Book review

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This important volume on media and indigeneity in South Asia takes an approach that could broadly be called 'media cultural'. The introduction section provides a thorough contextualization of indigeneity research and indigenous media studies in South Asia, defining some of the area's critical concepts. The spatial dynamics are primarily related to "how indigeneity is articulated in the context of encompassing hegemonic nations" (p. 8). This approach is highly relevant since—alongside the transnational scale of media practices—the nation-state still holds sway over the imagination and affects of much of its citizenry. The process of "culturalization" which Schleiter and de Maaker refer to in their introduction (by drawing on media anthropological approaches such as those of Faye Ginsburg, Brian Larkin, and William Mazzarella) points towards the decentralization of production and the valorization of cultural meaning in circulations and advertisement. With the rise of digital media, the circulatory sphere has become more important, as shown by many chapters in this volume. The usefulness of the highly controversial *indigeneity* concept lies in its self-appropriation by marginalized groups who often claim the ecological and moral high ground. At the same time, their popular representations remain wrapped in stereotypes of underdevelopment and backward 'inferiority'. Many such tropes are shown to date back to colonial-era ethnography.

Media, indigeneity and nation in South Asia is divided into three parts. The first one addresses vernacular popular culture, exploring the intersections of mainstream and regional media: adaptations and cultural identity markers in video CDs (Wagner's contribution on Gaddin VCDs); carnivalesque folk humor (Mukherjee's contribution on Manbhum videos); media reception and social change (Schleiter on the appropriation of Santali VCDs in place of village dances), family values, transgression and male-centered reception practices in Bhojpuri cinema (Kumar's contribution).

Centering on political activism, the second section of the book delves into questions of political articulations via videos and movies: political activist films on Adivasis facing primitive accumulation and its multiple reception contexts (Chandra's contribution); intersections of NGO media activism and (non-)rep-

resentational wishes of indigenous co-producers (Borde's contribution); and audience engagement with Facebook postings and representations of indigenous communities in India's northeastern states (Hasan's contribution). The section concludes with Brandt's discussion of a Bangladeshi film and its self-orientalizing representations. Agents of the Bangladeshi government see indigeneity discourses as a threat to Bangladeshi identity, as their nationalist rhetoric focuses on the indigenous character of Bengalis and the nation as historically victimized.

The third section focuses on documentary and feature films, overlaps with amateur practices, and new sites for dissemination. This section's particular insight pertains to the negotiation of stereotypes by audiences (de Maaker's contribution), including a critique of both funding and production institutions and the compliance of documentary filmmakers with respect to government policies directed at indigenous communities (Battaglia's contribution). It also looks at the standardization of ritual performances through video recordings as well as the mediatized reinterpretation of traditional dance (Wettstein's contribution). The section concludes with a comparative study of an Assamese film as an inquiry into Assamese nationalism (Ara's contribution) and an analysis of the representations of polyandrous relationships among the Brokpa of Arunachal Pradesh (Matta's contribution).

In the afterword, Robin Jeffrey comments on the explosion of the new forms of mediated representations and self-representations that are portrayed in the book, speaking of "the individualization of mass communication" (p. 267). The book lends credence to Jeffrey's claim that "even a poor individual can make a show-and-tell presentation and send it to the world" (p. 267). Interestingly, the current farmers' protests seem to be geared towards media-avoidance strategies, as was the Shaheen Bagh/anti-CAA protest led by low-caste Muslim women in northern India (Ohm, 2021). This shows that a marginalized group may seek to *exit a specific visibility structure* in which 'back talk' is expected to lead to new vulnerabilities. As Radhika Borde puts it, it remains to be seen "whether the subaltern actually wants to speak and wants to be heard" (p. 122)—not out of ethical concerns (see Spivak's ethics as mentioned by Borde) but based on political considerations. In other words, *self-invisibilizing* strategies may be seen as an escape from the digital space where mass-self communication reigns supreme. While Adorno and Horkheimer may seem passé regarding the underpinnings of centralized mass productions, as mentioned by the editors in their introduction, this does not mean that the new environments will enable *structural transformations* through the easier paths of becoming visible and audible. The new domain is still driven by capitalistic logic where even 'talking back' is part of capital accumulation (feeding the digital vortex with sellable data) while remaining tethered to the power asymmetries of older established mass media such as television.

When one speaks about political mobilization, some understanding of its effectiveness is implicit but usually hard to determine. What are the factors that *limit* effectiveness—the platforms' affordances, the scale effects, the symbolic value, and other systemic candidates, etc.—at a time where the predictive, results-generating matrix is steeped in algorithmic control rather than *cultural meaning*? This dimension remains unexplored by some of these otherwise well-contextualized pieces on the digital mediation of indigeneity.

Overall, the book is a significant, pertinent contribution to a new field of studies. The chapters are all well-written, making for a fascinating read that highlights the hopes, aspirations, and limitations behind contemporary mediations of indigeneity that move in often chaotic ways within and beyond the nation-state.

Reference

Ohm, B. (2021). Media against communication: Media/violence and conditionalities of Muslim silencing in Northern India. *Media, Culture & Society*, 1–14.