• **Global media and the dialectics of the global**

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The notion of the global has caught on like wildfire in the last 15 years. It is conspicuously present in media outputs ranging from university pronouncements to corporate advertisements. 'Global vision', 'global brands', and 'global networks' are some of the phrases which have acquired common currency. Globalization has become a hot topic in discourse, both formal and informal, among politicians, media professionals, businessmen, and academics.

In spite of its currency, globalization remains an elusive concept (Hamelink, 1999). Academics differ in their emphases, with some treating it as a social process, and others stressing its consequences. To some, it is an extension of modernity (Giddens, 1990). To others, it is a new phase of imperialism (see Tomlinson, 1999). In the cultural domain, some expect globalization to result in cultural homogenization, while others see it as an opportunity for the synthesis of new cultures (Waters, 1995; Barker, 1999). Surrounded by so many contradictions and ambiguities, the term globalization begets both rejection and celebration at the same time.

One reason for the divergences in the responses to the idea of globalization has to do with the different ways in which it is conceptualized. Of special concern here is what constitutes the cultural global. To me, this is a matter of dialectics.

First, the global is always becoming. Cultural globalization is not a completed process, nor will it ever be. There is no point in assuming that we will ever reach a stage where there is a stable and enduring globality. In this process of becoming, the primary tendency is for the dominant cultures to prevail. However, the dominant cultures can be transculturated for self-aggrandizement too, resulting in a hybridized and globalized culture (Chan and Ma, 2002). There is no doubt that cultures have become more connected as their development becomes more and more integrated globally and as cultural exchanges intensify over time. Given the uneven resistance of the local, however, cultural globalization does not take place at a uniform speed. The global is thus embodied in the commonality of cultures on the one hand and in the diversity of hybridized cultures on the other.

Second, the global is not to be understood without reference to the local (Robertson, 1995). Not only do they go together conceptually, we have to incorporate the idea of the local because of the strong resistance

it may pose to the forces of globalization. The local is tied to 'immutables' such as soil, blood and history. The local can be so strong that the global itself becomes localized in the course of production, marketing and distribution. Or at least, the global can be localized during consumption. Indeed, what is local can be globalized too, as exemplified in the globalization of a Chinese legend *Mulan* (Chan, 2002) and the Asian martial arts story of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Wu and Chan, 2003). With the global and local feeding on one another, the boundaries between them are blurring, and the idea of cultural authenticity is constantly being redefined.

Third, what constitutes the global is the result of the interplay of diverging human activities, including structural social changes such as the rise of market democracy (Waters, 1995) and discursive contestation over the meaning of globalization (Guillen, 2001). What are the conditions of cultural globalization? Who benefits and who loses? How can the imbalances be addressed? Answers to these important questions will add to the reflexivity with which cultural globalization is carried forward, and will allow human beings to better assess its impact and re-direct its course of development in order to better meet their needs. Reflexivity may make a difference as what people think of a situation has real consequences, especially when their thoughts are translated into actions.

The above observations represent a dynamic and dialectical per-spective on cultural formation in this age of globalized communication. Based on observable social phenomena and actual practices, these abstractions should be applicable to the analysis of global media, the primary agents of cultural globalization. At the core of global media are the transnational media who run operations across national boundaries. Profit-driven and thriving on the economy of scale, some transnational media corporations seek to derive a larger part of their revenue from overseas markets. Even non-profit making global media such as public and state broadcasters want to expand their influence beyond their national borders.

Asking how global such media are is similar to asking how nationalistic they are. This question can be examined in terms of owner-ship, production, distribution, content and reception. The boundaries in all these areas are not as clear as they once were. At the level of ownership, production and distribution, transnational corporations are changing hands not just within a nation but also across countries and continents. Ownership shifts in the form of acquisition, merging, co-production and joint venture which take place at an unprecedented

speed and scope. This is especially alarming, as the transnational media corporations appear to have made some progress in reaching out to socialist China – the ultimate or the largest unexploited market of global media. Capital formation is at the heart of all these changes. The global media are Western, if not American. While this characterization remains largely valid, reality is getting more sophisticated, as indicated by the growing rivalries within the West and the success of the East, as represented by Japanese media operators, in making inroads into the global market in some areas. How capital and cultural products from different countries crisscross and realign in this new age should tell us a lot about the loci of global media and the evolution of global culture.

While global culture is increasingly economized, its ideological nature remains an important concern for many governments and cultural critics who may resort to protectionist measures and other forms of restrictions out of political or cultural motivations. Such local resistances help to tame what appears to be the invincible force of transnational media corporations and to slow down the seemingly inevitable trend of cultural globalization. Added to the force of local resistance is the primacy of cultural proximity at the consumption level. Many global media operators have subsequently learnt to localize in order to increase their popularity. This may result in superficial adaptations to the local or in more genuine cultural synthesis of the local and the global. That explains why there is a growing search for successful cultural crossovers in this age of globalized communication. Given that global media are first of all national players in their home countries, they are dualistic in nature, performing as both local and global media. The importance of the home base for global media ensures that they will not stray too far from their home culture.

Important as they are, notions such as glocalization, hybridization, and fusion cannot hide the power vector in global communication (Chan and Ma, 2002). As far as the boundaries of national and cultural identities remain, the power imbalance will continue to be an enduring issue. While it is appropriate for us to take a cultural turn in the study of global communication and stress how cultures clash and hybridize, we may lose sight of the underlying principles if we go so far as to neglect the structural parameters and the political economy that enable and restrict communication at the global level. Having said this, it should be noted that the influence of the global media is not merely measured in terms of capital formation, audience ratings and physical presence. As the world gets more integrated economically and culturally, it has become more difficult for local media to stay away from global

influence. They are locked into some kind of comparative framework, if not direct competition, with the global media, thereby putting pressure on them to adopt foreign organizational practices, formats, genres, and ideas that are perceived to be more advanced and competitive.

Our understanding of the global in global media cannot be complete without knowledge at the reception end. What is global is relative to the audience's level of cosmopolitanism. As more people are brought up in an environment with a good mix of global and local media, the cultural boundaries and reference points are shifting. How such contextual change will interact with the ways audiences decode and appropriate the content of global media has become a significant issue as cultural globalization picks up its momentum.

In short, what constitutes globality is problematic. As said earlier, its meaning and significance are not only based on observable facts but are also a result of discursive contestations. The global in global media is tied to the larger debates over the asymmetrical relationship between different parts of the world. In spite of all the globalizing tendency, the world will not become a unified whole; neither will its culture reach a singularity. States, economies and cultures will continue to strive for survival and domination as they come into contact with one another, resulting in tensions that may be reflected in the media world. As long as tensions exist between the local and the global, global communication promises to be an exciting area of study, which can put to the test the dialectical perspective mentioned above.

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• From internationalization to transnationalization

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The transnationalization of global media at the beginning of the 21st century can be comprehended as the third phase in a succession of paradigm shifts in the evolution of international communication from the mid-19th century onwards.

Internationalization

The second industrial revolution that developed during the second half of the 19th century (Caron, 1997), and the new technologies associated with it, spurred the first big bang in international communication. In the 1850s, the application of electricity to the telegraph facilitated the transfer of information over long distances. In the ensuing decade, progress in steamship and cable technology enabled telegraph companies to begin laying down submarine cables. By the end of the century, telegraph communications connected the world's main cities, reducing from weeks to hours the transmission time of information (Kieve, 1973; Standage, 1998).

Alongside the emergence of the first corporations with an international scope, such as telegraph companies and news agencies (Rantanen, 1997), the first international media markets developed. In technology, firms with cutting-edge expertise (e.g. Marconi), rapidly expanded their activities in several territories (Hills, 2002). In entertainment, the fledgling international film trade was first dominated by the French studios, and later overtaken by a Hollywood-based US film industry during the interwar period (Trumpbour, 2002).

Governments played a crucial role because they considered the progress of international communication a strategic priority. European powers subsidized telegraph companies – when they did not own them – and the US State Department worked closely with Hollywood in its bid