

• **Disciplinary spaces and globalization: a postcolonial unsettling**

Radha S. Hegde

Department of Culture and Communication, New York University, USA

Across the social sciences, the academic gaze is increasingly directed towards globalization and its impact on the social and economic landscape. It is both a theoretical and empirical challenge to capture the multilayered complexity posed by the sheer speed and scope of these changes. The inaugural issue of a new journal provides an opportunity to think about how the globe and, in particular, the world beyond the nation enter into the disciplinary space of communication and media studies. The contemporary geopolitical moment also calls for a critical examination of how globalization gets defined, constituted and deployed in both public and academic discourse. Terminologies such as cosmopolitanism, nationalism, mobility and hybridity need to be revisited in order to recharge their analytical edge and in turn make scholarship more reflective of the material consequences of global disjunctures.

Over the last few years, a prodigious amount of scholarship on global transformations has emerged. In the shake-up and flow of technology, capital, images and people, an onslaught of material issues simultaneously divides and brings together the center and periphery, the global and local. Mapping these transformations requires a refusal of the normative casting of globalization as the progressive flip-side of tradition and underdevelopment (see Calhoun, 2002). There is also a strident discourse of consumer cosmopolitanism authored by corporate interests with an obvious stake in scripting the world as a connected market. It is our responsibility to demystify the accounts and logics which gloss over the material inequalities of participation, access and representation available to people in the global South. To articulate the politics of globalization is to enter into a discussion of how to intervene in the power of Euro-American modernity, which has the ability to restage its presence in predictable yet unexpected quarters. Let me offer a few thoughts on how the intellectual enterprise is already implicated in this discussion of modernity.

If one considers the growth of the communication discipline, especially in the United States, there have been only limited intellectual spaces for the study of world regions. The logic of the area-studies model, with its clear disciplinary separation of the domestic and the international and the strong assumption of modernization, has had a strong impact on the shaping of international communication studies. In a field that has fiercely insisted on the insularity of cultures and the instrumentality of knowledge, there has also been until quite recently an

insistent refusal to recognize and record the violence of colonialism, patriarchy, racism or, for that matter, history. What we have acquired in terms of epistemological legacy are Orientalist images of racial and gendered bodies, an unquestioned promotion of Westernization from which follows the hierarchical ordering of global cultures.

The need to critically engage with the intertwining of contemporary global events and history has become very apparent in the post September 11th environment, where local and remote experiences are connected in personal and politically explosive ways. The need to engage with history and politics within communication studies has acquired new and urgent meaning. Postcolonial scholarship enables the internationalist turn by introducing the need to historicize cultural practices. Grossberg (2002) argues that postcolonial studies have contributed to an enriched understanding of contexts:

... if contexts have to be understood in geographical and historical terms, then at least part of the understanding of any contemporary social context involves its location within the history and geography of colonialism as a crucial and deep structure of North Atlantic modernity. (p. 369)

Postcolonial studies have revitalized the space of communication and media studies by placing issues of race, gender, nation, citizenship and sexuality at theoretical center-stage. Both in terms of theory and method, there is a conscious commitment to addressing the problematics of Western modernity together with the politics of knowledge production. In addition to its intellectual appeal, the pliability of postcolonial cultural studies lies in its refusal to adopt a language of universalization, a resolute insistence on local specificity and a self-conscious articulation of speaking positions.

Recent geopolitical developments have foregrounded the need to think carefully about what internationalizing our academic pursuit means. It must be said that transnational mobility and diasporic concerns have contributed to a body of research that stems from a different optic and political relationship to geographical locations in the global South. In conference circuits, there is a creative burgeoning of research that takes a strong interdisciplinary approach to the study of global transformations. The critique of area studies is being increasingly brought into the conversations and concerns about issues of ethnicity, gender and sexuality. This is an important move especially at a time when outmoded binary descriptions of cultures are being restaged. In order to access globalization from below (as Appadurai, 2000, suggests) media practices provide the very site to understand the global as it gets scripted and performed on multiple levels.

Globalization, according to Bourdieu (2002), is not the result of economic inevitability but of a politics that is conscious and calculated. Yet, he argues, the paradoxical reality of globalization is that it relies upon 'a politics of depoliticization'. This prompts the need to think about media in more expansive and innovative ways in order to revive an analytical interest in the intersections of media practices and everyday life, in the connections between representation and material experience in various global locales. It is here that we see the power of mediated images to mobilize global versions of modernity and thereby intervene in the construction of everyday life. The contemporary moment marks the emergence of new forms of sociality and cultural practices constructed by the coming together of media, migration, mobility and the flow of capital. The exploding of traditional categories leads to the crafting of new conceptualizations of belonging, national community and citizenship.

Take Bollywood, India's movie industry, which has recently arrived with a splash on the global radar screen. The growing middle class in India, the visible rise of the South Asian diasporic presence in the West and the recent interest of global media corporations in promoting Bollywood are not merely happening at the same time because of a coincidental inevitability. As the taste for local media expands, media corporations globalize their involvement in regional productions (see McChesney, 2001). Individual and group identities are redefined through media practices that seamlessly weave in local and global realities. In the United States, South Asian diasporic youth builds resistant cool ethnic subcultures focusing their social life around activities that involve Bollywood. Parties planned around Bollywood-inspired music and fashions draw in cultural paraphernalia that sustain a thriving ethnic industry. It is the calculus of globalization where the political economy of Indian films works into the circuit of immigrant desire, youth identity, transnational mobility and the commodification of nostalgia.

Bollywood has garnered fans in countries around the world spanning Eastern Europe, Middle East, Africa, the Philippines and Japan, and creating newer audience groups for the industry. Writing about the circulation of Indian films in Nigeria, Larkin (2003) notes that Indian films offer ways of being modern and traditional by creating a template for explaining the tensions of postcoloniality. He argues that Indian films provide a different concept of being modern, a 'third space' that mediates between Islamic traditions and Western modernity. Larkin also notes that Southern Nigerians cite the popularity of Indian films among the Hausa of Northern Nigeria as a sign of their 'backwardness'.

Another interesting example is the viewing of the US sitcom 'Friends' in India not for pleasure but as a pedagogical tool in the training of call-center employees working for US corporations in India. Yes, learning US-speak via media characters such as Phoebe and Joey translates into required skills for global employment in the Third World. Such is the irony of these transnational encounters where entrance of the Third World into the global stage is modulated and regulated by the intimate global grouping of Western modernity, technology and capitalism.

The various aspects of globalization including the growth of religious fundamentalism, the privatization and deregulation of mass communication, new technologies and the rise of global markets ripple out into social and cultural spheres, and affect the materiality of life in metropolitan centers and peripheries. Underlying all these realities is the power of representation and the reproductive power of a colonial imaginary that pervades world cultures. Depending on where one is located, the global can be either expansive, overlapping and hypervisible or invisible and tantalizingly unreachable.

The transnational context, deeply fragmented and divided by criss-crossing lines of power, exerts a significant influence on the patterns of communicative activity and modes of identification. The environment opens up new types of questions and lines of inquiry that need innovative and critical attention. A postcolonial reading of globality should produce resistant readings of the invisible operations of power reproduced through media accounts, representations and practices. Adopting a principle of decolonization as an epistemological 'given' will enable a more transnationally responsible and democratic reading of the politics and practices of representation in the global context.

References

- Appadurai, Arjun (2000) 'Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination', *Public Culture* 12(1): 1–19.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (2002) 'The Politics of Globalization', [<http://www.opendemocracy.net/debates/article-6-27-283.jsp>], accessed 18 October 2004.
- Calhoun, Craig (2002) 'Imagining Solidarity: Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere', *Public Culture* 14(1): 147–71.
- Grossberg, Lawrence (2002) 'Postscript' (Special Issue on Postcolonial Approaches to Communication), *Communication Theory* 12(3): 367–3.
- Larkin, Brian (2003) 'Itineraries of Indian Cinema: African Videos, Bollywood and Global Media', in Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (eds) *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality and Transnational Media*, pp. 170–91. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- McChesney, Robert (2001) 'Global Media, Neoliberalism and Imperialism', [<http://www.monthlyreview.org/301rwm.htm>], accessed 19 October 2004.