

From Cultural Imperialism to Transnational Commercialization: Shifting Paradigms in International Media Studies

Michael Griffin
Communication and Media Studies
Macalester College
griffin@macalester.edu

But a Pokemon piñata is still a piñata, isn't it?
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participant, Acapulco, June 2000

Introduction

The idea for this paper emerged from a presentation at the International Communication Association (ICA) Conference held in Acapulco, Mexico in June of 2000. As a popular tourist destination, Acapulco represented a mix of “global” commerce familiar to world travelers. The conference hotel, owned by the Fairmont Hotel chain headquartered in New York, was one of several luxury resorts that stretched along the beach between the airport and the city. Travelling along the Costera Miguel Aleman, the main commercial thoroughfare, a parade of transnational corporate logos flashed by the windows of the cab: Hyatt, Hilton, and Radisson hotels, Wal Mart, Costco, and Woolworth’s retail stores, McDonalds, Burger King, and Dominos’ Pizza fast-food chains, Walt Disney and Warner Bros. novelty/theme stores, Nestle and Baskin-Robbins ice cream shops, a Nike shoe and apparel store, a Ralph Lauren boutique, Eastman Kodak photo shops, an American Express service center, Planet Hollywood, Hooters, and the Hard Rock Cafe.

Of course, the transnational expansion of corporate chains is only one facet of what many writers term “the processes of globalization.” At the conference hotel there was a bank of computer terminals set up in the conference center to provide Internet access for all of the participants. The hope of temporarily leaving office worries and correspondence behind and escaping to a tropical getaway was muted by the reach of technological networks and the nagging presence of email only a mouse click away. Hotel televisions carried a variety of U.S., as well as Mexican channels and programming, and Mexican television was punctuated not only by high budget commercial advertising but slickly produced political spots for the upcoming national election. Vicente Fox, former top executive of Coca-Cola Latin America (and a personal friend of George W. Bush), was running a sophisticated media campaign for president of Mexico (with much assistance from corporate media and marketing consultants) and eventually succeeded in defeating Francisco Labastida, the candidate of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), a regime that had held the presidency since 1929 and dominated Mexican politics for most of the century. Fox (an anglicized name) ran on the promise that he would end decades of PRI state bureaucracy and run the government more like a business (with himself as CEO).

None of these signs of transnational commerce, media, and politics were particularly surprising. These are the types of things travelers see in many parts of the world. And the experience was repeated this past summer when the 2002 ICA Conference convened in Seoul, South Korea. International conferences are most often held in large metropolises, such as Seoul, and especially in the metropolitan commercial centers that constitute what Sassen (1995) has termed a “global grid of strategic sites,” those critical intersections with the resources and interconnected systems that make them “global cities” (Brezezinski, 1970; Sassen 1991, 1995). Such “global” or “world” cities represent the primary concentrations of corporate headquarters, financial, accounting, legal and advertising services, media organization and culture industries, and various professional associations and non-governmental organizations, as well as the leading global marketplaces for commodities, commodity futures, investment capital, foreign exchange, equities, bonds, and real estate. Global cities may be the key places (spatial arenas of interaction) that facilitate and structure a global grid of finance and trade, that is, act as the infrastructural

nexus points for world markets.

The cities and the globally oriented markets and firms they contain mediate in the relation of the world economy to nation-states. ...To a considerable extent, global processes are this grid of sites and linkages (Sassen, 1998, p. 214).

Relatively small "resort towns," such as Acapulco, on the other hand, situated in the mostly rural state of Guerrero, represent the face of transnational flows of tourism, along with attendant brand-name consumerism and pop culture iconography (in other words, "new geographies of consumption" (Jackson, 2002)). Such movements of people and commerce are often quite distant from the nodal centers Sassen calls "global cities." They suggest instead "flows" of people and money, of tourism and consumption (Castell, 1996) out from these centers. In Acapulco these flows reveal a transnational vision of contemporary consumerism, an increasingly homogenous (though not entirely homogenous) world of consumption marked by corporate branding. This commercialized consumer culture often masks, by its sheer scale, seeming ubiquity, and "designed" quality (designed especially to draw attention and suggest glamour) the multi-layered contexts of social interaction in which consumption practices and cultural identities play out. It also effectively masks the exclusion and marginalization that accompany participation in transnational markets.

Perhaps most interesting, in Acapulco, is the seeming ease with which the transnational elements are juxtaposed with more distinctly local aspects of Mexican culture. Against the background of nationally (and transnationally) produced TV and billboard advertisements for the presidential candidates, locally organized political street demonstrations wound through the city at night. Parades of vans, automobiles, and flatbed trucks loaded with political partisans hoisting printed and hand-made signs and banners drove up and down the commercial avenues. The cacophony of honking horns, megaphones, and chanting voices that typified these campaign demonstrations was as unfamiliar to a U.S. observer as the television commercials and billboards were familiar. A few blocks off the main thoroughfare overt signs of corporate commerce and mass media publicity largely disappeared (as they might in any residential neighborhood anywhere) and a more distinctly Guerrea style was evident in the appearance of homes, cafes, shops and open markets. Local domestic life, presumably like that in most parts of the world, remained relatively insulated from the intrusions of commercial activity and tourists. Yet the "cosmopolitan" and the "local" (Merton, 1949) jostled with one another continuously in Acapulco; and it seemed to be in this constant flux and reflux of transnational commercial influences and local everyday life that the issues of so-called "globalization" and its impact on culture were most tangibly manifest.

As part of the "flow" of tourism to Acapulco, and not necessarily part of the "place," in historical terms, we conference goers were part of what Sklair (2001) calls a "transnational producer-service class," with our transnational habits of work and consumption: airplane flights, faxes, emails, long-distance phone calls, eating at gourmet seafood restaurants, having cocktails at the beach, buying silver jewelry, folk-art, crafts, and other souvenirs (perhaps even a pokemon piñata). The hybrid nature of Acapulco was compatible with the inherently cosmopolitan bent of our own professional activities (e.g. listening to scholarly paper presentations on popular Mexican television dramas). Yet, the "black hole" of marginalization and exclusion form the global network society that Castell (1996; 2000) describes, always just around the corner in our own cities and towns, was also particularly salient in this Mexican tourist region. Inland from the beach clubs, just over the first ridge of hills, desperately poor families attempt to scratch a living from meager crops planted in semi-arid hillsides.

How well do the familiar paradigms of modernization, development, cultural imperialism, or globalization address both the transnational and the local circumstances and habits of life in places such as this? How well are they able to account for the predominance of transnational marketing, the embrace of transnational brand images, and the simultaneous marginalization of most of the population from the system of contemporary consumerism that is so visible all around them? How do we resolve the "universalism" of iconography of consumerism with the "particularism" of regional and ethnic identities and ways of life? Or the seeming homogenization of branded culture with the differentiation of local circumstances and traditions? How do we reconcile the documented control of "global centers" over global networks with evidence of decentralized adaptations and hybridizations constructed in encounters

with world markets? And how are these questions further complicated by the “deterritorializing” and “reterritorializing” of migratory and immigrant people. The institutionalized study of “international communication” has not adequately theorized these (and other) complications and inconsistencies.

In particular, I want to argue that the theories of dependency and cultural imperialism, which arose in reaction to ethnocentric, Cold War notions of post-colonial development and modernization, have constituted a necessary but insufficient stage of macro-level analysis, and that more recent postmodern conceptions of “globalization” lack coherence and specificity. I propose a move away from over-theorized and over-totalizing assumptions concerning the nature of “globalization” and a turn toward the close analysis of particular contexts of economic and cultural interchange that only cumulatively constitute transnational networks of information, finance and commercial marketing. In doing so, I am not recapitulating a “uses and gratifications” derived framework that sees controlling autonomy in the hands of receivers who process, interpret, resist or transform the cultural products which they encounter according to their own specific circumstances, cultural identities, or position on the global grid. Nor do I wish to conflate the economic and the cultural. The structure and control of production and distribution, and the economic and political engines driving the processes of control, are essential issues in communication research that need to be part of any framework that presumes to study the changing landscapes of media and culture. Likewise, the nature of informational and financial networks and their ramifications for “commodity chains”—circuits of finance, design, product development, production, subcontracting, marketing, advertising, distribution, and consumption that characterize transnational commerce in a context of increasingly compressed space and time—are rightly identified as a profound shift in economic relations and practices (Castells, 1996). However, in the process of debunking normative Western assumptions of the inevitable and universal march of technological “progress” and “modernization,” and drawing attention to the systematic inequalities and vulgarizations endemic to capitalist Westernization, the paradigm of cultural imperialism has continued to suffer from its own assumption of structural determinism and has not sufficiently explored the context-specific processes of cultural and commodity diffusion, integration, rejection or transformation.

Since the September 11 attacks in the United States, the nature of global relations has been more widely questioned. The targeting of both the World Trade Center and the Pentagon suggests that the attackers struck against more than one form of imperialism. Saturation media coverage in the year since the attacks has repeatedly suggested that terrorist envy has led to their desire to attack and destroy “our way of life,” a way of life that is routinely defined in terms of the freedom to choose and acquire among bountiful goods. Numerous journalists and scholars have framed the “post 9-11” problem as a “clash of civilizations” and offered competing arguments for the need to “democratize,” “modernize,” “civilize,” “transform” or “save” the Islamic world. Islamic fundamentalists—and often by extension Muslims in general, or Arabs in general, or Middle Easterners in general, or Middle Easterners, Southwest Asians and South Asians, in general—have been easily demonized in a media system where their images are easily matched to long-established fictional entertainment stereotypes of the Arab villain (Shaheen, 1988) and are seen as belonging to that anti-Western world of the “other” described so thoroughly in Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). Indeed, the September 11 attacks themselves quickly became grist for the commercial media mill, providing many hours and pages of sensational imagery for television, magazines and newspapers. As with the Gulf War of 1991, commercially motivated media relentlessly moved to exploit the conflict, fire, death and destruction that are so much a part of saleable media fare (Gerbner, 1992; Griffin & Lee, 1995).

Bin Laden’s public statements specifically single out the incursions and transgressions of “Americans” and “Jews” in the Middle East as the instigation for reprisals. Yet there is a broader Islamic response in many countries, and an apparent assumption on the part of most Western writers, that recent attempts to strike at the West are a challenge to the secular and commercial mores and symbols of Western modernism and globalization, perhaps even the onset of an overt culture war against Western commercialization and its trappings. More than ever, it seems, previous paradigms for conceptualizing modernization, dependency, and imperialism must be overhauled to address the transnational diffusion of a secular consumer society and its ramifications. And merely recognizing and charting the existence of the expanding networks of commerce and commercial promotion will not help us to understand the implications of commercialization in specific places and cultures.

This paper attempts to outline some of the challenges and prospects for such research in this new Post-Cold War era of global conflict, as so-called “global” cosmopolitan influences driven by the logic of commercial marketing jostle with the diverse features of local cultures. In the sections that follow I try to contextualize this challenge for transnational media studies against the background of theoretical paradigms that have historically characterized international mass communication research. And I question the ability of previous models to describe or explain the peculiar character of those processes of cultural homogenization, creolization, and contradiction that have accompanied the spread of transnationally standardized commercial culture.

“International media research,” as it continues to respond to a changing global situation in the 21st century, will need to go beyond documenting the structural realities of world economic systems (as vitally necessary and important as that continues to be) and concern itself also with case studies of the particular symbolic exchanges, accommodations and contests that occur in local arenas of influence and diffusion. It is precisely those points of unsettled contact between transnational marketing and representation and the shifting contexts of traditional, transitional, marginal or hybridized local cultures that seem to offer the most promising areas for new research. In these contexts links between the structured systems of expanding technology, global markets, and transnational media, and the culturally specific and more elusive lifeways of particular locales may be revealed. The jostling of these forces involves a complex interplay of culturally specific traditions and lifeways with the more standardized and restricted codes of corporate commerce. Neither the international orientation of nation-state imperialism nor the often complacent assumptions of inexorable “globalization” seem adequate to address such complex arenas and processes of cultural interaction.

The central purpose of my argument, then, is to challenge the historical assumptions embedded in certain key terms of “international communication” scholarship—especially the terms “international” and “globalization”—and to suggest that these powerful universalizing metaphors suggest paradigmatic views with limited applicability to future studies of media penetration and socio-cultural adaptation and response. The abstract empiricism of global systems theory must be buttressed by concrete descriptions and case-specific analyses of media representation, the patterns of media production required by commercial marketing, and the ways in which such media representation is encountered, managed and responded to in local contexts across geographic regions.

“Globalization” as a Pluralist Alternative to the Imperialism Framework

The last two decades of the twentieth century saw the idea of cultural imperialism challenged from several directions. Globalization advocates and certain postmodern theorists considered the idea anachronistic, and even scholars critical of Western media imperialism and hegemony in international affairs began to reject the concept as over totalizing and imprecise (Golding & Harris, 1997; Roach, 1997; Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996). Like the notion of development before it, the concept was confronted by patterns of communication growth and change that often defied its mode of explanation.

The first challenge came in the form of audience studies that questioned the homogenizing influences of mass produced media content. An outgrowth of the “cultural studies” movement in communications research, and its concerns for the active role of receivers in interpreting, negotiating, resisting, or even subverting the polysemic meanings of mass media presentations, several landmark studies from the 1980s provided evidence that audiences in both Western and non-Western cultural contexts brought distinctly different patterns of interpretation and media use to bear in their interactions with Western mass media products (Ang, 1985; Lull, 1988, 1990, 1991; Liebes & Katz, 1990; Morley, 1980, 1986, 1992).

A second challenge came as a result of the expansion and concentration of transnational business itself, what Mattelart (1994) calls “the ascendancy of the geoeconomy.” Emerging technological networks for real-time data transmission laid the groundwork for financial globalization, the “delinking” of capital markets from nation-states and a growing dependence of national production on transnational capital flows. By the early 1980s the IMF and the World Bank began to take a more assertive role in stabilizing world currencies, assuring Third World debt repayment, and facilitating transnational capital transfers and

investments (Herman & McChesney, 1997, pp. 28-31). In an often cited 1983 article "The Globalization of Markets," and the book *The Marketing Imagination* (1986), management science professor and consultant Theodore Levitt, then editor of the *Harvard Business Review*, called for the application of global financial networking to economic and cultural marketing. He argued that already expanding technological networks were leading the world towards "a converging commonality" and that this "commonality" was producing increasingly uniform needs and markets (1983, pp. 42-43). In order to thrive successfully in this new environment, Levitt argued, firms must compete on a global scale with a global strategic vision of market planning and a globally integrated approach to customers. He believed that accelerating corporate concentration, and particularly the media and advertising mega-mergers already underway in the early 1980s, made increasing world-wide standardization of products and appeals necessary and inevitable. Although in some respects this was no more than a natural result of mass production strategies that always gravitated towards economies of scale based on expanding markets, the old multinational corporation did this by operating in multiple countries and adapting its products to different national preferences. Levitt's idea was that the new global corporation would move away from catering to large numbers of customized markets to addressing fewer standardized regional markets, eventually transcending vestigial national differences altogether to sell the same kinds of things, to similar classes of people, in the same ways everywhere. He saw new advertising and communications mega-agencies, such as Saatchi and Saatchi (for whom he consulted) as new models of "global firms" which would operate as if the entire world were a single set of stratified markets, and its products, services, distribution and communication part of an integrated system of global marketing. This model of globalization has been envisioned as a kind of cybernetic grid, relating global firms as synergistic systems to transnational networks of customers.

The fact that Saatchi and Saatchi's strategy to create a globally integrated marketing and communications giant collapsed under crushing indebtedness during the recession of the 1980s was viewed by many as only a temporary setback in the inevitable trend towards global synergy. And by the end of the 1980s the fall of the Soviet empire reinvigorated assumptions about the inevitability of a world capitalist system, leading to a spate of free-flow rhetoric and buoyant predictions that international media access would break down barriers and "bring the whole world closer."

For business purposes...the boundaries that separate one nation from another are no more real than the equator. They are merely convenient demarcations of ethnic, linguistic and cultural entities. They do not define business requirements or consumer trends (IBM 1990; quoted in Morley & Robins, 1995, p. 10).

That same year, 1990, the head of Time Warner, Steven Ross, gave what was titled a "Worldview address" to the Edinburgh International Television Festival. In that address he claimed that Time Warner stands for "complete freedom of information," and the "free flow of ideas, products and technologies in the spirit of fair competition." As pointed out by Morley and Robins in *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes, and Cultural Boundaries* (1995), Ross characterized national boundaries as relics of the past, and stated, "The new reality of international media is driven more by market opportunity than by national identity." Claiming that this free and open global competition will bring "a better world," Ross continues,

The competitive marketplace of ideas and experience can only bring the world closer together. ...With new technologies, we can bring services and ideas that will help draw even the most remote areas of the world into the international media community (Ross, 1990).

As the participation of Time Warner, the world's largest media and entertainment corporation, makes clear, the advance of communication technologies not only provided an evolving matrix for transmitting government, financial, and market information but created new entertainment, news, and info-tainment opportunities as well. The techno-financial macrosystem facilitated continuing multi-national corporate expansion and concentration, and the creation of transnational multi-media partnerships and mega-groups, shifting the network of control from the overt military-industrial synergy of the Cold War era (particularly in the U.S.) to a global grid of transnational communications systems jointly owned or operated by giant conglomerates such as Time-Warner/AOL (Turner-CNN), News Corporation (FOX, StarTV, SkyTV), Sony, Disney (ABC), Viacom (CBS, MTV), Bertelsmann, and General Electric (NBC).

Telecom and cable operations have also undergone multiple mergers and takeovers that increasingly cross national boundaries (as in the purchase of MCI by British Telecom, or cable giant TCI by AT&T). Satellite and cable systems transformed the roles played by dominant news services such as Reuters, AP, UPI, Agence France-Press, Reuters TV (formerly Visnews) and Worldwide Television News, and led to the creation of new “global news services such as Cable News Network (CNN) and CNN International, and later CNBC, MSNBC, and the Fox News Channel. New entertainment services such as Music Television (MTV) and Entertainment and Sports Network (ESPN) were launched in the U.S. and eventually grew into transnational enterprises, with custom regional MTV production occurring in Europe, Asia and Latin America (one of the three Asian MTV channels is in Mandarin). Since the 1980s, global satellite and cable systems such as News Corporation’s Asian Star TV, Indian Zee TV, Sky Broadcasting in Japan, India and Latin America, among others, have established global distribution networks for the programming and products of the entertainment media giants that finance and sponsor them.

At the same time that global distribution networks emerged under the control of commercial media conglomerates, media production (following other sectors of commercial manufacturing) became less easily identified with a few “core” metropolises. Regional centers of media production arose and/or expanded in such places as India, Brazil, Mexico, Egypt, and Hong Kong, along with regional, “geocultural” markets for their cultural products (Straubhaar, 1997). This has served to organize world markets for media and cultural products in new ways, particularly as regional operations such as Televisa in Mexico, Globo TV in Brazil, or India Sky Broadcasting and Zee Telefilms in India are acquired by, or enter into joint ventures with, transnational giants such as News Corporation. This amalgamation of ever growing corporate conglomerates and their media systems (CNN, Star TV, CNBC, MSNBC, MTV, etc.), jointly operated with regional distribution networks and media production centers, have created a truly global “reach” and market penetration never before seen. In some respects, such corporately operated networks of production, distribution and access have begun to compete with nation states as loci of communication power and control (Griffin & Kagan, 1999; Herman & McChesney, 1997; Mowlana, et.al., 1992). In the face of this multifaceted and commercial “globalization” the idea of cultural imperialism—rooted as it is in international and/or intercultural relations of dominance and dependence—is less simply or directly applied.

Finally, growing attention to the complex cultural dynamics of “post-colonial” relations, and a growing awareness of the inadequacy of conceptualizing global cultural flows as unidirectional (or flowing exclusively from dominant “cores” to formerly colonized dependents), produced a burgeoning interest in the many forms of transcultural hybridization that seemed to result from multi-directional cultural influences. Music provides one of the best arenas for observing such transcultural patterns. The prominence and popularity in the U.S. and other Western nations of the various regional and creolized genres marketed as “world music”—from Jamaican reggae, Mexican banda music, and Cuban and Brazilian jazz and dance music, to West African, South African, and Andean folk music, Indo-fusion, and even Afro-Celtic—is evident in the recording categories routinely displayed in CD catalogs, on internet sites and in record shops. A similar influence is apparent in television and motion pictures. The regional and global distribution of Latin American telenovelas, Hong Kong martial arts actions films, Hindi musical melodramas, and other regional cinema products (from locations as varied as Senegal, Iran, China, Australia, Turkey, and Japan) reveals a cross-cultural traffic in media that clearly transcends Western media impact on the rest of the world. This new “post-colonial” sensibility has encouraged writers and analysts to take new perspectives on global dynamics and to become increasingly skeptical of old assumptions about cores, peripheries, and unidirectional media flows.

Of course, cultural imperialism theorists never claimed that transnational flows were strictly unidirectional or that the extension of Western media worldwide necessarily produced universal homogenizing effects. Their argument focused on structure, on the impact of dominant, far-reaching systems of government influence and industrial media production that establish prevalent media models, channel and constrain media forms and functions, and set routine parameters for discourse, thereby shaping the socio-cultural norms that media tend to promote and the political and economic interests they routinely serve. Specific audience responses to the products of such a system would be expected to vary from culture to culture and context to context. But latitude in reception does not alter the fundamental conditions under which

oligarchic communications industries (in conjunction with specific government interests) dominate media production and distribution, constrain diversity, or limit access to mediated symbolic expression. In short, demonstrating the active nature of audience reception did not make the issues and concerns of cultural imperialism disappear. And the presentation of audience studies as a kind of refutation of cultural imperialism led to fears that such research might effectively shift attention away from the structural aspects of media systems and their control. Schiller (1991) expressed this position when he wrote, "There is much to be said for the idea that people do not mindlessly absorb everything that passes before their eyes. Yet much of the current work on audience reception comes uncomfortably close to being apologetics for present-day structures of cultural control" (p. 25).

Still, the concept of cultural imperialism was rooted in the notion that some national cultures will dominate others in a system of international exchange rigged to benefit already powerful nation-states, and the shifting ground of "global" technology, transnational markets, and information and media networks was making application of this frame of analysis increasingly ill-fitting. By 1989 Schiller had responded to these shifting circumstances with his book *Culture, Inc.*, an analysis that focused less on state-sponsored imperialism and more on the growing power of transnational corporate conglomerates. Other scholars were becoming convinced that cultural imperialism as a concept was out of step with contemporary circumstances. Surveying communication theory in the 1990s, Mattelart and Mattelart (1998) wrote,

Internationalisation is no longer what it was when the concepts of dependency and cultural imperialism could still be used to apprehend the imbalance in worldwide flows of information and communication , because new actors have appeared on what is now a trans-national scene. States and inter-state relations are no longer the sole mainspring of world organisation. The major information and communication networks, with their 'invisible,' 'immaterial' flows, form 'abstract territories' that no longer correspond to old notions of territoriality. By attacking the institutional foundations of nations-states in the 1980s, the logics of construction of the techno-financial macrosystem modified the topology of the actors of the trans-national sphere. The end of the bipolar tension between superpowers enhanced the role of market relations in the configuration of the world space. The incorporation of the territories of the nation-states into the norms of planetary networks augurs a profound transformation of the economic and social model, that is, the organisational forms of overall social relations within each society (p. 138).

Annabelle Sreberny, a theorist of global media issues who has paid much attention to the inherent imbalances of global economic and media systems, also seems ready by 1997 to leave "cultural imperialism" behind as an operative research concept. "The notion of 'cultural imperialism' became one of the staple catchphrases of the field of international communication. Yet from the beginning, the concept was broad and ill-defined, operating as evocative metaphor rather than precise construct, and has gradually lost much of its critical bite and historic validity" (1997, p. 48).

Given the inexorable expansion of transnational industries and horizontal integration in nearly all economic sectors during the second half of the twentieth century, and the increasing harmonization of legal and regulatory frameworks for the privatization and commercialization of mass media, it is hardly surprising that "globalization" became the new buzzword in business and communications. Or that these emerging conditions prompted a fascination with global markets and "a truly free and open competition that will be dictated by consumers' tastes and desires" (Ross, 1990). Yet, "globalization" as an organizing concept for viewing economic, political, or cultural change, or as a contextual paradigm for media research, is even broader and often less well-defined than the concept of cultural imperialism. And, as a kind of pluralist response to Marxist world systems theory it represents several, sometimes contradictory, strains of theory, research, and economic/political interests.

Globalization in Historical Perspective

As Robertson (1992, 1995) makes clear, globalization is not a new process, but the continuation and extension of processes that have been in motion for centuries: exploration, trade, migration, wars, conquest, colonization, empire, the efforts of industrialized nations to control international markets and financial exchanges, to "develop" sources of raw materials, to extend and consolidate military power and "state security," and to "modernize" client states. He identifies the shifting parameters of these forces in

five historical phases beginning from the early fifteenth century and ending in the “phase of uncertainty” that has marked the accelerating movement towards global communications systems, species-wide human rights, transnational trade and migration, greater multiculturalism and polyethnicity, the end of the Cold War and a “more fluid international system” since the 1960s (1992: 56-60). Tomlinson (1991), Giddens (1991), Friedman (1994), Featherstone and Lash (1995), and others have also tried to analyze the phenomenon of globalization within the context of the historical rise of modernity. Echoing Wallerstein (1974), Tomlinson (1991) argues that much of what has been labeled cultural imperialism, or “Americanization,” or “Westernization,” can in fact be seen as part of a broader global pattern of modernity and the accompanying spread and deepening of a world system of capitalism (pp. 89-90).

Similarly, Giddens (1991) sees globalization as part and parcel of the historical forces of modernization. He identifies the emergence of international consciousness with the rise of nation states and the modern era, relationships among states being a necessary concomitant of the formation of states as coherent entities. For him, globalization proceeds largely through state-supported integration of multiple knowledge-based abstract systems (including media) which coordinate human activity across time and space. Therefore, the concept of globalization refers to the “stretching” of relations between “local and distance social forms,” as “modes of connection between different social contexts or regions become networked across the earth’s surface as a whole” (1991, p. 61).

Globalization can thus be defined as the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice-versa. This is a dialectical process because such local happenings may move in an obverse direction from the very distanced relations that shape them (pp. 63-64).

Giddens’ view of globalization as the increasing integration of systems implies no consistent, unifying social or cultural integration. As Shaw (1994) notes,

For Giddens, the globalization of abstract systems creates opportunities for individuals, as well as crises in which they have constantly to remake their own lives and identities. It is clear from Giddens’ view that the increasing integration of systems (plural) does not necessarily imply greater social integration on a global scale. On the contrary, the crises brought about by the failures of or contradictions between the various abstract systems could lead to greater problems of social integration (p. 7).

The historical views of globalization offered by writers such as Robertson, Giddens and Shaw stand in contrast to the often imprecise or overreaching use of the term in business and journalism (Friedman, 1999). By providing analytical distinctions among the various knowledge-based systems implicated in, but not synonymous with, the unified global capitalist system described by Wallerstein, they suggest opportunities for the investigation of specific processes of global diffusion or interconnection that may operate in ways that are not continuous or unified. Economic networks may encourage flows of financial investment that are inconsistent with patterns of transnational migration or out of synch with quickly changing trends and flows of popular culture. Most important, these writers point to the fact that global system integration is not synonymous with global social integration or cultural homogenization. This helps to explain the discrepancies in what different writers mean by the term globalization, and offers one theoretical dimension by which to distinguish approaches to the study of global media phenomena.

The concept of globalization, therefore, may be useful as a general descriptor of emerging technological, financial, and communication networks that link localities across national boundaries and often bypass the mediation of interstate relations. As an operative term it is more multifaceted, more historically contextualized, and it leaves more wiggle room for looking at particular global/national/local interplay than the concept of cultural imperialism. Yet its strength as a concept is also its weakness. It suffers from its imprecision as a cover term for multiple and divergent theoretical foci and distinctly different levels of economic, political, social, and cultural concerns. It is variously used to refer to at least four types of phenomena: 1) transnational domination, cultural imperialism, Americanization, and so on; 2) the global spread of world systems of market capitalism; 3) the spread of the culture of modernity itself, encompassing not only the economic practices of capitalism but the Weberian rationalization of ways of life, scientific approaches to the natural environment, etc., (sometimes referred to as the

“McDonaldization” of systems and practices (Ritzer, 1996), and 4) the spread of commercial culture and consumerism specifically, and its potential impacts on local environments and cultures (Budd, Craig, & Steinman, 1999).

Early use of the term was most often associated with considerations of changing communication technology and the relationships of technological form, time, space, and community. Innis (1950, 1951, 1952), the first to systematically address these issues, worried about the consequences of mass communication systems that spanned space and time with unprecedented speed and efficiency while detaching messages from their senders and from the specific times and contexts of their production and reception. Such systems, he observed, provide opportunities for those in control of media production and distribution to manipulate and profit from the temporal and geographic compressions and reconfigurations made possible by new technology, eroding local control and buttressing the power and influence of cosmopolitan elites. McLuhan (1962; 1964; McLuhan & Fiore, 1967), on the other hand, saw the new temporal and spatial relationships created by modern communication technology in a much more optimistic light. According to McLuhan, new media technologies will not further alienate populations or polarize power, but rather “retribalize” a new “global society” and lead it back to its oral, nonlinear, holistic roots in an emerging “global village”. Bell interpreted the shift to a technological imperative as the “coming of post-industrial society,” a road to a higher stage of rationality that would leave the emotion of politics behind and lead to the “end of ideology” (1962, 1973). Harvey (1989) later saw time and space compression as the key engine of new “postmodern” conditions of life, producing an upheaval in our very experience and representation of time and space and requiring new cognitive maps to “grapple with the realities unfolding around us,” and to navigate “through a period of excessive ephemerality in the political and private as well as the social realm” (1989, p. 306).

Brzezinski (1970) predicted a new hegemony for the United States within an increasingly “globalized” world of technological and electronic interdependence, the “technetronic society.” He was perhaps the first to describe a future in which the United States, already “the first global society in history,” would be “the principal global disseminator of the technetronic revolution” (1970, p. 33), exerting its hegemony not through old forms of “imperialism” but through the spread of the technological and scientific revolution represented primarily by communications and computers. In this emerging “global city” (1970, p. 19)—that “agitated, tense, and fragmented web of interdependent relations” that he referred to as a “global nervous system” (1970, p. 23)—he realized that it would not be the political power of nation states so much as the expansion of multinational corporations and the accompanying transnational economic relations and global divisions of labor that would drive the new world order. He proposed that the United States, as a major source of new technological developments and the home base of a disproportionately large share of multinational business, media, and communications was in a uniquely advantageous position to assume leadership in this new global technetronic society, and at the end of the century, and now more than ten years after the collapse of Cold War alignments, his vision seems especially prescient.

Such optimistic views of a new global society are what drive the global marketing schemes of Levitt (1983, 1986), and the visions of a new American hegemony in international relations promoted by commentators such as Friedman (1999), who accept as inevitable progress the breakdown of national and cultural barriers to advertising and trade, and the “free flow” of information, technology, and commerce worldwide. Their conceptualization of globalization effectively extends the old modernization paradigm in the guise of a new ostensibly non-hierarchical and pan-cultural global commercialism. In this view system integration will inevitably result in social integration, and the eventual acceptance worldwide of an overriding Western capitalist paradigm.

Such loosely employed concepts of “globalization” (as well as many formulations of postmodernity) seem to conflate the economic with the cultural. Economic and technological systems integration (including the establishment of global communications networks) makes the notion of globalization and world “cultural convergence” seem obvious and inevitable. And media coverage of world events at the close of the Cold War—the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the globally televised Gulf War in 1991—seemed to recapitulate and confirm for viewers the idea that we were entering the new era of the “global village.” Yet, although the integration of technical and electronic systems worldwide has been steady and seemingly inexorable, cultural, social and political integration has been much more uneven and unpredictable. Promoters of

economic globalization often recognize that many obstacles remain even to the kind of systems integration that they envision. But they tend to view such obstacles as temporary problems, which will be addressed along the way to that inevitable global economy. In the final sections of this article I would like to recast these “obstacles” as the very pressure points of global change, the crucibles in which processes of cultural resistance and transformation offer the most intriguing questions for communications and media scholars.

Globalization as Commercialization: the Culture of Consumption

Each historical stage of international communication research has been shaped by coherent synoptic paradigms (development, dependency, globalization) that often suffer from overly totalizing visions of technological, economic, and/or cultural change. At the same time, these paradigms have depended upon certain competitive dichotomies—views of the world structured by East-West and/or North-South conceptual maps—which are frequently useful heuristics for understanding networks of flow and structures of power but which most often fail to account for the complexity of ongoing transnational interaction and change (Tehrani, 1999). The seductive elegance of unified nomothetic explanatory theories and dichotomies has not encouraged the detailed and concrete ideographic studies still needed on specific situations and processes of cultural flux. Future studies need to incorporate the structural emphasis of dependency theory, concerns for the mechanisms of power implicit in the notion of cultural imperialism, and the ethnographic sensitivity of active audience research in a framework that plainly confronts the locomotives and processes of diffusion, commercialization, and cultural interaction.

This is not a new idea. But theoretical polemics have too often led scholars to categorically ignore structure or processes at one level in order to emphasize those at another. Or they have prompted attempts to find universal (or “global”) patterns at the expense of scrutinizing particular processes in specific contexts. By focusing on specific cases of the interface between transnational economic or media networks and local culture, and comparing and contrasting those cases over time, we may more clearly understand the structural and systemic factors behind the expansion of transnational commercial media operations and the complexities and ramifications of cultural interactions and response.

There has been a growing consensus that the metaphor of imperialism is no longer adequate for conceptualizing these complexities. In taking the position that the global marketplace is not just an extension of American power, Hutton and Giddens (2000) posit,

There are two general questions that we need to answer. Is globalization, in sum, the same as Americanization? More broadly put, is globalization a set of processes dominated by Western countries to their own advantage? I would answer a qualified “no” to each of these questions.

Globalization...refers to a complex of changes rather than a single one. No single country, or group of countries, controls any one of them. Economic globalization, of course, has been and is shaped by U.S. foreign and domestic policy. The health of the global economy at any one time is strongly influenced by the strength or otherwise of the U.S. economy. During the cold war period successive U.S. governments were propagating a distinct “way of life” around the world in a self-conscious struggle with communism. American economic power was backed by a global network of military alliances, by numerous forms of interventionism, and by the propagating of “proxy wars” in various places. Old habits die hard, but the United States doesn’t have these strategic interests any more. The battle within the United States these days is between those who favor free trade and a global role for the country and those (a mixture of old left and Republican right) who favor protectionism and disengagement (p. 11).

One does not need to accept this specific analysis of the American political scene, his overall diagnosis of the state of global capitalism, nor Giddens’ (1999; 2000) prescriptions for a political “third way” to recognize that the forces of globalization do represent something much more complicated, multi-dimensional and historically long-term than simply “Americanization.” Theorists with different perspectives and agendas have come to similar conclusions. Frederic Jameson (2000) writes of five related yet distinct levels of globalization: the technological, the political, the cultural, the economic, and the social, all of which reflect U.S. influence on the shape of modern capitalism around the world but none

of which are strictly controlled by American interests. The anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996) posits five somewhat parallel dimensions of global cultural flows: ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, financescaples, and ideoscaples, which represent interrelated, but not synchronous or uniform networks of influence and activities. Appadurai (1996) chooses the suffix –scape in order to suggest that these dimensions represent “irregular landscapes” of perspective, the building blocks of “imagined worlds,” rather than objectively given relations (1996: 33). Elaborating multiple dimensions of globalization opens the way for studying the uneven and even disjointed nature of global flows, economic and cultural interaction, bureaucratic and cultural homogenization and what Appadurai calls “the production of locality” (pp. 178-199). Yet, the confluence of these irregular “scapes” of global interconnection seems to support a consistent trend: the extension and promotion of commercial consumerism as a nearly universal reference for symbolic interaction and social indexing.

Drawing from Bourdieu’s (1977) notion of “habitus” (a tacit realm of reproduced practices and dispositions), Anderson’s (1983) notion of “imagined communities,” and Jameson’s (1989) concept of “nostalgia for the present,” Appadurai identifies the existence of “postnational locations”: new communities and social practices that have superseded the community habitus of locally and historically embedded culture and depend upon the spatially extended and fragmented, yet collectively imagined, landscapes and aspirations of globally bureaucratized commercial marketing. These imagined communities are often spatially “deterritorialized.” They are linked more by technical systems of media and communication than by geographic locale. A key to their formation, according to Appadurai (1996), is their engagement with the representation and practice of consumption as “habituation through repetition” (pp. 66-67). Rationalized transnational markets and media images of consumption link relocated populations with their homelands, homelands which are partly invented, “existing only in the imaginations of the deterritorialized groups”(p. 49).

The crucial point, however, is that the United States is no longer the puppeteer of a world system of images but is only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes. The world we live in today is characterized by a new role for the imagination in social life. To grasp this new role, we need to bring together the old idea of images, especially mechanically produced images (in the Frankfurt School sense); the idea of the imagined community (in Anderson’s sense); and the French idea of the imaginary (*imaginaire*) as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations, which is no more and no less real than the collective representations of Emile Durkheim, now mediated through the complex prism of modern media.

The image, the imagined, the imaginary—these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as social practice. ...the imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order (1996: 31).

The weakness of the metaphor of imperialism under these conditions is that it suggests a planned co-optation and transformation of local “ways of life,” whereas contemporary global commercialization is better described as the steadily increasing participation of peoples across regional, national, and local boundaries in these “imaginary cultural landscapes.” To be sure, these imaginary landscapes are significantly shaped by calculated campaigns of transnational corporate marketing, but in most cases engagement with them is not coercive, but “cultivated.” Moreover, as noted previously, global systems of exchange, marketing, and media are still uneven and inconsistent. As Appadurai (1996) describes the situation,

The new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models (even those that might account for multiple centers and peripheries). Nor is it susceptible to simple models of push and pull (in terms of migration theory), or of surpluses and deficits (as in traditional models of balance of trade), or of consumers and producers (as in most neo-Marxist theories of development). Even the most complex and flexible theories of global development that have come out of the Marxist tradition (Amin, 1980; Mandel, 1978; Wallerstein, 1974; Wolf, 1982) are inadequately quirky and have failed to come to terms with what Scott Lash and John Urry have called disorganized capitalism (1987). The complexity of the current global economy has to do with certain fundamental disjunctions between economy, culture, and politics

that we have only begun to theorize (pp. 32-33).

On the other hand, the continuing strength of the metaphor of imperialism lies in the fact that the imaginary cultural landscapes described by Appadurai are largely the product of corporate marketing practices and the repetitive consumption patterns (and patterns of desire and aspiration) that marketing encourages and supports. And the operations of transnational corporate systems of technology and marketing seem to reinforce, rather than diminish, continuing inequalities between historical colonizers and the historically colonized (Golding, 1998). We have entered a period in which truly global networks of technology and communication are, in fact, bringing cognate forms of information, mass media entertainment, and commercial marketing to most areas of the world across previous regional, national, and cultural divides. According to figures compiled by the Institute for Policy Studies, by 1996 the world's 200 largest corporations already accounted for 27.5% of all global economic activity (Anderson & Cavanagh, 1996). Moreover, according to economist Saskia Sassen (1998), "we know that the top transnationals have very high shares of foreign operations: the top ten largest transnational corporations in the world had sixty-one percent of their sales abroad. The average for the 100 largest corporations was almost fifty percent" (p. 207). According to numerous economic and financial reports, these levels of concentration and transnational expansion are even greater among media firms (Herman & McChesney, 1997). And such concentration continues to extend and exacerbate gaps in communication resources and access to media and technology (including the "digital divide") among classes, regions, and nations (Golding, 1998; McChesney, 1998). Although Appadurai rejects unitary economic models for conceptualizing global change, and correctly emphasizes the multiple dimensions of cultural flow and interaction that require further theorizing and empirical scrutiny, he identifies in the activities of consumption, and the ephemerality that is endemic to consumer marketing, a repetitive, constantly renewing, and regulated activity that represents a convergence of these global economic and cultural processes.

...It is not simply the case that consumption has now become the driving force of industrial society. The fact is that consumption is now the social practice through which persons are drawn into the work of fantasy. It is the daily practice through which nostalgia and fantasy are drawn together in a world of commodified objects.

...What we have now is something beyond a consumer revolution, something we may call "a revolution of consumption," in which consumption has become the principal work of late industrial society. ...The heart of this work is the social discipline of the imagination, the discipline of learning to link fantasy and nostalgia to the desire for new bundles of commodities (Appadurai, 1996: 82)

In his book *Cultural Imperialism* Tomlinson (1991), writes something very similar in characterizing globalization as a peculiar and inherent byproduct of the spread of modern capitalism,

We can make a distinction between two possible discourses of cultural imperialism...the familiar discourse of cultural imperialism as the attack on the national/cultural identity, a discourse conducted around the binary opposition of 'us' and 'them' and on the 'synchronic-spatial' plane. It is the discourse of 'Americanization' and so on. ...

But underlying this is the broader discourse of cultural imperialism as the spread of the culture of modernity itself. This is a discourse of historical change, of 'development', of a global movement towards, among other things, an everyday life governed by the habitual routine of commodity capitalism. One reason for calling this discourse a broader one is that the 'imaginary' discourse of cultural identity only arises within the context of modernity (pp. 89-90).

What this suggests for the study of transnational media is that the key foci of investigation need to shift from concerns with such things as international media imports and exports, the export of one national culture into other nations, or the establishment of universal ways of life in the emergence of an actual global culture (although all of these things still must be taken into account), to an emphasis on the ways in which corporate media products, and the social imaginary of commercial consumerism of which they are a part, are viewed, used, engaged with, adapted, adopted, or resisted in multi-cultural contexts. It is the

system of neoliberal capitalism itself, dependent upon imagined myths of the market as panacea, and dreams of future acquisition, upward social mobility and cultural and personal autonomy, that is spreading inexorably, though unevenly, to affect people to varying degrees in nearly every part of the planet. Some call this “the spread of modernity itself.” But it is not necessarily the spread of culture in any traditional sense. It is only the spread of commercialization, of both the logic of the market, and the aspirations of a life based on consumerism.

The prediction, for example, that because of American economic and military dominance in the world English would become a universal language is now being revised in the face of evidence that worldwide English use has reached a plateau: non-English speakers are the fastest growing group of internet users, more than three times as many of the world’s people continue to be native speakers of Chinese than native speakers of English, and fifty years from now (based on population projections and patterns of intergenerational language inheritance) it is estimated that English speakers will also be outnumbered by speakers of Hindi and Urdu, with Arabic and Spanish contending with English for third, fourth and fifth place among language groups (Wallraf, 2000). Undoubtedly, English has become disproportionately used within global systems of business, technology and media, and in this sense has become a kind of “language of commercial culture.” Yet the culturally specific ways in which English is adopted and used in various locales and technological settings (the Internet, satellite television, financial institutions, etc.) has created a proliferation of pidgins, creoles, and diverse dialects rather than a global language. Courses in Spanglish are now taught in some American colleges. “English isn’t managing to sweep all else before it—and if it ever does become the universal language, many of those who speak it won’t understand one another” (Wallraf, 2000, p. 52).

Recent studies of corporate structure also reveal that while the marketing reach of commercial firms has expanded globally, and the financial and product markets are far more interconnected than ever before, the internal culture of companies themselves remains distinctly national (Doremus, Keller, et. al., 1998). Only in special circumstances, such as the computer industry of Silicon Valley, has the influx of thousands of engineers from India and other countries created a more diverse corporate environment that has sometimes been referred to as “mongrel capitalism” (Pang, 2000).

Studying Transnational Networks of Consumption and Culture

By the 1990s several scholars of globalization had begun to address consumption, and the formation of transnational consumption communities, as key issues and foci for study. Sklair (1995) has attempted to create new theoretical constructs for the way that we classify the “global system,” leaving old notions of First, Second and Third worlds behind and focusing on relative resource allocation and consumption communities within and across national borders. He argues that recent expansions of transnational media systems, and attempts to forge regulatory environments that will not impede transnational advertising and marketing across these systems, form the basis for a “culture/ideology of consumption” that serves to establish the legitimacy of commercial products, marketing practices, and new patterns of consumption in the everyday lives of consumers. As a result, other local forms of consumption and community life jostle and vie with transnationally marketed forms, setting up systems of social distinction in consumer behavior and often extending gaps between socio-economic classes (Sklair, 2001).

Observations and analyses of this process are not romanticized visions of “pure,” indigenous, or “authentic” cultures suddenly displaced or extinguished by the invasion of commercial goods and images. The penetration of transnational media systems and the accompanying formation of new audiences, markets, and consumption communities are rightly seen as specific stages (albeit sometimes sudden and disruptive ones) in a long ongoing history of population movement, trade between social groups, and socio-cultural change. The culture of consumption is a continuation and acceleration of historical shifts from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*—the larger organizational forms of modern society undermining or replacing older, and more locally “organic,” family, clan and village relationships. But the forces of global commercial marketing have a specific individualizing and atomizing tendency. On the one hand, commercial mass media address audience members as individuals (often in settings where they are reading/listening/viewing separately or alone) and promote individualism: the concepts of individual free choice, separate personal identities, and uniquely personal gratification, with the increasingly

taken-for-granted presumption that individuals anywhere can make their own particular choices from a globally available commercial menu. At the same time, the marketing techniques that characterize both the explicit advertising and selling of products and the implicit selling of consumer lifestyles (in entertainment as well as advertising) coax or seduce the audience to participate in “imagined communities” of consumption and aspiration that are “ephemeral,” socio-culturally distinctive, and socially invidious. As audience members move into and out of these imagined communities they are constantly supplied with socio-cultural markers and messages about place, position, status, and the disjunctions between imagined worlds of consumption and the realities of everyday life.

Thus, Vilanilam (1989) observes that television advertising in India presents a heterogeneous cross-section of the Indian populace with images of products and lifestyles that are economically out of reach for the vast majority. In this way advertising constitutes an imaginary world of desire that addresses not only the elites that can purchase such goods, and in so doing affirm their elite status, but the masses of Indian workers and poor for whom the imaginary is merely a reference point, a shaper of aspirations, an ideal model of success, pleasure, and envy. Martín-Barbero (1993) also notes the role of imagined consumption in creating illusory unions of rich and poor.

When...the myth and strategies of development with its technocratic solutions and encouragement of a consumer society began to replace the worn out populist policies...the political function of the media was removed and the economic function took over. The state continued to maintain the rhetoric that the air waves were a public, social service...but, in fact, the state handed over management of education and culture to the private sector. Ideology became the backbone of a mass discourse whose function was to make the poor dream the same dreams as the rich. As Galeano has said, “The system spoke a Surrealist language.” Not only was the wealth of the land transformed into the poverty of mankind, but scarcity and mankind’s basic aspirations were converted into consumerism. The logic of this transformation would not become fully apparent until some years later when the economic crisis of the 1980s revealed the world-wide crisis of capitalism. The crisis could be solved only by making the model and decisions of production transnational and by standardizing, or, at least, pretending to standardize world culture (p. Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft—the larger organizational forms of modern society undermining or replacing older, and more locally “organic,” family, clan and village relationships. (p. 165).

Golding and Harris (1997) further emphasize that increasing transnationalization has not diminished these continuing disparities. They write that the “brave new world of the 1990s,” far from producing the widespread global prosperity predicted by “free traders,” was marked by the proliferation of dual economies and massive Third World debt, leaving more than a billion of the world’s people “living in stark and absolute poverty” (p. 4). Vast inequalities in resources and standards of living have more often been exacerbated than reduced by global networks that create a rising appetite for imports among cosmopolitan elites and “a growing dependence on the North for research and development, technology, and education” (p. 4). This continuing dependency, however, is linked more than in the past to the transnational marketing of consumer goods rather than industrial development within nation-states. It is more a function of transnational horizontal integration than national vertical integration. “This process of horizontal integration is evidenced by several factors, one of which is the process whereby people are increasingly addressed across national boundaries on the basis of class status and other cultural attributes by marketing, political and cultural agencies alike” (Sreberny-Mohammadi, Winseck, et. al., 1997: xiii). Such transnational networks facilitate attempts in various regions to address and create audiences that correspond to particular consumer groups, the business of commercial media being the creation of audiences to sell to advertisers.

I believe that the most important task confronting international communication research at the beginning of the 21st century is the close analysis of such shifting consumption communities, and their linkages to horizontally integrated systems of global commercialism, within and across specific cultural contexts. Although this vision of future research is not articulated in precisely the same manner by other media scholars, several writers suggest similar paths for study. In their survey of international media research Corner, Schlesinger, and Silverstone (1997) hint at such an approach when they note that “the products of mass media systems will have an increasingly commodified character as the exchange-value of media products extends to areas where it has so far been resisted and intensifies in areas (e.g. globally

marketed entertainment) where it has always been present” (p. 7), and that this inevitably involves issues of “social order and social solidarity,” and relations of “media and identity” (p. 11). Their primary concern is with the “global economic squeeze on public culture” exerted by “marketization,” and “to what degree ‘public values’ are sustainable or not in the face of this underlying pattern of commodification” (p.7). They conclude that the study of the specific technological and commercial characteristics of media systems, and the “relations between media and various collectives” within and across cultural and national boundaries, presents a central challenge for future media research (p. 11).

Morley and Robins (1995) explore similar issues in their reflection on shifting concepts of space and identity in the nascent European Union. They are particularly interested in the specific role of media and electronic communication networks in forging “reimagined communities” and “reimagined others” in mediated notions of a common yet diverse Euro-culture.

The media industries have been assigned a leading role in the cultural community of Europe: they are supposed to articulate the ‘deep solidarity’ of our collective consciousness and our common culture; and at the same time they are asked to reflect the rich variety and diversity of the European nations and regions. There is the belief, or hope, that this cultural project will help to create the sense of community necessary for Europe to confront the new world order. But in as much as Europe can imagine itself as a community, it seems that it is an unimaginable community that is being imagined (Morley & Robins, 1995, p. 174).

Far from achieving a pan-European sense of community the new “electronic cultural spaces,” according to Morley and Robins, are created by and serve “global cultural corporations” who “are rapidly restructuring to ensure strategic control of a range of cultural products across world markets” (1995, p. 112). Rather than working to build “deep” and integrated communities, these conglomerates are using the advantages of scale and financial power to create a “world of instantaneous and depthless communication, a world in which space and time horizons have become compressed and collapsed,” not with the goal (or result) of enhancing public life or culture but for the maximization of market share (1995: 112). Describing the mergers, acquisitions and strategic alliances of two of these global cultural corporations Morley and Robins (1995) write,

What is prefigurative about both News Corporation and Sony is not simply their scale and reach, but also the fact that they aspire to be stateless, “headless,” decentered corporations. These global cultural industries understand the importance of achieving a real equidistance, or equipresence, of perspective in relation to the whole world of their audiences and consumers.

If the origination of world-standardized cultural products is one key strategy, the process of globalisation is more complex and diverse. In reality it is not possible to eradicate or transcend difference. Here, too, the principle of equidistance prevails: the resourceful global conglomerate exploits local difference and particularity. Cultural products are assembled from all over the world and turned into commodities for a new ‘cosmopolitan’ marketplace: world music and tourism; ethnic arts, fashion and cuisine; Third World writing and cinema. The local and ‘exotic’ are torn out of place and time to be repackaged for the world bazaar. So-called world culture may reflect a new valuation of difference and particularity, but it is also very much about making a profit from it (p. 113).

I would argue that Morley and Robins characterize one side of the commercial globalization process, the appropriation of local cultural diversity by extensive corporate conglomerates for standardized transnational marketing. And they are correct to point out—as do Corner, et. al. (1997) and Jameson (2000)—that media systems, as commercially driven enterprises, have no social goals and will never be reliable forces for integrating new communities of citizenship or public culture. They mine diversity for innovation in products and appeals, but they do not “eradicate or transcend” cultural difference or establish frameworks or agendas for communitarian values or social welfare. However, the other side of the process involves the ways in which particular communities are linked, even if tangentially and superficially, by common habits of consumption, signs of cosmopolitan connection with outside networks (or simply a general notion of modernity), and symbolic indices of status or success—overlapping, combining with, or displacing local or more traditional cultural signs of social place and position. In

Appadurai's (1996) words, "The link between the imagination and social life...is increasingly a global and deterritorialized one" (p. 55).

The continuing expansion of conglomerate media systems, and the corporate appropriation and repackaging of culture for commercial uses, can and has been studied through the mapping of technical and economic networks, the documentation of corporate consolidation, and the monitoring of media form and content. The engagement with or insulation from these networks of global corporate media by identifiable social communities—old, new and emerging—must be studied "in the field," through various methods of detailed observation and analysis. But the ethnographic work that is needed cannot be limited to synchronic descriptions of the current particularities of local life. A new focus needs to be the historically shifting, or emerging, interfaces of large-scale, transnational spheres of symbolic production with local social life. If, as Giddens (1991) writes, "Globalization can...be defined as the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa," then studies of global media need to explore the historical and ethnographic circumstances in which these world-wide social relations link and become more "intensified." Appadurai (1996) seems to propose this emphasis when he writes,

...Those who represent real or ordinary lives must resist making claims to epistemic privilege in regard to the lived particularities of social life. Rather, ethnography must redefine itself as that practice of representation that illuminates the power of large-scale imagined life possibilities over specific life trajectories. This is thickness with a difference, and the difference lies in a new alertness to the fact that ordinary lives today are more often powered not by the givenness of things but by the possibilities that media (either directly or indirectly) suggest are available. Put another way, some of the force of Bourdieu's idea of the habitus can be retained (1977), but the stress must be put on his idea of improvisation, for improvisation no longer occurs within a relatively bounded set of thinkable postures but is always skidding and taking off, powered by the imagined vistas of mass-mediated master narratives (pp. 55-56).

For Appadurai, such interrelations between the imaginaire and social involve "conjunctural variations in the links between class, production, marketing, and politics over long stretches of any particular history" (p. 73). This is "global interaction in the realm of consumption," fueled by media representation, which involves "a radically new relationship among wanting, remembering, being, and buying" (p. 84).

Conclusion

The state of international media research now awaits new sets of concrete case studies that take as their focus the interaction of large-scale, global media systems with local ways of life in various settings and cultures. Studies, for example, that investigate how particular patterns of transnational advertising or entertainment play out differently, not only in contrasting cultural communities (Muslim Hausa communities vs. Christian Igbo ones in Nigeria, for example), but in regions and nations with differing historical relationships to media production centers and transnational networks (South Korea vs. North Korea, Taiwan vs. China, the highly industrialized "open-market" centers of the southern Cantonese provinces vs. subsistence agricultural areas of the north and central regions, or even cities such as Bangalore or Bombay, known as technology and media centers, vs. segments of India less globally linked).

It is in the mix of mediated and non-mediated experience that the impact of changing media systems on cultural horizons and social life will be found. Thus Tomlinson (1997) suggests the study of transnational media scandals as an arena in which to explore the factors and processes of local cultural interaction with globally distributed media fare, arguing that there are no global scandals, only "locally re-embedded ones." Such an approach is not a return to the "uses and gratifications" idea that local interpretive communities control communication, but a turn towards research on community-based implications of imposed transnational media systems. It suggests the study of what Chen (1996) calls the "cultural imperialism" of transforming, not replacing, dominant cultural forms with new simulations—the seemingly benign transformation of everyday ways of life rather than the overt imposition of ideology.

People in the Third World do watch Dallas, but in their specific ways, framed and in accordance to local history and politics. But at the same time, that the “imageries” (traces of American life) whereby ideological articulation is conducted are pervasively imperializing is unquestionable. That is, it is not so much an ideological content but its form which seems to follow an American trend: TV culture, blue jeans, punk style or yuppie ways of life (there is a Yuppie handbook used in Taiwan).

Thus the thesis of cultural imperialism has to be transformed with an emphasis not only on the ideological, but the simulation of ways of life, as a much more subtle form of articulation (Chen, 1996, pp. 322-323).

Here Chen points to the proliferation of lifestyle patterns that are ostensibly non-political, and therefore not overtly ideological, and yet describe the commercialization of social life. The symbols and aesthetic forms of transnational media systems enter into daily life, become part of the accepted fabric of new forms of social life, and play a role whose precise effect or implications remain to be investigated. This, I believe, represents the most important new terrain for those interested in the role of media amid the forces of globalization. It is a transformation of the thesis of cultural imperialism to the fragmented front of transnational commercialization.

Some, like Chen (1996), call for permanent local struggles against these dominant, and no longer nationally controlled, systems of commerce. Others warn about the long-term consequences for public life and culture of addressing world populations as consumers rather than citizens. Jameson (2000) rues the point “at which the economic passes over into the social” (p. 57). He writes, “as part of daily life, the ‘culture of consumption’ is in fact a part and parcel of the social fabric and can scarcely be separated from it,” but he worries, “not so much whether the ‘culture of consumption’ is part of the social as whether it signals the end of all that we have hitherto understood the social to be” (p. 57).

To address these concerns and others we need to find out more about what is happening in specific communities as global commercial culture becomes an increasingly prominent part of local social life. We need to build a more substantial body of specific case studies of the processes and ramifications of transnational and transcultural media production and use. The focus of study for those concerned with issues of media concentration, control and power, must go beyond concerns for asymmetrical international media flows and the disproportionate dominance of particular national agendas and spheres of influence within media content, to include investigations of the global standardization of media production and distribution, and the generic commercialization of transnational media forms across various local contexts.

Global commercialization is a distinctly different phenomenon from international trade. More than an interchange of cultural forms and influences, or even a replacement of one form with another, it represents an effacing of cultural difference. Markets are defined according to income, demographic variables and consumption patterns that cut across historically distinctive cultures, sub-cultures, and communities. Common psychographic tendencies and aspirations are assumed within western bourgeois models of desire and success, even as these ideals are adapted to particular settings and lifeways, and to cosmopolitan elites that cut across regional, national, and ethnic distinctions. Ever larger transnational conglomerates conceive of, project, and market to transnational consumption communities.

This construction of “global markets” and transnational consumption communities no doubt produces different types of responses and has very different impacts in different socio-cultural contexts. There is nothing simple and uniform about the dynamics of global/local relations, and there is no reason to believe that “globalization” represents a monolithic apparatus drawing diverse cultures and activities into economic, social or cultural “synchronization.” Yet the creation of transnational media industries, and the transnational flow of information, entertainment and advertising that they produce, establishes an increasingly ubiquitous resource and reference ground (what some authors have described as a universe of “imagined” relationships, possibilities, and ways of life) for global-local interactions. These resources for social interaction and cultural expression are not myriad in form and substance, but narrowed parameters (and restricted codes) of media form and content that channel imaginary possibilities in repetitive patterns.

The proliferation of corporate advertising and commercial entertainment flooding the increasingly open markets of such nations as India or China provides standardized images of professional life (what a business executive, a teacher, a physician or nurse looks like), home life (what a kitchen should look like and what products and appliances it should contain), and gender (what it means to appear attractively, or even "normally," masculine or feminine). Griffin, Viswanath, and Schwartz (1994) found that by the 1980s national magazine advertisements in India were adopting poses and displays for female models that conformed closely to gender portrayals in the advertising of the industrialized Western nations. Do different cultures employ the discourse of corporately produced media in different ways? Davis (1999) found that South Korean advertisers regularly used images of Caucasian fashion models in conventionally Western fashion poses to advertise products considered erotic or risqué (such as lingerie), while using models that appeared East Asian to advertise household and domestic products. Here the adoption of transnational commercial formats serves both to standardize South Korean advertising in a Western mold, and to set up the advertising system as a backdrop for communicating cultural difference.

Central American countries have almost universally adopted U.S. technical and program formats for television news broadcasts, even to the point of dressing and presenting news anchors as young, fashionable and attractive (Euro-Western looking) male-female anchor teams. Yet, news content continues to vary (sometimes with different news and/or entertainment emphases) within the homogenized commercial "look" of news coverage. What types of variance are, and are not, found in which specific cultural and political situations? And what difference, if any, do they make?

Innumerable cases of the complex interactions of global media await detailed study. Future research will undoubtedly examine the standardization of internet protocol, web site design, and the digitalization of text and images that characterize that global grid we call the electronic "highway." How are people of various cultures responding to, using, or even altering the terms of this Western technology that now crisscrosses the globe?

Pokemon piñatas purchased for the birthday parties of Mexican children symbolize the knotty challenge for such media research. The key issues no longer center on the debate over creation of a peculiarly American empire. Transnational media industries no longer define their economic interests in direct synchronization with U.S. foreign policy objectives. The marketing of the Japanese Pokemon fad around the globe is an American phenomenon only to the extent that the U.S. provides one of the largest markets for its sale and thereby propels or facilitates its distribution on a global scale. Yet the case of Pokemon is still another example of the emerging global integration of technological systems that are directed from a cluster of the most economically prosperous nations. And the potential for global media systems to over-determine parameters of imagined social relations remains the same whether such systems serve specifically national or more generic commercial interests. The most compelling questions now involve the role that these transnational media systems are in fact playing in propagating a particular pattern of commercial, rather than civic, culture and how those commercial media models and resources are being integrated (or not) by specific communities in particular patterns of cultural accommodation, hybridization, and resistance (both systemic and conscious). In other words, what are the specific processes and functions of mediation in this new environment of global capitalism? Is a Pokemon piñata still a piñata? And if so, what difference does it make in specific Mexican communities that the piñata takes the form of a Pokemon rather than a burro?

Back in 1963, Ithiel de Sola Pool, one of the leading exponents of anti-Communist modernization theory in the post war period, and a regular contributor to government-sponsored development studies of the time, clearly recognized that the global communication system he envisioned had implications far beyond particular American national interests. He was acutely aware that what he proposed was nothing less than the creation of a global media grid for a world capitalist system, globalized media that would work to construct the imagined communities and social relations of human life quite independently of national interests and visions. He presciently wrote:

The propaganda in favor of modernism contained in commercial communications media is not solely intended to obtain sales for a particular brand of soap. It certainly aids this operation, but it would have

neither audience nor effect if the communications media did not provide a product much richer in savor or excitement. Persuasion towards a particular choice is only part of a general argument for a totally modernized mode of life. The communications media, whose object is to open the market to new products and new interests, also present the image of a new kind of man in a new kind of milieu. As Marx underlined, the businessman is a revolutionary, even though this is not his intention. It is the mass media which transform what would otherwise be the unrealized dream of a few modernizers into the dynamic aspiration of a whole people (1963, p. 287).

Today, we can see clearly that “globalization” is not the inevitable progress of a natural evolution, but the strategic response—Harvey (2000) calls it a “re-scaling”—of unwittingly “revolutionary businessmen,” attempting to manage a crisis-ridden capitalist world economy requiring continuing expansion, the movement of capital from low return to high return places, and the periodic restructuring of production and consumption. The cultural implications of these changing relationships of scale, changing forms of nationalism, and shifting local encounters with new products and new representations are still not clear. The mass media in Mexico, while still in the process of attempting to submerge ethnic and regional differences to build a sense of nationalism has simultaneously become permeated by the messages, symbols, and representations of global corporate marketing. The culture industries in the United States, predicted by some theorists to supplant the need for military dominance and coercion, have continued to promote the use of military force. Seemingly impatient with the slow pace of neoliberal globalization, government and industry leaders in the U.S. and Britain are now contemplating “pre-emptive wars.” Islamic fundamentalists have vowed to oppose globalization efforts, whether military, economic, or cultural and Muslims in various parts of the world have become increasingly alarmed by polarizing Western responses. And now, just as I am sending the final draft of this paper off to the editor, a tourist destination, not unlike Acapulco, has been bombed in Bali, and Western tourists seem to have been the target.

The commercialization of spaces and transnational interactions does seem to come with some cost. For media scholars, perhaps the events of the past year will serve as a reminder that we still know very little about the cultural impact of transnational systems of media technology that propagate social norms and public aspirations. Global upheaval, rather than global peace, seems to be accompanying the expansion of global markets. Countries that both have McDonald’s restaurants do seem willing to bomb one another. Perhaps this will shift our attention to the context-specific processes by which transnational media are encountered, accommodated, or resisted within specific communities.

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About the Author

Michael Griffin teaches in the Department of Communication and Media Studies at Macalester College in Saint Paul, Minnesota. He earned his Ph.D. from the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania where he was the recipient of a CBS Dissertation Fellowship. In 1995-96 he was a Post-doctoral Fellow in the Annenberg Scholars Program at the University of Pennsylvania. He has taught courses in visual communication theory, the history of film and photography, film analysis, television news, documentary theory and production, media history and culture, critical media theory, mass media institutions, and global media and culture at the University of Minnesota, the University of Amsterdam, and the University of Pennsylvania. He is currently Chair-elect of the Visual Communication Interest Group of the International Communication Association. Recent publications include: *International Media Monitoring* (1999) with Kaarle Nordenstreng; *Camera as Witness, Image as Sign: The Study of*

Visual Communication in Communication Research, Communication Yearbook 24 (2000), and Sociocultural Perspectives on Visual Communication, Journal of Visual Literacy (Spring 2002). He is currently working on a study of news magazine depictions of the "war on terrorism," from which a preliminary report was presented in Seoul, South Korea, in July 2002.