



Cultural Imperialism Versus Globalization of Culture: Riding the Structure-Agency Dialectic in Global Communication and Media Studies

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Abstract

This article discusses and analyzes the dialectic between so-called cultural imperialism and globalization of culture perspectives in global communication and media studies. At an extreme, cultural imperialism is cast as the international extension of the long-discredited hypodermic needle theory which views cultural consumers as passive automatons. At the other end of the extreme, the globalization of culture perspective is cast as a wildly postmodern standpoint in which free-floating individuals are said to be able to make an infinite set of localized meanings from cultural products. There has been a growing trend among many global communication and media scholars to locate a productive middle ground between cultural imperialism and globalization of culture. In this author's view, the most effective melding of the two perspectives would situate local, creative appropriation of cultural objects against the backdrop of larger, hegemonic regional and global macro-forces. This approach ought also to acknowledge the many complexities that characterize the intersections among globalization, culture, and media, including the ways in which the local, national, regional, and global constitute one another and the ways in which resistance to local hegemony can paradoxically fuel national or global hegemony.

The sheer scale and complexity of the empirical reality of global connectivity is something which defies attempts to encompass it: it is something we can only grasp by cutting it in various ways. (Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* 1999, 17)

Introduction

A long-running and often contentious debate has swirled around the nature of the relationship between globalization, media and culture and the human social actors who collectively construct the increasingly global world in which we live. This article discusses and analyzes key themes, approaches, perspectives, questions, and conflicts within media and communication studies surrounding the intersections among globalization, media, and culture. It concentrates in particular on the tensions and dialectic between the so-called *cultural imperialism* and *globalization of culture* perspectives in global communication and media studies. In commenting on this debate – with special attention paid at the end to some of the most promising contemporary approaches – this article seeks to contribute to moving the field of global communication and media studies forward vis-à-vis the study of globalization, culture, and media.

The article is divided into five primary sections. In the first section, I provide a general overview of some of the key issues and questions vis-à-vis the cultural imperialism and globalization of culture perspectives. Here, I also begin to lay out my own critical analysis

of the dialectic between cultural imperialism and globalization of culture. The second section defines and charts cultural imperialism as a conceptual category and as a theoretical perspective. The third section does the same with globalization of culture. In the fourth section, I discuss and reflect on what I consider to be some of the strengths and weaknesses of cultural imperialism and globalization of culture approaches, paying special attention to the issue of power. In the fifth section, I zero in on and analyze approaches which seek to find the most productive theoretical and analytical means to engaging the binaries of global communication and media research, meaning the macro and the micro, the global and the local, and cultural production and consumption. Finally, in the concluding section, I reflect on where the global communication and media studies appear to be headed in terms of theorizing the relationship between globalization, media and culture.

Cultural imperialism vs. globalization of culture: foundations and definitions

Debates about globalization, culture, and media inevitably are debates about one – and often more than one – of the following:

- structure and agency;
- the comparative significance of cultural production vs. cultural consumption;
- global cultural flows and the impact of these flows on individual and collective identity(ies);
- which social levels – local, national, regional, global – reveal most about the fundamental relationship between individuals, society, culture, media, and various forms of identity;
- the existence of cultural hierarchies and inequalities, the nature of these, reasons for them, and, finally, their potential impact on individuals and collectivities;
- power.

Historically, as has been the case with media and communication studies scholarship more generally, research concerned with the intersections among globalization, culture and media has tended to swing between the ends of what essentially amounts to a structure-agency pendulum with powerful media producers (structure) situated at one end and active media audiences (agency) at the other. At an extreme, cultural imperialism is cast as the international extension of the long-discredited hypodermic needle theory which views cultural consumers as passive and malleable automatons who inevitably fall prey to a direct injection of dominant ideology via media and cultural products. At the other end of the extreme, the globalization of culture perspective is cast as a wildly postmodern standpoint in which free-floating individuals are said to be able to do anything and everything with cultural objects from which they derive a nearly infinite set of meanings. While it is conceptually useful to conceive of debates surrounding the relationship between media, culture, globalization, and identity in terms of a structure-agency continuum across which a scholarly pendulum has tended to swing, it is important to note that this continuum has no absolute or definitive binary endpoints.

Cultural imperialism

Cultural imperialism is most usefully viewed not as a tightly defined paradigm but as ‘a conceptual framework, a set of concepts, hypothesized linkages, and above all an optic that attempts to locate and clarify a wide range of problems’ (Fagen qtd. in Fejes 1981,

288). It refers to a global situation in which powerful culture industries and actors located almost exclusively in the West and, in particular, in the United States, dominate other local, national, and regional cultures and actors. This domination is understood as being largely the outcome of fundamental historical inequalities which have resulted in the bulk of political and economic power being concentrated in the West and, again, especially, in the United States. According to some interpretations (Morris 2002; Sepstrup 1989), cultural imperialism also presumes a sort of hypodermic needle effect in which the values embedded in cultural products, for instance, in Hollywood films, insinuate themselves into local and national cultures and effectively overpower them. The result is a global homogenization of culture built mostly but not exclusively around Western and American cultural forms – e.g. Hollywood action films, American television sitcoms, UK style reality television programs, CNN style broadcast news programs, McDonald's, etc.

Cultural imperialism as an analytical and political lens through which to theorize global cultural production and consumption emerges in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Roach 1997). It does so in part as a response to modernization theory, typically associated with the work of Daniel Lerner and Wilbur Schramm. Modernization theory, which has been severely problematized, even by some of its original proponents, uncritically cast the Western paradigm of development and communication as the model for the entire world (Fejes 1981). Cultural imperialism can also be understood as a critical response to liberal marketplace theory (Fejes 1981). Liberal marketplace theory, often referred to as neo-liberalism, holds that the spread of cultural products can essentially be read as the result of consumer demand and choice rather than as an outcome of fundamental and often gross inequities in global cultural production, distribution and flow.

Cultural imperialism perspectives draw heavily from dependency theory and a core-periphery model of global political economic relations as well as from Marxist theories of society and development (Fejes 1981). The work of Frankfurt School thinkers such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, who focused on the centrality of the arena of cultural (re)production to the ideological (re)production of capitalist domination, has also been influential. Cultural imperialism is not only concerned with unequal cultural flows between developed and developing countries. It also focuses on inequalities in cultural flow *among developed countries*, for instance between the United States and France. However, scholarship influenced by a cultural imperialism paradigm has paid considerably less attention to the question of unequal flows among countries not typically conceived of as being in the so-called global center, for instance, on inequities in cultural flow from China into Indonesia.

A number of different scholars have been associated with the development of the notion of cultural imperialism, among them Schiller (1976, 1989), Mattelart (1979), Golding (1977), and Boyd-Barrett (1977). Schiller is widely acknowledged as the most influential of these. Schiller conceives of the international system as being molded by the world's dominant political economic, military, and cultural players, most notably the United States. Situated *above* American hegemony is the overarching domination of the capitalist system and its accompanying economic, political, and ideological logics. This means that while American global cultural hegemony has often been the focus of scholarship that has drawn from a cultural imperialism model, regional, and even intra-national disparities in cultural production, export, and distribution and consumption are clearly within its theoretical and empirical parameters as well. In short, cultural imperialism should not be conflated or confused with Americanization, which is in fact a particular type of cultural imperialism. That fundamental inequalities in the capitalist system are the ultimate focus of much cultural imperialism oriented scholarship is made clear by the following passage written by Schiller:

[Cultural consumers] are all subject to the rule of the market forces and the domination of capital over those market forces. This is the grand common denominator that insures basic inequality in the social order, an inequality that the pluralists and the active-audience culturalists most often overlook. (1991, 153)

While some scholars (e.g. Morris 2002; Winter 2003) consider Schiller's views to have been thoroughly discredited and it has become a virtual disciplinary faux pas to explicitly identify oneself with cultural imperialism, many contemporary scholars continue to take up Schiller's critique, showing that it continues to have relevance within the field of global communication and media studies. For example, Sparks, writing in 2007 in response to those who have emphasized the localization of cultural products – an empirical phenomenon which it is important to note that has very clearly occurred and continues to occur on a widespread basis, writes that,

It is the 'centre' that produces and distributes, and the 'periphery' that modifies and adapts. Such a process is clearly distinct from the claim that the artefacts produced by the cultural industries of the developed world embody materials that originate elsewhere and which embody a global consciousness rather than that of a developed country, usually the USA. (2007, 145)

Similarly, in a 2005 article in *Global Media and Communication*, Boyd-Barrett, writes that,

Media imperialism need neither be permanent nor all-encompassing to be worth studying. 'Reading' diversity stretches the significance of cultural products beyond the indications deducible from content analysis, but offers little insight into processes determining which cultural significations are magnified for mass dissemination, and which are lost. (2005, 22)¹

Globalization of culture

Like cultural imperialism, globalization of culture is most usefully viewed as 'a conceptual framework, a set of concepts, hypothesized linkages, and above all an optic that attempts to locate and clarify a wide range of problems' (Fagen qtd. in Fejes 1981, 288). In contrast to cultural imperialism, which encourages scholars to concentrate on cultural domination and cultural producers and on the power of the latter to impose their ideology on others, globalization of culture encourages researchers to focus on cultural resistance and cultural consumption as well as on the power of people, both on individual and collective levels, to read, appropriate, and use cultural products in creative and often counter-hegemonic fashion. In this conflict of approaches – with cultural imperialism primarily concerned with cultural production and producers and globalization of culture concerned primarily with cultural consumption and consumers – one sees a clear manifestation of the long-running, cross-disciplinary debate over structure (cultural production) and agency (cultural consumption). This does not mean that scholarship tilted more toward the globalization side of a cultural imperialism/globalization of culture *continuum* does not concern itself with cultural production or with structural inequities. Nor does it mean that scholars situated more toward the cultural imperialism end of this dynamic and shifting continuum focus on cultural production to the exclusion of cultural consumption. Instead, it is often a matter of inflection and emphasis on cultural production or cultural consumption rather than the exclusion of one or the other. In the tensions between cultural imperialist-inflected and globalization of culture-inflected scholarship, one sees as well disagreement about what level of analysis to focus on, with scholarship rooted in a cultural imperialism approach generally concerned primarily with macro-level (global/national) questions and issues and

scholarship grounded in a globalization of culture approach tending to focus more on the micro-level (local). In fact, a number of international communication and media scholars (Kraidy 2002; Straubhaar 1991, etc.) have proposed an approach that carefully weighs structure/agency considerations and which melds macro- and micro-level analysis. This is a productive development, one I will discuss more later on.

Globalization of culture as an influential perspective emerges in the 1980s primarily in response to what many scholars charged were the overly deterministic assumptions of cultural imperialism, most notably the assumption that the widespread presence of, for example, American cultural products such as Hollywood films, music, television series, and multi-national corporations such as McDonald's and Wal-Mart, necessarily means the widespread adoption of American ideology. Thus, for instance, much scholarship rooted in a globalization of culture perspective emphasizes the localization of, and adaption of cultural products to particular markets and cultures and/or the creative and local appropriation of cultural products (e.g. Alim 2009; Cheshire and Moser 1994; Katz and Liebes 1987; Kirmse 2010; Thussu 1998, 2007).

Globalization of culture is also a response to what many critics claim are cultural imperialism's implicit appeals to cultural purity. According to this critique (e.g. Laing 1986; Morris 2002; Rogers 2006), invocations of 'American' (or 'German' or 'Japanese', etc.) culture are highly suspect, even useless, in the sense that there is no such thing as a singular, pure 'American', 'German,' 'Japanese', etc. culture.

A considerable body of scholarship which draws from a globalization of culture model has moved away from what once was a narrow focus on Americanization and Westernization to examining flows of culture across and among regions and countries which had not, at least until the 1990s, garnered much empirical attention (e.g. Straubhaar 1991, 2007; Thussu 2006). Among other things, this scholarship has focused on so-called counter-flows or contra-flows, in other words, on the flow of culture from developing and/or comparatively less politically and economically powerful countries such as South Africa, India and Brazil into so-called center or core countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. It is also concerned with so-called South-South flows, meaning the flow of culture among countries such as Tanzania, Indonesia, and Brazil, including inequalities in these flows – for example, Brazil, which exports cultural products all over the world and is a rising political and economic global player, is clearly on a different economic and cultural plane than Tanzania.

Globalization of culture ultimately conceives of culture as highly fluid, malleable, and fundamentally hybrid. Scholarship which draws from this tradition (e.g. Cheshire and Moser 1994; Parameswaran 1999; Winter 2003) often uses terms such as local/localization, glocal/glocalization, bricolage, creole/creolization, pluralism, and polysemy. Hybridization stands as a major trope around which globalization of culture analysis has been constructed. Critics (Schiller 1989; Sparks 2007) have charged that much work focused on localization, polysemy, and hybridization has tended to ignore questions such as *how* polysemic (Morley 1997) cultural texts are while glossing over the question of which cultural actors contribute more of the ingredients to a given cultural hybrid object. This has led to considerable suspicion of the term hybridization on the part of scholars concerned primarily with global cultural power inequalities and hierarchies (e.g. Murdock 1995; Schiller 1989; Sparks 2007; Venn 1987, etc.). However, Kraidy and Murphy (2008) have recently sought to redefine hybridization in a way that distances it from some of the more celebratory work in which it has sometimes been deployed (Atal 2003; Winter 2003) and to set it more squarely within a hegemonic global political, economic and cultural configuration of power.

The 1980s and 1990s: a move toward globalization of culture

Global communication and media scholarship's general swing away from powerful media and cultural producers toward a focus on active cultural consumers in the mid-1980s and through the 1990s mirrors a broader movement within media and communication studies as a whole. Thus, for example, in the 1980s and 1990s, the work of audience studies scholars such as John Fiske (1987) and Janice Radway (1986), who focused on the power of individual audience members to resist dominant ideologies 'encoded' into popular culture and (re)appropriate cultural objects toward their own resistive and/or pleasurable ends, held sway within much of media and communication studies. In terms of international media studies, Katz and Liebes' (1987) study on the American television series *Dallas* is considered seminal. The authors found that Israeli viewers of *Dallas* interpreted the US-made program in diverse ways, including ways that ran counter to the dominant ideology of the program. They concluded that television viewers were likely to appropriate cultural and ideological content based on local context and values.

A response to what critics termed the 'celebratory' and 'uncritical' approach of much audience studies work emerged alongside of it. Much of the criticism came from scholars who employ a political economy approach to studying and theorizing media and culture (Garnham 2000; Murdock 1995, etc.). This approach is primarily concerned with: (a) the ability of large cultural producers to leverage their economic power to determine the pop cultural menu from which consumers select cultural items; (b) the significance of dominant ideology encoded into cultural products, in particular the ideology of consumerism. Some of the criticism of 'celebratory' analyses of active audiences came from within audience studies itself. For instance, Morley called for more attention to be paid to the comparative boundedness of polysemic cultural texts:

The power of viewers to reinterpret meanings is hardly equivalent to the discursive power of centralized media institutions to construct the texts which the viewer then interprets, and to imagine otherwise is simply foolish. (1997, 125)

Cultural imperialism's focus on power crucial

Morley's commentary underscores the importance of power. While power should not be reduced to domination – clearly, *empowerment* is a key dimension of the broader power equation, unless one is talking about a utopia that humanity has yet to achieve, questions of power inevitably involve issues of inequality.

Cultural imperialism scholarship forces us to address key power inequality questions and issues. Among the most crucial of these is the question of general flows of culture as they are embedded within larger global relations of power. Among the questions which grow out of this larger question: *Who* is appropriating *what* cultural materials/texts/items and from *where* do these cultural products come? Also, who is appropriating *more of what* and from *where*? And, who is appropriating *less of what* from *where*? Other crucial questions with respect to global cultural flows include: When cultural resistance occurs, exactly what/who is being resisted? How does resistance manifest itself, i.e. what forms is it assuming? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, *at what level* is resistance manifesting itself? There is a dramatic difference between micro-level individual resistance to consumerism which finds its expression in, for example, television audience members pressing the mute button when assaulted by a stream of advertisements and macro-level, collective

political economic resistance, for instance by way of a radical subversion of a Wal-Mart advertisement to underscore capitalist contradiction.

More concretely, while it's clear, for instance, that a media organization and global pop cultural icon such as MTV has indeed been significantly localized, it still matters that MTV is founded in the United States, that MTV's formats are first produced in the United States, and that the ways in which MTV has worked to localize its product are comparatively homogenous (Chalaby 2006; Jones 2005). In fact, while they are localized around the world, many, though clearly not all, popular cultural forms emerge out of the West, and, in particular out of the United States (Kuisel 2003; Moran and Keane 2006; Sparks 2007). Equally significant, localization is often performed in comparatively formulaic fashion (Machin and Van Leeuwen 2004; Pieterse 2003). This means, for instance, that while McDonald's might deliver a special menu in a specific country, the emphasis on how the 'localized' items on that menu are delivered – quickly, efficiently, and according to very particular production and delivery procedures – is essentially universal (Machin and Van Leeuwen 2004).

Working toward an egalitarian global cultural field

It is true that a Hollywood film such as *The Titanic* is read in different ways in different local, regional and national contexts. Furthermore, *The Titanic*, like any cultural object, is fundamentally hybrid. Its form and content are a reflection of multiple historical and contemporary cultural influences, meaning they are not *essentially* American in a purist sense. Yet it still matters that *The Titanic* was produced in the United States, and not in Uruguay or Vietnam, it still matters that films produced in countries such as Uruguay or Vietnam do not regularly garner the large global audiences Hollywood films do, and it still matters that flows of culture, in particular film and television, generally emanate from powerful cultural producers in countries like the United States and the United Kingdom (De Bens and de Smaele 2001), with comparatively little cultural backflow of these cultural forms into the United States (Chalaby 2006; Coates and Peaslee 2005; Phillipson 2003; Schiller 2000). Of course, it is certainly worth considering and closely examining the question of whether the United States, and perhaps a few other historically powerful cultural producers, are perhaps atypical in terms of flows of culture, if, for instance, they are generally more intransigent and/or economically impenetrable to significant counter-flows than other national contexts and, if so, why this might be the case.

Training an empirical and critical lens on where a cultural product is produced does not matter according to some essentialist sense in which appeals are made to the essentially 'purity' of culture. A pure, unadulterated local, national, or regional culture does not exist. However, where a cultural object is produced *does* matter in the sense that voice matters. Multiple social actors collectively construct the local, national, regional and global cultural arenas. However, not all of these actors have equal influence in creating the 'shared' culture that circulates within and across the various levels of the global social order. Some groups' cultural stories are heard much more, and in many more places, than other groups' stories. These stories, which are essentially hybrid in nature, but which are also *unequal* hybrids in the sense that they draw more from some groups – from Anglo-Saxons as opposed to Native Americans – and some locations – from the United Kingdom as opposed to Armenia – can become disproportionately influential in terms of the cultural raw materials available to social actors in different locations. If one views human egalitarianism as an ideal – as I do, and, as I believe many other media, communication and cultural studies scholars do – the fact that local, national, regional, and global cultural

arenas are often dominated by the stories and voices of some social actors and the stories and the voices of others are rarely, if ever, heard, matters quite a lot.

This is not an appeal to the need to preserve 'pure' national cultures or particular national identities or entities. It is a broader appeal to basic human egalitarianism and to the profound social importance of providing individuals and groups with as equal an opportunity as is possible to create their own identities, practices, and forms of expression while *also* giving these individuals and groups a chance to contribute meaningfully to the larger, collective practices and forms of expression which form the global cultural stage.

In the end, in order to effectively deconstruct and contest inequality in global cultural production, distribution and consumption one must acknowledge the specific reality of inequities in global cultural relations. To claim the death of such inequities on the basis of universal cultural hybridity and localization – with little or no attention paid to power hierarchies – lays the ideological groundwork for the continued (re)production of precisely these inequities, as, when challenged, the dominant fundamental group(s) can simply claim that equality has already been achieved.

Cultural imperialism vs. globalization of culture: a middle ground?

Multiple scholars (Hall 1990; Kraidy 2002; Straubhaar 2007; Tomlinson 1999, etc.) have picked up the trope of hybridity and hybridization and sought to develop it and refine it, and, in some cases, to claim it as the analytical and theoretical locus around which international media and communication research ought to congeal. Hall (1990) was among the first to propose the examination of globalization and culture through the lens of hybridization via his notion of cultures in contact. According to Hall, new and different cultures – hybrids – emerge from social and cultural overlapping. This overlapping has historically taken place in what Hall describes as 'contact zones'. These are places where cultures intersect, with one typically an imperialist culture, the other(s) a subordinate one. The dominant, imperialist culture does not, according to Hall, steamroll the subordinate culture. Instead, a subordinate culture draws from its own roots and mixes its culture with elements of the hegemonic culture.

Considerable attention has recently been paid to considering hybridization in terms of power inequities. Attention has also been given to the challenge of marrying macro- and micro-level analysis. This, in an attempt to mold an approach which captures the strengths of both cultural imperialist and globalization of culture perspectives while leaving the weaknesses of each behind. In this section, I examine and analyze two comparatively recent articles in which some of the scholars at the leading edge of theorizing globalization, culture, and media seek to forge new, interesting and productive methodological and theoretical ground. The articles I select are certainly not the only ones I could have chosen. However, they are thought-provoking and highly relevant to the focus of this article.

Rogers (2006) searches for a middle ground vis-à-vis the cultural imperialism and globalization of culture continuum and, more broadly, with respect to a structure and agency continuum in the article, 'From Cultural Exchange to Transculturation: A Review and Reconceptualization of Cultural Appropriation'. In it, he advances an intriguing proposal to consider globalization, culture and media through the lens of 'transculturation'.

According to Rogers, 'Neither pure determinism (vulgar Marxism) nor pure agency (neoliberalism) is capable of accounting for the dynamics of cultural appropriation in the conditions of cultural dominance' (2006, 482). Here, Rogers locates cultural appropriation 'in the conditions of cultural dominance' while also acknowledging inequities in

global cultural flows, most notably the tremendous televisual and film outflow as opposed to inflow with respect to the United States. This sets Rogers' analysis apart from those which stop at the 'dynamics of cultural appropriation' and fail to get to the question of cultural dominance or unequal flows. Rogers also tips his theoretical hat to globalization of culture/active audience theorists, underscoring the importance of the idea of polysemic media texts which, he writes, 'challenge(d) simplistic models of ideological domination' (483).

Rogers ultimately proposes a typology of cultural appropriation based on four categories: Exchange, dominance, exploitation, and transculturation. He devotes the final third of his article to transculturation and to making an argument for its comparative superiority as a theoretical and analytical instrument by which to engage the intersections among globalization, media, and culture. 'Transculturation', he writes, 'refers not only to a more complex blending of cultures than the previous categories but also to a set of conditions under which such acts occur: globalization, neocolonialism, and the increasing dominance of transnational capitalism vis-à-vis nation states' (2006, 491).

Rogers makes his primary appeal to the 'trans'. However, it is worth asking: Does the reality of a growing tendency toward the 'trans' mean that no single national actor, or group of social actors, has more control over the emergent 'trans'-based system than another? It seems to me that the condition of 'transculturality' is likely to be different – sometimes dramatically so – for different people and peoples around the world, all of them positioned differently – sometimes radically so – vis-à-vis this social phenomenon. As a critical scholar, I am especially interested here in the question of power differentials in terms of the condition of transculturality – how can we most usefully and effectively understand, theorize, and address such differentials in a transcultural world while keeping the question of inequality squarely in view?

Kraidy and Murphy (2008) tap into the trope of the 'trans' as well in a more recent article, 'Shifting Geertz: Toward a Theory of Translocalism in Global Communication'. Like Rogers, Kraidy and Murphy work to locate the ideal middle point (in fact, the ideal point might not necessarily be exactly in the middle) along the cultural imperialism-globalization of culture continuum. They deliver criticism of this continuum's extremes while also pointing to what they view as a lack of empirical legwork within global communication and media studies. Kraidy and Murphy ultimately advocate for a comparative 'translocal' empirical approach. This calls for moving beyond a focus on, for example, cultural flows between the United States and other countries, to an examination of cultural flows *among* global regions, countries, and locales. Kraidy and Murphy's effort to balance political economic and local cultural consumption questions and considerations as well as their call for increased empirical engagement that does both of these things while also moving away from what might be called a core-periphery model of empirical engagement is compelling. Yet – and perhaps this has to do with my own belief in the continuing utility of many of the elements of the cultural imperialism model, in particular its stubborn insistence on foregrounding the reality of, and the significance of, political economic and cultural hierarchy – it seems to me as if Kraidy and Murphy tilt a bit more toward the globalization of culture end of the continuum than the cultural imperialism end in their proposal.

Conclusion: melding the macro and micro, the global and local, and production and consumption

Kraidy and Murphy's call for a comparative, empirically grounded translocalism and Rogers' appeal to a transcultural approach represent the leading edge of global communication

theory. In general, the direction in which they seek to push the field is a highly productive one as it seeks to tap the strengths of cultural imperialism and globalization of culture perspectives while also aiming to avoid some of their weaknesses. This melding of the two approaches undoubtedly has resulted in, and will continue to result in, the development of a more sophisticated and nuanced theoretical base from which to better understand the complex interplay among globalization, culture, and media.

Ultimately, it seems to me that the most effective middle ground approach would situate local, creative appropriation of cultural objects against the backdrop of those larger regional and global macro-forces which play a significant role in the question of which cultural objects are widely available in which particular cultural contexts, and which ones are not. This approach – which would keep an eye both on productive and consumptive players and actors – would also seek to acknowledge the many complexities and paradoxes that characterize the intersections among globalization, culture, and media, including, for example, the ways in which the local, national, regional, and global constitute one another (Kraidy and Murphy 2008). Ideally, such an approach would also pay attention to the ways in which resistance to local or regional cultural hegemony can paradoxically fuel national or international cultural hegemony. More concretely, it would, for example, acknowledge the ways in which, in Quebec, an individual business owner's decision to post a store sign in English only rather than in English *and* French in an attempt to resist and challenge the regional imposition of French in Quebec might *also* be understood as contributing to the hegemony of English on a *national, North American, and global* scale.

If paying attention to cross-cutting tendencies and paradox, for example, to the ways in which the global growth of MTV or McDonald's is heavily dependent upon localization strategies that, at a broad level of analysis, are comparatively homogenous, is crucial – and it is – it is equally important to engage processes of globalization at multiple levels of analysis. In other words, while it is crucial to pay attention to the reality of widespread localization of cultural products, in other words, to undeniable cultural difference, it is equally important to pay close attention to similarities and comparative homogenization. This means examining the ways in which the macro-sociological processes and forces of globalization are realized in, and shaped by, the micro-practices of everyday life. What, for example, does it mean in terms of larger macro-sociological forces such as the global spread of fast food culture and 'global' popular music when a Nigerian immigrant to Brazil sits down and helps herself to a Big Mac to the strains of a Celine Dion song in English in São Paulo? Alternatively, how do we make sense of, and meaningfully situate against the backdrop of the increasing global prevalence of English, a decision by Slovenian pop music group such as Siddharta to re-record its top songs in English? We might read the first example as an instance of increasing cultural hybridization, or, rather differently, as indicative of the increasing homogeneity of modern life. Alternatively, it could be read as indicative of both of these tendencies. And we might read the second example primarily as an instance of a musical group tapping English to realize greater global agency, or, rather differently, primarily as a micro-act that – when added together with thousands of similar micro-acts – contributes to the very thing that necessitates that Siddharta sing in English in the first place, meaning the global hegemony of English.

Ultimately, the challenge for global communication studies lies in constructing an analytical approach that doesn't lean too far toward a macro or micro-level perspective, but which effectively – and critically – takes both into account at the same time. This is not an easy, nor necessarily unproblematic, task. Indeed, the difficulty of – perhaps the impossibility of – putting aside one's assumptions about the nature of the relationship

between the human social whole and the individual is surely one of the primary reasons for the often heated debates that have swirled around, and which will continue to swirl around, how best to approach theorizing and studying the relation between the global and local and culture and media.

As contentious as these debates have been and as passionate as they continue to be, it seems clear that, as Fornäs (2008), Jansson (2009), and others have noted, global communication and media studies has generally moved beyond the polarization that once characterized the field. Thus, there appears to be general agreement that one cannot adequately grasp the nexus between globalization and culture by looking exclusively at the realm of cultural production – or by zeroing in only on local, individual acts of creative cultural appropriation. This doesn't mean that disagreement and debate have disappeared from global communication and media studies, or that the disagreement that remains does not revolve around some of the same issues that it has in the past, most notably, the question of where the balance of power primarily resides in the global/local equation. However, it does mean global communication and media studies is moving toward building approaches to engaging and understanding the global/local-culture/media dynamic in more sophisticated and productive fashion than it has in the past. In short, it shows that the field is not stagnant and that it is not being held back by entrenched thinking. Indeed, it is, as Rogers' (2006) and Kraidy and Murphy's (2008) recent work shows, very definitely moving forward. In the end, this is exactly what ought to be happening with theory, whether it's focused on the interplay between globalization, media and culture, or, more broadly, on the general nature of human social being in the world.

Short Biography

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Notes

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¹ Boyd-Barrett refers to 'media imperialism' here rather than to 'cultural imperialism'. Media imperialism can be thought of as a sub-category of cultural imperialism; it is particularly concerned with unbalanced media import and export relationships among countries.

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