

Book Review

Einar Thorsen, Daniel Jackson, Heather Savigny, Jenny Alexander (eds) (2015) *Media, Margins and Civic Agency*. Palgrave MacMillan

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The book poses an interesting outlook and adds to discussion on use of social media and its impact on civic society. The added value lies in the aspect of only looking at ‘groups in the margin of society instead of looking at citizens, or interest groups in general. This adds to existing literature while most edited volumes will look at groups based on their interest or goals, and less to groups based on their position in society. According to the introduction the book focusses on discursive and structural (re)production of social, cultural and political marginality via constructions of voiced and silenced, ‘orderly’ and ‘disorderly’, ‘normative’ and ‘non-normative’ citizens and ‘non-citizens’ in mainstream media and media policy. It argues that those who are marginalized sometimes find the way to push back and indeed find representation within the media.

This however leads to a first point of critique as well, nowhere in the book there is a clear operationalization or definition of what ‘groups in the margin’ actually are. While Black woman in the United Kingdom are considered a group in the margin, apparently so are suicide bombers. Every chapter in this respect is a surprise, because there seems to be no clear set of criteria on how to determine whether a group is marginalized or not. The line of reasoning seems somewhat circular: the book deals with how marginalized groups attempt to get access to mainstream media, but those who are marginalized are defined by having difficulties doing so.

When looking at the book another question comes to mind, there is a lot of very interesting and very rich case material within the book, but an overall theory is lacking. What does media theoretically mean for the position of these groups? Why would that be the case? These questions remain unanswered, while it would have been quite easy to link all the case studies to empowerment or micro mobilization theory. It would have strengthened the overall consistency of the book if a link to a common theory would have been established. The book now remains a set of case studies, very interesting in their own regard, but a common denominator is missing and how the respective cases relate to each other is unclear.

This is not to say that the book is unstructured in itself, because it does provide a clear structure. After the introduction the book starts with its first set of chapters, this part of the book provides for the descriptive set of the book. Here several authors look at, and describe the way marginalized groups aim to gain voice in mainstream media and in that way try to gain symbolic power. Put differently, in this set of chapters the tone is set, the chapters together answer the question on how these groups deal with the fact that they are often unheard and which efforts they undertake to be heard in mainstream media. The first of these chapters deals with African Caribbean bloggers in the United Kingdom, and more specifically woman. It is researched how they attempt to construct their Black identity and self-represent in a society where they are not equal to others. The second chapter deals with NGO’s dealing with crisis and disaster management, an interesting dilemma is posed here, while these NGO’s in their communication are in the position to voice (and let audiences hear) authentic voices of those affected by the disaster (who are considered the marginalized group) they also have their own public relations and have an incentive

to control these voices. In Chapter 3 the step to citizen-journalism is explored further and a group of citizens who organized their own media outlet platform is researched. They need to balance their effort between being heard with their fear or reluctance of being publically known in their critique against the government in welfare issues. The fourth chapter takes a different turn and looks at how violent voices and extremist thought aims to find followers, however very interesting in the context of the book, the chapter moves forward to a line of reasoning that finds its base in mental health issues and the chapter does not seem to fit the book very well.

In general the first part of the book gives a very clear overview, starting with citizens micro mobilizing through blogs, then citizens given voice by an intermediary (NGO) and finally citizens building their own media platform. What could have been looked at in all four chapters would be the matter of fragmentation. Now the emphasis is on how these groups empower themselves and how their voices gain access to mainstream media. It is unclear whether others actually hear them and how these voices are expanded to other media. Fragmentation being a large topic within communication and media studies, and especially the issue of 'who hears you', however this topic is addressed very limited. The book seems to focus on the side of the sender of the message but does not take into account what happens when others (media or intermediaries) receive the message.

The second part of the book deals with marginalized groups on a more institutional level, it tries to answer how media frameworks and media policy hinders marginalized groups in getting access to mainstream media. The first chapter in this part argues that European countries focus solely on nation centric frameworks, which accounts for those groups who operate over the boundaries of states have a difficult time in gaining voice in mainstream media. The focus is on migration and especially the Roma population of Europe. In the second chapter a concept called 'creative diversity' is introduced and it is linked to the crisis of multiculturalism especially in the United Kingdom. This creative diversity, is argued, does primarily benefit the interest of Public Service Broadcasting, the line of reasoning is that Public Service Broadcasting, through a discourse of creative diversity becomes able to diminish the agenda of diversity in terms of race. The third chapter is much more based in the ethical sphere, how do mourners (those who have suffered loss) get representation and should they? The focus is on the journalist and the ethical dilemma that is posed is whether those who have lost a family member or friend should be gate-kept by journalist (and therefore become marginalized) or whether they should be given voice. The chapter fits the book well, however seems to be in the wrong place in part two, while all the chapters in part two deal with the institutional part of media, this chapter deals with the ethical part. In the fourth chapter it is argued that diasporic media bridge the gap between mainstream and diasporic audiences. A diasporic newspaper is researched and it is argued that existing public service media is complemented and diasporic content should be taken seriously by policy makers. In the final chapter of this part the French sea border immigrant camps are being looked at, frames of migration are researched and the focus lies on how these frames trigger or hinder empathy and engagement in the migration debate. Interesting in this case is how the space itself is taken into the frame.

The first thing that comes to mind after reading the second part is that while I started off with claiming that the part was on the institutional level, this term is not to be found within the part. In essence part two of the book is on the institutional level, and looks at how media policy indeed impacts marginalized groups, by looking at national frameworks, media policy of broadcasting companies, journalist routines, public service frameworks and space construction. However the link on the institutional is never openly stated in the book. This is a pity because the line of reasoning in the book as a whole could have been strengthened by going into some institutional media theory giving some background to the five case studies posed.

The final part of the book deals with counter narratives, which seems strange since a lot of the cases above deal with counter narratives as well. Obviously the topic of counter narratives need to be addressed within the book, but why a separate part is devoted to the topic while counter narratives are also discussed in other parts seems unclear.

In the first chapter in this part the Thatcher funeral protests are discussed with a focus on images of those who protested the costs and shape of the event. This chapter holds the strength to indeed look at fragmentation and indeed also to look at the receiving end of communication. The second chapter deals with groups campaigning against tax avoidance of large corporations, and it is assessed how these groups have found their way into mainstream media. While well researched this is a 'classic' case study of mirco mobilization and spread over to mainstream media. The third chapter deals with user generated content (mediated by the BBC) in the crisis in Syria. In fact this chapter would have fit the first part of the book as well (linking to the chapter in which NGO used citizen voices), it could also have fit the second part, because it shows how BBC media policy had dealt with verification of non-BBC content. While the second part of the book tries to argue that institutional boundaries hinder marginalized voices, this chapter shows the exact opposite. This is not a downfall, this strengthens the book in proving it aims not to be normative. In the final chapter those narratives are researched which try to undermine media logics line of reasoning in terms of the 'good police' against the 'angry mob' in the Ian Tomlinson case. It is argued that changes in society are hindering the police in framing protest. The point made for the previous chapter also goes for this chapter, it is directly contradicting the line of reasoning made in part two.

The book ends with a chapter taking a lens over the entire book. It is not so much a conclusion but more a reflection. The reflection is very refreshing, linking to a lot of more theoretical topics, however the book would have benefit with an actual conclusion. A conclusion on how all the chapters together give an answer to questions posed in the introduction. This is now lacking and would have given the book a more complete 'feel', especially since theory is very marginally present to begin with.

Additional to the structure something must be said about the case selection as presented by the cases. First of all there is a very divers set of media outlets which has been looked at, both television and newspaper, both images and text, both offline and online, this strengthens the book greatly, giving a full overview of all the different forms and types of media. It is very refreshing to find such a variety. It would have been interesting to see what the impact of all these different forms would be in an over-reaching conclusion, however this is not the case. It must also be said that the book is very UK based, the majority of the cases are found within the UK which does not strengthen the external validity of the book, additionally almost one third of the cases deal with ethnic minorities as 'marginalized groups' this could have been more diverse as well.

In general something must be said about the read of the book itself, it is very well written and offers a very complete overview, but not only content wise, because cases are very rich in empirical material the book itself becomes an easy and pleasant read.

It is a very recommendable book for those looking for a large set of very rich case studies in the field of media, varying in media outlet, media type and group marginality. For one who is looking for a more theoretically based work, other books seem more suitable.