as tools for illustration.

As the book advances so does the depth of information. By the time Robertson reaches chapter 6, which explores how activists harness the power of global media to effect social change, the reader will find a gripping exploration of the intricacies of the global media landscape. Robertson clearly outlines the ways in which traditional media outlets are grappling with new technological forms and how best to merge them with conventional production methods. Likewise, activists and regu-

lar citizens have learned how to lasso the power of social media and blogs to give voice to the disenfranchised. One of the book's lighter moments comes when Robertson recounts a British comedy sketch in which news anchors announce that aliens are about to destroy Earth. They then invite viewers to share their thoughts on how the story will affect them. Through the humor, the sketch illustrates Robertson's larger point of the very serious challenges media face with adapting to the twenty-first century.

Perhaps the strongest part of the text comes when Robertson explores the issue of mediated conflict. She beautifully outlines the history of media's role in covering war and the implications of such coverage. The revolutionary use of photography in conflicts like the American Civil War eventually gave way to the powerful use of film and video in World War II and Vietnam. Live coverage and the ubiquity of visual sources later gave us the CNN Effect and the Al Jazeera Effect. From governmental efforts to control coverage to media that sanitize conflict, Robertson explores the ways in which modern reporting can clash with geopolitical reality. That reality, however, can vary from system to system, as Robertson illustrates by turning to the sixtieth anniversary of D-Day. The event demonstrated the ways in which various national media approached information from different perspectives. Coverage in the former Allied nations "emphasized the importance of taking to arms in defence [*sic*] of freedom, and of coming to the assistance of those oppressed by undemocratic regimes," whereas many German broadcasters focused "on the human cost of warfare, and the importance of reconciliation and partnership" (p. 114).

There are criticisms of the book to offer. There is a slight slant towards a Western perspective. Robertson does an admirable job of incorporating other global regions, with the Middle East most apparent; however, other geographic areas get only a passing mention. As noted, Robertson has

taken on the unenviable task of trying to illustrate the many ways in which media and politics are manifested around the world. The challenge of addressing these topics, which offer so many different models, is that the text moves quickly, sometimes jumping from system to system. Those with an established knowledge will surely surf the content with relative ease. Those who are less versed in global media and political structures may find this aspect of the book somewhat overwhelming. Another challenge of tackling the sheer scope of this subject matter is that some examples seem too brief, which may leave the reader wanting more. The challenge of summarizing media and politics on a global scale is perhaps best illustrated in the chapter entitled "Mediatization." The concept, in and of itself, is complex and Robertson spends a good deal of time offering multiple ways to define and conceive of the idea. Yet some may be left still wondering what, exactly, mediatization is.

The strengths of the book, however, outweigh these shortcomings. For the budding media or political scholar wishing to explore global systems in greater depth, Robertson concludes her text with a valuable appendix that provides a well-focused research guide. Readers will find suggestions for ways to conceptualize and design studies exploring global media and politics, as well as suggested topics for developing a research agenda. The appendix is the fitting last piece of the puzzle to provide scholars with a meaningful guide for their research. Whatever our understanding of terms like "media" and "politics" has been in the past, recent years have brought about a need to reevaluate that understanding. With Robertson's text as a guide we are better equipped to continue that exploration.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
<https://networks.h-net.org/jhistory>

Citation: W. Joe Watson. Review of Robertson, Alexa, *Media and Politics in a Globalizing World*. Jhistory, H-Net Reviews. February, 2017.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=48004>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.