

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the SEAMSJ special issue volume 4, number 1: *Histories, States, Theories, and Futures*. As the theme suggests, this volume provides opportunities to reflect on and respond to political, cultural, social, economic, and linguistic issues that affect the media landscape in Southeast Asia.

During 2022, the Southeast Asian region began slowly moving out of its preoccupation with the Covid pandemic and started on a road to recovery; however, factors like the Russian War in Ukraine, the Myanmar Crisis, and China's muscle-flexing in the South China Sea greatly limit collaboration, impacting trust and opportunities for development in the region. In addition, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) 2022-edition rankings on media freedom place press freedom at 'difficult' in seven Southeast Asian countries to 'very serious' in three others. Also, we are seeing more governments like Singapore and Vietnam tightening controls on the media. It is obvious that many factors are driving and reshaping the mediascape in the region.

We open this volume with "Inspiring Social Change through Independent Media: Case Studies on *Bulatlat* and *Konde.co*" by Dr. Levon Kwok, an independent researcher. Appropriately, the article establishes the difficulties of independent media outlets to provide the public with alternative stories and views in the Philippines and Indonesia. Dr. Kwok demonstrates how harassment and intimidation from the power structure and status quo function in many ways to silence alternative views. As a result, he recognizes that using social media for alternative views has its limitations, and that it is necessary for independent media activists to develop new means of social movement practices in the Southeast Asian struggle for freedom of speech.

From Ph.D. candidate Clara Chin (University of California at Santa Barbara), "Sounding Transnationalism: Popular Music in *Paris by Night* and *The Sympathizer*" analyzes improvisation in Vietnamese diasporic performances. Chin argues that cover performances in *Paris by Night* are not about assimilating towards the norms of American popular culture, but are rather about a form of participation in transnational flows of media. Mobilizing queer aesthetics and temporality, *Paris by Night* cover performances subvert popular culture norms and establish a role as a memory archive, or a way to live the past differently.

Continuing our focus with the Vietnamese diaspora, Lan-Hanh Thi Nguyen's (National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University, Taiwan) article, "Vietnam's *Đổi Mới* Cinema: Navigating Gender Relations in Tony Bui's *Three Seasons* (1999)," provides a critical film analysis that counters stereotypes about Vietnam and the Vietnamese in Western films. On the one hand, Nguyen suggests that the film reclaims Vietnamese subjectivity; however, that subjectivity is embodied by male characters who maintain a traditional Vietnamese perspective. According to Nguyen, the film portrays Vietnamese women in a subordinate position with less agency and they are living through dreams borrowed or inherited from men. As a result, rather than celebrating women's roles as symbols of transformation and change, Nguyen sees the film as one that returns to Vietnamese traditionalist construction of women, especially their past social position.

Finally, we turn our attention to "Raikantopino: Glocalization of the Boys' Love Genre in the Philippines" by Erwin James A. dela Cruz of the University of the Philippines Diliman. The article explores queer sexuality through content analysis of several independently produced Filipino movies and TV series. Dela Cruz claims that Filipino Boys' Love stories reject some tropes commonly found in Thai BL movies, and suggests that these differences are a result of queer actors and individuals being actively involved in the development and process of the Filipino productions. Dela Cruz further claims that this is a new phenomenon which he calls "First Wave Pinoy BL" and suggests that further studies are necessary.

The journal concludes with an event review by Dr. Le Thu Mach in which she discusses the Vietnam Sports Forum 2022 and the economic importance of sports branding.

Southeast Asian Media Studies Journal's dedication and efforts to cover critical themes provides us with another volume of alternative and independent voices from the Southeast Asian region. The diverse range of topics above demonstrates the journal's willingness to offer a forum for those voices. With more efforts by governments tightening their control on the media, the Southeast Asian Media Studies Journal continues to provide opportunities to communicate and educate the global community about relevant and contemporary themes arising from the region. Let us take a moment to reflect on and appreciate this opportunity as we look forward to future issues.

William F. Smith II

Guest Editor

Abu Dhabi, December 2022

ABOUT THE GUEST EDITOR

WILLIAM F. SMITH II is an Associate Professor at the College of Communication and Media Science at Zayed University in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. He has over 15 years of extensive experience living and teaching in China, Japan, Thailand, and Vietnam. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy – summa cum laude and an Antonin Artaud Fellowship from the European Graduate School (EGS), Switzerland. His research explores the disruptive nature of technology and the overarching implications of communication on society – social and cultural phenomena, especially in the context of social transformation and global issues that are impacted by the current mediascape.