

**Edward S. Herman, Robert W. McChesney; On Media Centralization and Commercialization -
TRENDY MEDIA GLOBALIZATION AND NEW JOURNALISM**

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Among a number of very interesting titles published this year by the Belgrade publishing house Clio, Multimedia Library, is the publication *The Global Media* by Edward S. Herman and Robert W. McChesney. The two American university professors, Herman (University of Pennsylvania) and McChesney, both with imposing professional and journalistic bibliographies, in seven chapters of the book, systematically and from a number of angles, speak about the current process of commercialization and globalization of the media market and analyze the effect that this, as they call it, reconstructed market has on the structure of the individual media.

Analyzing the effects of many historic, economic and political factors which they believe influenced the most important characteristics of globalization of media systems in the last 15 years, the authors of the work believe that what can be observed is a domination of large countries and powerful transnational companies (TNC) which, according to the effects of market laws, also affect the sphere of media industry and media systems.

The authors of *The Global Media* maintain that these processes directly influence general commercialization of media in the world and thereby most certainly democracy, both as an idea and system of governance. Although, in their opinion, global media systems do not develop linearly in this direction, their trend is, gradually and more or less, to become a part of the process of media centralization spearheaded by some 30 TNCs with the aim of taking control over the media. In this regard, economic oligopolies unreservedly help the political structures in large countries, which thus watch over the information and ideological orientation inside nations, and in regions and on continents as well.

After providing a short historic overview of the appearance and development of the first massive medium – press – and its historic predecessors, from avisses, gazettes, pamphlets, annals, to the first newspaper editions in today's meaning, all the way to the appearance of the first electronic medium and development of television and internet (also internet of importance to security and speed of doing business), Herman and McChesney analyze the dynamics of the global media market and explain the strategy and funding of major media corporations, such as Time Warner, Disney, Bertelsmann, Viacom, and News Corporation, which primarily have big film and television productions.

Calling them *top players on the global media market*, the authors provide imposing data indicating these companies' clear profile, first of all their financial wealth measured in billions of dollars in annual income. (For example, Time Warner, the biggest media corporation, had an income of close to \$25 billion, Disney had \$24 billion, and News Corporation had \$10 billion). They maintain their economic power primarily thanks to a broad range of production and publishing activities, i.e. internal growth, but also thanks to acquisitions and mergers. (To recall, the biggest media corporation, Time Warner, was created in 1989 as a result of a merger between Time Incorporated and Warner Communications Incorporated).

It is precisely economic market relations – which guide transnational companies, after integrating with one another in the above two ways, to ruthlessly enter national and international arenas – according to the two authors, that have a fatal affect on the character and structure of media programs. As a result, the general trend of media insistence on entertainment and light contents is a consequence of the almost completed commercialization of the media. The famous saying that the media create the culture of entertainment, allege Herman and McChesney, is now at work. This has a negative effect on program quality and the demands of public opinion which is under its influence, and it promotes an elitist consumer culture within the broader society, as Griffin, Viswanath and Dona Schwartz described in their joint article **Media, Culture & Society** back in 1994.

Poor and less developed regions in terms of information and communications experience a particularly big effect on this character of the modern media, warn the authors. The local cultural and political media landscape of these countries is strongly affected by the operation of political and media systems of wealthy countries, United States first of all, which the authors of the work use as a model for analyzing the *neoliberal and commercially connected world*:

All countries are moving, each in its own way, towards the US model, and as we have observed, this process is being reinforced; global media cross borders, they make alliances with local firms, they create an impressive political force and growing commercial sectors...., say Herman and McChesney, also recalling another commercial tradition in this country (which annually spends some \$160 billion on advertising, of which more than \$30 billion is spent on television advertising).

All these processes in media systems, along with countries which TNC and their influences originate from, are also supported by economic giants such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which, through some of its programs, facilitates media penetration of the great powers into underdeveloped countries.

The marketing – media – TNC – IMF scheme operates throughout the global system, stimulating application of neoliberal rules based on penetration of private investments and reduced social appropriations, explain Herman and McChesney, maintaining that this can be a very dangerous combination in a system of extreme inequality.

The Global Media is certainly a book that speaks about globalization, commercialization and centralization of media, these parallel and conditioned processes, in an open and concise way, supported by numerous arguments with the latest data. The authors warn that standardization of media, first of all through the structure and content of programs in all types of media, may influence the particularity and sustainability of authentic characteristics of national cultures which succumb to the consumer spirit of the media industry conglomerate. But these processes may result, and are already resulting in a loss of public journalism and criticism of journalists, who often face the dilemma of whether to write truthfully and accurately (?) or not to allow themselves to be neutral in writing for the sake of – higher interests of the media giants they work for. Instead of civil journalism, what is present is new journalism with products which constitute commodities, with journalists who balance among neutrality, hushing up and truth, and a media system insensitive to the local and the original.

The slogans under which the first media appeared, freedom of expression, freedom of writing, principles of truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity or, even better, fair reporting, are today thrown into question by the fact that commercial values in the media have taken root and primacy.

True, the authors believe that at local level there is still resistance to complete takeover of media companies by TNC and global media systems, and they see a solution to preserving national and media authenticity and pluralism in alternative non-profit media which would form a non-profit public sphere. Status quo, they maintain, can remain only if there are no forces that believe in the possibility of change in order to overcome the present situation on the media market. Consequently, decentralization of global media and economic giants is possible through concentration of alternative media markets. Primarily at local level, and after that at a higher level. The *Global Media* can thus be understood as a useful guide for our information and media landscapes in the region.

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