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6

Power Decentered Dominant Diversity

As Europe and the United States adjusted to a post-colonial world in the 1950s and 1960s, multinational corporations invested heavily in the exploitation of natural resources in the developing world. Scholars and technicians believing that the Western model of consumerism and two-party elections was best, argued that media and advertising would contribute to national development in Latin America and elsewhere. Very quickly it became clear that capitalist development by multinational industries meant underdevelopment dependency. A small elite class in each nation benefited from its alliance with US and European companies, but for most of the population Western “development” brought a market economy and all of its social inequalities.

While many communication scholars like Wilbur Schramm and Everett Rogers remained wedded to the development model, others recognized the social and cultural consequences of North American economic and cultural dominance. Herbert Schiller, Armand Mattelart, and Luis Beltrán, among others, revealed how US media exports to Latin America in particular appeared to be cultural imperialism.

Cultural Imperialism and Cultural Dominance

Cultural imperialism theory became prominent in Latin America (Beltrán, 1982; Matta, 1977) and informed many of the supporters of the New World and Information Order that arose in UNESCO. At the time, the West

overwhelmed the media systems and cultural practices of developing nations that lacked the infrastructures for producing their own media. Leading media influenced the choices by indigenous commercial media and their governments that willingly adopted market norms and values (Schiller, 1976).

As if speaking about transnational media today, Armand Mattelart (1976) explained that cultural imperialism does not impose a uniform culture but “changes its form and content” and “adapts to different realities and national contexts” depending on its expansionist opportunities (p. 160). This cultural imperialism seeks social control through the “conquest of hearts and minds” by “taking into account the specific interests and needs of each age level, each social category” as the means for producing a universal culture that expands American influence (Mattelart, 1976, pp. 160–161). Cultural dominance is not imposed; it requires administration by the national dominant classes in the developing countries. Hollywood movies’ market share runs 80%–90% in Latin American countries, but it dips below 50% in France and is broadly 60%–75% over Western Europe (Hopewell, 2013). However, cultural imperialism “cannot be summed up as the volume of imported products or cultural commodities (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2002, p. 161). The USA produces the models, but the national bourgeoisies (capitalist classes) may perfectly well ‘nationalize’ these models” through “operations of decentralization” and local reproduction (Mattelart, 1976, p. 161).

Herb Schiller’s *Communication and Cultural Domination* (1976) sketched the contours of corporate dominance in the world economy of that time, arguing that media production and distribution conformed to the same economic imperatives and structural forms as other multinational industries of the 1970s. Schiller referred to educational institutions, scientific research, corporate training programs, tourism, and public diplomacy as key components in the cultural environment that existed alongside mass media products.

Despite caveats offered by cultural imperialism theorists, critics were quick to challenge the provocative terminology rather than the substance of the insights. Admittedly, the term “imperialism” does not capture the complex processes or relations of Western media and media produced in developing nations. In fact, imperialism does not reflect what Schiller, Mattelart, Boyd-Barrett, and others have accurately described as cultural domination through media, education, and business training protocols.

Imperialism is enforced exploitation of one nation by another for the benefit of nationally based capitalist profits. Multinational media do not exploit labor or resources in Latin America for export and manufacture in the United States. Paul Simon’s appropriation of Ladysmith Black Mambazo to save his career on the harmony of traditional South African music and Disney’s use of traditional European folklore or other national cultural narratives certainly suggests exploitation of the local by the global. However, more generally media corporations seek to export media for direct sales and to attract audiences that can be sold to advertisers. Increasingly, transnational media seek to establish local production for local consumption, leaving the “foreign” nation and culture out of the economic and cultural process altogether. Disney prefers that its productions and co-productions in and for Latin America reach a wide consuming audience; thus Disney works to obstruct competition from other transnational and national media.

What “cultural “imperialism” actually describes is domination, maybe even predominance, but it is not *imperialism*. This is not a semantic difference. It goes to the heart of the social process of production, distribution, and consumption. Unfortunately, the term provokes knee-jerk responses that may be valid, but off point. For instance, Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz (1990) argue that US television wasn’t “imperialistic,” but was globally dominant due to the sheer availability of its programming, the relative “openness” of its narratives, and the “universal” appeal of its themes – identifying some of the structural mechanisms that all but guarantee cultural dominance. Of course, Liebes and Katz were at pains to demonstrate the polysemic nature of US programming, so they skirted the cultural consequence of their fairly accurate assessment of the actual global media flow. At any rate, what Schiller and Liebes and Katz (at least partially) unearth is closer to cultural hegemony than imperialism.

Although using a problematic vocabulary, Schiller reports early on how transnational capitalism and TNCs lead the development of a global commercial culture. He accurately explains how the capitalist class uses global institutions to politically defend and reproduce its economic relations, while parallel institutions, particularly media entertainment, culturally and ideologically obscure control and domination by incorporating political and cultural alternatives wherever and however possible while still maintaining the social relations of transnational capitalism. The predominance of commercial consumerist forms and content interferes with potential cultural and political alternatives, as global television and film “push toward

invigorating, intensifying, and legitimizing a focus on the individual over collectivity" (Derné, 2008, p. 164). Global entertainment media then and now promote individualism and undermine democratic practices and relations. TNMCs in their corporate relations and practices of production deny access to the public, organize labor away from decision-making, and assure content suitable for advertising and consumption, regardless of real human needs.

Much of what Schiller, Mattelart, and others observed are elements of cultural hegemony. Unfortunately, at the time few had access to Gramsci's writings, which were not widely available in English until the mid-1970s. Even then, because cultural studies quickly appropriated and dismantled Gramsci's materialist and class perspective, critical political economists did not approach his work until much later. It's quite remarkable that cultural imperialism theorists were not only accurate for the time, they expressed a portent of the transformations to come.

Not everyone responds to reality in the same way. Reality takes on meanings according to perspective, skill, interest, and social position. Skeptics seeking to avoid the realities of class have frantically run from the realities of capitalism, proffering several substitute explanations for global media activities. Although evidence has been sparse and arguments often convoluted, various attacks on cultural imperialism theories and attempts to deny cultural dominance based on political economy of the media have searched for evidence that would dispute or undercut claims of transnational capitalist dominance. Findings have been many; arguments flashy. Yet, power has been unpersuaded by theory.

While cultural hegemony recovers and adapts many of the insights from cultural imperialism theses, other approaches have discarded the entire perspective in futile attempts to dispute social class and the workings of capitalist power.

The Inertia of Contraflow: Dominance Undenied

The most direct refutation would be evidence that nations presumed to be subject to cultural dominance were actually producing and exporting their own content. Increased media exports from the developing nations to Western countries and decreased media exports from Western countries to developing nations would – by simple arithmetic – demonstrate that communication flow was more balanced, not unequal, and therefore not subject

to domination. The argument is logical and simple: media "contraflow" from the developing world to the developed world refutes all charges of domination. Contraflow announces resistance and independence by formerly subordinate nations; contraflow reveals that there are alternatives to Western programming. In this view, media contraflow and media produced from subordinate and alternative perspectives (often called "subaltern") refute the claims of cultural imperialism. Unfortunately for its hopeful proponents, significant contraflow cannot readily be found.

In the twenty-first century, media flows are not flows between nations. Transnational media narrate culturally specific content mixed with global capitalist themes of consumerism and individual gratification without regard for national identity or influence. In fact, media cross borders most easily when they find international partners, erasing any claim to national identity in the process. As O Globo merges with Telemontecarlo in Italy, partners with SSE in Monaco, buys shares in SIC television in Portugal, or signs joint ventures with Televisa and News Corp (De Gouvea Neto, 1997), O Globo in structure and definition no longer is a Brazilian firm: it has merged and transformed into a medium-sized transnational media corporation (TNMC) with ownership, production, and distribution integrated across national borders by transnational capitalists seeking to share profits from a variety of countries. Transnational media send messages across all borders, messages that have a shared, singular, core purpose: advancing consumerism and capitalist social relations with entertaining narratives that win viewers and fans, building cultural hegemony for commercial culture and the market.

Imagining contraflow as an indicator of non-dominance of Western media remains only a quaint and outdated effort to explain the disappearing national markers in global media. Samba is Brazilian, curry is Indian, Italians play bocce, French eat brioche, Middle Eastern cuisine includes pita, and some Asians may enjoy eggrolls, but in no case do such elementary stereotypes mark meaningful cultural difference.

Likewise, to explain global media now, it is singularly insufficient to identify film, television, or other media productions by their country of origin. *Lincoln* (2012), Disney's Touchstone film nominated for 12 Academy Awards, was produced by DreamWorks, a Reliance Entertainment 50% joint venture. So, is the film Indian or North American? Do we decide by language? Then all films produced in Hindi are Indian, including Disney's UTV movies? The twisting analyses required by apolitical searches for contraflow create contradictory and peculiar observations: CNN's deal with

Network 18, a \$300 million multimedia Indian company, accelerates Western media flows (Thussu, 2007, pp. 20–21), while Univision, the largest Spanish-language TV network in the United States, owned in the 1990s by Mexico's Televisa and Venezuela's *Venevisión*, represents contraflow? Korean telenovelas, Indian cinema, and Al-Jazeera news broadcasts are contraflow (Thussu, 2007, p. 23) – even when co-produced as joint ventures with “Western” companies? News Corp's joint venture, Phoenix TV, is contraflow because it broadcasts in Mandarin (Thussu, 2007, p. 24)?

By such contraflow accounts, Saudi Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal, one of the richest men in the world, participating overseer of a feudal regime and shareholder in Citibank, is a leading “subaltern” communicator resisting Western domination because his Rotana television network is based in a developing country. Democratically speaking, the all-female Saudi band *Accolade* – which cannot perform publicly under Saudi law – has more validity as subaltern than Al-Waleed, given the oppression of women in Saudi Arabia and their challenge to patriarchy (McElroy, 2008). Legitimizing private commercial media (Al-Waleed's, Amhamsi, or the Huayi Brothers) as nationally representative of contraflow does a real disservice to the millions of citizens denied access to media who really would like to communicate their stories, experiences, and interests outside TNMC frames.

If contraflow and subaltern definitions were adjusted to designate communication of and for an alternative media hegemony, one born from social classes and allies developing a more democratic, non-commercial media system, subaltern contraflow would have explanatory value, because meaningful media contraflow appears only when working classes and their allies have media access, when they organize to produce and distribute independent messages and narratives. TeleSUR (Television of the South), the regionally based, democratically run transnational satellite channel of the Bolivarian revolutionary project, transmits voices from working class and indigenous communities across Latin America (Artz, 2006). Journalists from Venezuela, Argentina, Uruguay, Cuba, and Bolivia report on democratic and national-popular movements, allowing media to serve subordinate classes. TeleSUR is not national contraflow, but it does give voice to subordinate and alternative perspectives, providing a limited contraflow to TNMC entertainment. The community-based network of 1,000+ radio and television stations in Venezuela today (Artz, 2012) and the short-lived CORADEP (Public Radio Cooperative) in Nicaragua in the 1980s (Artz, 1993) are also examples of subaltern communication arising from movements of subordinate classes demanding media access and democratic power.

The change in media “flow” reveals the transformational outcome of changed social relations of production – from nationally based production for export to a transnational system of capitalist co-production of global products for local consumption and local products for global consumption. The appearance of diverse flows between nations indicates the success of capitalist cultural hegemony as local media are implicated in transnational media operations or employ practices and ideologies culled from TNMC business models. Cultural hegemony predicts that diverse privatized national media adopting TNMC practices will export programs, but the content will remain ad-driven entertainment. Cultural hegemony expects that national media contraflow and subaltern content will appear, but in the hands of TNMCs will exhibit ideological content amenable to dominant social relations and capitalist leadership.

Diverse local productions may offer alternatives, but they pose no oppositional challenge to capitalist cultural hegemony and its consumerist entertainment. Subaltern communication challenges capitalist cultural hegemony only to the extent it represents, organizes, and leads decisive social groups, especially the working class, to different, more democratic social practices and cultural norms: democratic decision-making; workers' control of industry; public access to media; affirmative equal rights for women, ethnic and religious groups, and indigenous nations. Any subaltern movement ultimately needs to assemble a new cultural hegemony of solidarity to realize its vision and its power (Gramsci, 2000; Sassoon, 1987; Artz & Murphy, 2000, 2012).

Cultural Proximity: Bringing Domination Home

Another answer discounting cultural domination from abroad is cultural proximity, the theoretical cousin of contraflow. Proximity theory notes the obvious: media audiences usually prefer media content that reflects their own cultural experience. Given a choice, domestic audiences prefer local media over media imports.

At one time, Joseph Straubhaar (1984, 1991) found that audiences preferred television programs in their own language, with scenery and historical icons from their own cultures, demonstrated by the relative popularity of local telenovelas compared to US imports in Brazil. Although the rediscovery that people tend to feel more comfortable speaking their own language in familiar surroundings is not particularly profound, as a

component of audience choice it was repositioned as evidence of the limited ability of Western media to influence other cultures – a remarkable analytical leap. Positing that “ultimately people like to see something close to their lives” (Hong, 1998, p. 46) becomes a condition “limiting the influx of Western media products” (Chadha & Koovri, 2000, p. 425) presumes transnationals are incapable of producing culturally proximate content – a claim immediately refuted by the global success of *Millionaire*, a transnational production which obtained cultural proximity in every locale. Analytically, large audiences for one local television genre – Brazilian telenovelas, Japanese “trendy” dramas – were presumed to disprove media predominance and influence from abroad. Unfortunately, this approach to “cultural proximity” simply counts instances of non-dominant culture as evidence of non-dominance, reducing cultural values and norms to percentages of television schedules.

Telenovelas’ content reveals ample proof of the presence of dominant commercial culture (Oliviera, 1995; Beltrán, 1982). Steve Derré (2008) notes that the styles, images, and themes from American soaps have heavily influenced “the content and representational styles” of Hindi drama, including their unequivocal celebration of urban consumer lifestyles (pp. 33–35). Another Latin American example of cultural proximity (and contraflow) might be *Sábado Gigante*, the Chilean-based Galavisión-Univisión weekly variety show that is broadcast across Latin America and the United States. In an extensive content analysis of *Sábado Gigante*, Martha Sánchez, Janet Cramer, and Leonel Prieto (2003) concluded that internationally the show communicates “an escape from real material conditions and political engagement to a land where luck, riches, consumption, and the ‘American way’ may be seen as salvation” (p. 146) – a kind of hybridized, Disneyfied, “Latinized” variety show for all people. Cultural proximity may be the bait, but viewers are soon hooked on consumerism as a “local” cultural activity.

Cultural proximity theory relies on tautological surety: whenever and wherever audiences prefer a program, cultural proximity must exist. Proximity holds out weakly for any audience-generated common feeling or attraction, attaching proximity to shared consumerist pleasures – solid evidence of the cultural hegemony of transnational media and capital.

At some not-too-distant moment, Polish media (likely allied with a TNMC) will script and film their own telenovelas – resurrecting “cultural proximity” as a truism once again. Meanwhile, Disney’s UTV in India, News Corp’s STAR TV Asia, and Discovery Channel in Europe promote

Brazil in Poland

The popularity in Eastern Europe of O Globo’s Portuguese-language telenovelas (the exemplar for cultural proximity) essentially scraps the concept of most of its explanatory power. Poles do not speak Portuguese, don’t compose sambas, prefer feijoada over pierogis, experience the same seasons, or travel across the same climates and landscapes. Yet, telenovelas are “muy popular” in Poland. Yes, most Poles and many Latin Americans are Catholics, but Catholicism has never been a necessary convention in telenovela narratives. Arguing that Poles have more “cultural proximity” to Brazil than their own Polish heritage defies all reason. It seems that Poles, and Hungarians and Croats, can decipher Brazilian cultural codes enough to enjoy stories of obstructed romance, underdog success, and generational plots that frequent telenovelas. More to the point: the political economy of media infrastructures in Poland is not as prepared for production and export as in Brazil or Mexico, and telenovelas are a cheap option for filling TV schedules (Jakubowicz, 2007, pp. 368–371). Cultural proximity is not the primary variable in media content in Poland.

TNMC “cultural proximity” with programming that is both produced locally and feels familiar to local audiences. In certain instances, a firm may even aspire to “cultural proximity” with one distinct locale as a means to improve its global reach. As part of its branding strategy, Guinness needs to be as Irish as possible, especially now that it has merged with Grand Metropolitan, a European transnational hotel operator. Likewise, operating as part of a transnationally consolidated media network, MTV Polska aspires to be “culturally proximate” to its Polish audience although production occurs elsewhere. In a different context, South Korean transnational television, film, and music producers work to mask their cultural and national identities with an appearance and feeling of Asianness constructed through content collaboration with two or more cultural corporations in the region, creating a multi-lingual, multicultural, market-based proximity to reach East Asian consumers. Korean singer BoA sings in Korean, Japanese, and English; singer Rain learned English, Chinese, and Thai to “demonstrate his cultural proximity to his fans” (Siriyuvassak, 2010).

In these commercial variants, cultural proximity loses all connection to any actual local culture.

A more substantial and consistent understanding of global media structures and practices recognizes the centrality of capitalist social relations, including globally “flexible” labor, transnational/local co-productions, and the predominance of localized media entertainment content. Cultural hegemony places the proximity of cultural preferences and norms in the context of implemented and accepted dominant practices in diverse local cultures, all following the neoliberal economic and political leadership of the transnational capitalist class (TNCC) and TNMGs.

Transnationally exchanged formats build on local preferences and simultaneously spread local preferences across borders, creating a global culture that is “proximate” to many viewers. Whatever audiences watch, in whatever language, with whatever cultural gloss, culturally proximate content is produced transnationally using multiple, diverse cultural contributions to nourish global consumption. “Consumerism has become an Indian value,” says a top magazine editor (Fernandes, 2010, p. 614) – and a Brazilian value, and a Nigerian value, and a global value for most locales. Indeed, we are all becoming cosmopolitan as expressed by transnational media and advertising exuding cultural proximity for consumers in every nation.

Hybridity: Domination through Diversity

Of all the claims about the limits of media dominance, the recurring promotion of the power of audience is most prevalent. Skeptics of global media influence and fans of active audiences believe that audiences and cultures do not accept imported media content as is, but creatively decode and repurpose meanings to construct hybridized forms and meanings for local uses. In some versions, hybridity means that dominance is not possible because local populations create their own meanings by decoding media images for their own pleasures. Presumably, local media create their own hybrid forms that also undercut dominant influence. Thus, in terms of global media effects, hybridity is “local resilience in the face of cultural invasion and global homogenization” (Huang, 2011, p. 4).

Anthropological studies and textual analyses of cultural development reveal that all practices, rituals, and media content are hybrids of previous cultural cross-pollination. For anthropologists, hybridization means “the

ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms and new practices” (Rowe & Schilling, 1991, p. 231). Of course, recognizing that cultures are hybrid offspring with multiple ancestors is really quite mundane, although the results of that phenomenon often have profound significance. In the hands of pluralist apologists for capitalism and its commercial media, the validity of observations about hybrid media messages becomes an invitation to ignore media industry power.

Somehow the mere existence of hybridity in culture has been transformed into a theory that dismisses cultural dominance from any source and discounts the structural and institutional effects on meaning (Fiske, 1988; Bhabha, 1994) so that consumers “indigenize products to serve their own cultural purposes” (Beynon & Dunkerley, 2000, p. 29). Michael Keane, Anthony Fung, and Albert Moran (2007) contend that TNMG power has been displaced because “producers and consumers meet as co-creators of hybrid programming” such that “self-identification with tasty food” is evidence of political agency and “non-governmental organization activity” (pp. 15, 139). For liberal pluralists, hybridity has “refurbished the view ... [that] the customer, though perhaps a little bruised, is still ultimately sovereign ... heroic resistance fighters in the war against cultural deception” (Golding & Murdock, 1991, p. 28).

Cultural borrowing, hybridization, and indigenization are common processes in global cultural flow and international media. “Without the breakthroughs of blacks, Jews, Italians, Irish and others would [North American] music even exist?” (Reich, 2013, p. D1). “Where did Walt Disney find the stories for his films *Cinderella* and *Pinochio*? Who inspired Garcia Márquez to make Remedios la Bella rise to heaven, body and soul? From what northeastern mouths did Vargas Llosa take his captivating narration? In the cultural universe we are all debtors and creditors” (López Vigil, 2007). All cultures are the culmination of diverse contributions awaiting further alteration. Audience-initiated decodings of received media content and the repurposing of dominant meanings by local media creators that hybridize cultural artifacts are contradictory assemblages of TNMG productions and local revisions.

The real controversy over hybridity regards its content and meaningful effect. Hybridity may be “mutually constituted” (Kraidy, 2002); one might even note the inordinate contribution of creative content by local cultures in a particular TNMG product, or how some cultures strategically hybridize and “domesticate” imports as a means of “innovation by emulation” (Huang,

2011, p. 4). A much more important question than hybridity *per se* is the content. Some hybrids promote consumerism and market power. Some hybrids undermine consumerism and authority. The resistance or power of any image can only be measured by the social consequence of the message itself, not its author or its viewer.

The question is to ascertain which hybrids do what and how. What proportion of meaning emanates from TNMC producers? What part of the content reflects influences or interpretations contributed by local cultures? What values appear in hybrid media and do they reinforce or challenge the status quo? “How are these programs refashioned, resignified, modified – and how are they subsequently read and evaluated?” (Keane et al., 2007, p. 9). What’s new? What’s different? Is it a platypus or just another duck of a different color? How much of the hybrid expresses local independence or creativity and how much of the hybrid appropriates local creativity for commercial purposes?

Even for content as unique as Pokémon, “children do not produce meaning alone; instead they interact with the meanings constructed by others” (Brongère, 2004, p. 206). Meanings constructed by animators, scriptwriters, and peers prompt responses. Indeed, the larger social order and its social relations of production, its political norms, and yes, its dominant cultural practices, including 3–5 hours of television viewing every day, frame both child and adult experiences and reactions. Our circumstances within the larger culture, including access to and preference for particular media images and narratives, are shaped by our social location. “A shared culture arises more from a shared structural situation than from shared cultural inculcation” (Derné, 2008, p. 208). Thus, not surprisingly, affluent fan audiences for hybrid “idols” in Japan translate their “sense of familiarity and intimacy with the idol into action” as consumers (Galbraith & Karlin, 2012, p. 25). Indian working class men reject Hollywood and Bollywood film celebrations of conspicuous consumption and romantic marriage as unrealistic guides to action, but are attracted to movies with dominant male heroes. Structures carry meanings as much as media disseminate meanings.

In a TNMC-mediated world, social interaction between communicators occurs largely in a restricted environment for symbolic interaction, privileging the media producer and distributor of messages. Global cultural flow is TNMC directed, despite the appearance of local cultural eddies and dams. Moreover, TNMCs astutely respond to new currents as opportunities to prosper through local adaptation. TNMCs are both megaphone and social messaging service for neoliberal ideology and policy of the

Americana as Local

Over time, “images and commodities [may] tend to lose their cultural identity” (Iwabuchi, 2004, p. 73). In many places “American” icons are conceived as national. “McDonald’s is now so much a part of their world that to Japanese or Taiwanese young consumers it no longer represents an American way of life,” because “meaning construction is never free from the command of transnational media industries” with their localization strategies that may “naturally” appear local (Iwabuchi, 2004, p. 73).

Consuming McDonald’s and listening to K-pop music does not seem foreign, because the local-national culture has morphed into the same practices, attitudes, and tastes of what was previously viewed as foreign. Hybrids have value for local cultures to the extent that media fit their cultural experience. Media content that appeals most to local audiences works from those political and social relations that frame their cultural world (Derné, 2008, p. 210). As transnational capitalism comes to dominate domestic social relations of production, TNMC-local hybrids reflect and reproduce cultural relations for individual consumerism and private accumulation of wealth with little concern for democracy and equality. The hegemony of market relations thus appears as common sense in TNMC narratives and images.

American icons become local. Hybrid local culture serves global capitalism.

transnational capitalist class: extolling the “myth of consumer agency to convince consumers that they are empowered to choose what they consume” (Galbraith & Karlin, 2012, p. 25).

The constitutive power of TNMCs is not absolute, but only politically informed and active groups can effectively turn oppositional decodings into actual political change. Differential “readings” of dominant media are informed by one’s social location that provides access to cultural repertoires and symbolic resources that sustain different interpretations (Golding & Murdock, 1991, p. 30). Besides, whatever our understanding, however we make meaning, the media can continue to broadcast its coded, preferred narratives and images to thousands and millions of others that individually we can not reach without media access.

The issue then is not one of polysemic, alternative readings of messages received, or even one of how to produce new hybrid meanings. It's a question of having the power and capacity to participate in the communication process as an interactive producer and distributor of messages. Entertainment media can provide diversity aplenty – something for everyone. The information super-highway can reach millions of receivers, but democratic communication requires the full participation in the construction of messages and meaning. The “fetishism of the consumer” as power broker is only a “mask for the real seat of agency,” which is the producer” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 42). Actively decoding or not, relegated to only being a receiver limits one's ability to communicate with others, but that is precisely how privatized commercial media structure the communication process.

In Turkey, commercially run Arabesk and Turkish pop radio offer “*gazino* tavern-like entertainment” for the working class, while Western pop radio creates a “party atmosphere for an upscale audience” (Algan, 2003, p. 185) – demonstrating the hegemonic pull of transnational capitalist values. Using hybrid musical styles – nationalist “green” pop, Islamic pop, and a top-40 Turkish version of mainstream pop – local radio companies provide diverse venues for attracting audiences and advertisers, in line with the models provided by the transnational music industry and European commercial media. Likewise, “having accommodated foreign culture for a long period of time” Korea media excel at “refining imported culture” (You, 2006, p. 4). “Korean scholars credit cultural hybridity with simultaneously promoting globalization and localization of Korean pop culture” (Jang & Paik, 2012, p. 201), with traditional, even conservative, local inflections carrying homogenous themes of individual consumption and affluent lifestyle. Local Indian filmmakers introduce hybrid media content heavily influenced by TNMC programming and advertising such that even traditional Indian family values are combined with female cosmopolitan fashion and consumer independence (Derré, 2008, pp. 113, 147). Transnational media promote and profit from these hybrid local cultures which are “largely depoliticized, commercialized, and excluded from public deliberation” (Splichal, 2002, p. 6), so we will likely see spin-offs of these elements in local hybrids from East Europe to East Asia. In fact, transnational production incessantly promotes recycling, hybrid adaptation, and local repurposing of narrative and content to increase market share and hedge financial risk. Narratives and images of preferred cultural norms are thus produced, broadcast, and continually repeated in hybrid entertainment media, laying the groundwork and decorating the walls of popular culture.

Cloaking Power in the Hybrid

The cloak of hybridization does not disguise much to the discerning. Most examples of hybridity demonstrating popular power or resistance demonstrate new content but fail to include new forms or practices. Ironically, critics who champion the power of the audience seem unfazed by the apartheid media system that precludes audiences from becoming communicators. Marwan Kraidy (2005) argues that TV Azteca's *Tele Chobis*, a hybrid copycat of BBC's *Teletubbies* children's program, is a “complex embodiment of hybridity” featuring a “radical intertextuality” of cultural diversity (pp. 103–115). Yet, beyond *Tele Chobis*'s setting in Mexico, its “carnavalesque” style, and the addition of product advertising, it's hard to find any ground-breaking challenges to educational children's television. Hybridity of this kind represents difference not unlike that of McDonald's global hybrids: “McDonald's may sell ‘sushi burgers’ in Japan and ‘curry burgers’ in India, but burgers remain burgers, and it is their ‘burger-ness’ that is the essence of their cultural significance” (Machin & Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 107). One could argue that even if McDonald's sells shawarmas in Greece, the structure of production and consumption of the fast food maintains its significance for organizing social practices according to individualism, immediate gratification, impersonal social interaction, and other preferred practices of capitalist cultural hegemony. McDonald's has been successful in part because of its adaptability: franchisees have been careful to shape their products in ways that meet the needs and expectations of the local community, providing kosher in Israel and halal in Palestine (Crothers, 2010, p. 133).

Media formats incorporate hybrids, but they are not subject to just any reworking; they are not value-free. Hybrid formats have structures that disseminate ideologies, values, and preferred norms for transnational capitalist hegemony. Just as Christianity polished off pagan icons and rituals for better recruitment, the outcome of “mutually constitutive” processes depends on social and political power structured by institutions and communicative forms (MacMullen, 1997). Cultural mixing under a transnational capitalist order does not have equality in ingredients. There is scant global South influence in the global North, with the exception of massive sales of the condiment salsa and Shakira's music. As the United Nations Development Project concluded, “the unequal economic and political powers of countries, industries and corporations cause some cultures to spread, others to wither” (UNDP, 2004, p. 90).

Here is the point: not just any hybrid can undermine dominance. Like hegemony, hybridity has no political mantle of progress or reaction – it is a process and form that can be used for any number of political and cultural ends. Dominance does not depend on a single, universal culture. “The invention of a hybridized form of globality, one produced through the national imagination in liberalizing India, has been centrally linked to the production of images of the urban middles classes” (Fernandes, 2000, p. 620). Hybridity for the consuming middle class. On another continent: “The whole idea that France is being destroyed by global popular culture misunderstands the modern media, which increasingly create separate products for each national market rather than peddling a single imperial product” (Miller et al., 2008, p. 198). Hybridity for promoting a national market. In the United States, Robin Thicke’s 2013 R&B/Hip-hop hybrid song, “Blurred Lines,” is “nothing more than a montage of female sexual degradation, complete with hair-pulling by the singer and his rapping buddies” despite director Diane Martel claiming that because women look into the camera, “they are in the power position” (Villareal, 2013, p. 21). Hybridity for misogyny. In each case, hybrid media were produced by TNMCs appealing to targeted markets for commercial purposes.

Dominance works quite well, indeed much better hegeomonically speaking; if local preferences are served transnational media offerings that articulate language, locations, and local cultural icons into the entertainment mix. TNMCs consciously advance hybridization through their efforts to indigenize local media programming and commodities. Hybridization by itself does not interfere with the commercialization of anything. In Turkey, “what undercut and strangled the diversity, creativity, and independence of the new media was its commercialization by monopolies willing to broadcast any style attractive to advertisers seeking particular audiences. Turkish audiences have tolerated, even sought out, this capitalist commodification of culture because it permits positive representations of their ethnicity and class culture” (Algan, 2003, p. 188). Cultural hegemony actively promotes hybrid media and culture in Turkey and elsewhere because they advance TNMC economic goals, understanding that “purely cultural changes have little effect on social arrangements” so pose little challenge to capitalist cultural and political leaderships, as Steve Derré (2008) found in his multi-year study of global media in urban India (p. 17).

Homogenizing Hybridity

Hybridity nestles comfortably in the larger homogenous culture. Individual content components fit nicely within global formats and effectively carry global themes. We might pause to recall that the quintessential entertainer, Disney, is the fairest hybrid in the land as it “plunders all folklore, fairy tales, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century children’s literature,” and recently African and Chinese stories, to reshape them (Dorfman, 1983, p. 24) for maximum commercial value and global distribution. The regeneration of hybrid genres underlines the intrinsic economic needs of Asian filmmakers as cultural producers, who effectively “act as initiators and gatekeepers of major’s collaboration and involvement, as intermediaries balancing tensions and conflicts, and as catalysts triggering competition and consolidation at both national and regional levels” (Chung, 2011, p. 203). Active consent and participation by TNMC local and national partners makes the appeal of capitalist cultural hegemony more palatable for local audiences who willingly consume the creative hybrid genres that exhibit local cultural traits. The pan-Latin American variety show *Sábado Gigante* broadcasts hybrid content that stands on decades of Latin American cultural homogeneity.

Politically, [national] homogenization was a condition that, in turbulent times, helped shield national elites from internal dissension and external invasion. Economically, homogenization bolstered and protected certain elite strategies, presented as beneficial for all Brazilians, Chileans, etc. but invariably serving the elite’s notion of nation in trade, production, and social norms. (Sanchez, Cramer, & Prieto, 2003, p. 133)

With a tradition of exchanging global and regional programming across Latin America, regional and TNMC television has been an active agent in homogenizing culture for decades – hybrid variations notwithstanding.

Line up all the distinct hybrid media content produced by contrawall media and other diverse nation-based media alongside hybridized resistive decodings that have no political manifestation. List the myriad cultural differences among them. Add the other possible pleasurable uses and gratifications available to audiences who make their own meanings from received media content. Then, step back and take a broader look. Several recognizable and common themes appear across the multitude of hybrids.

There – among all the hybrids – clear tones and meanings stand out as shared similarities.

Cultural hegemony, as the manifestation of transnational capitalism's political economy, highlights hybridity as a process of homogenization. "Competition for the most lucrative audience segments leads to more sophisticated and costlier productions that require worldwide circulation" to be profitable (Havens, 2006, p. 159). Havens (2006) discerns the "development of distinct transnational taste-cultures, which are roughly akin to social classes" (p. 159), suggesting that transnational social class audiences share cultural preferences and norms which must appear in homogenized media content to be well-received. Capitalist leadership provide something for everyone within their hegemonic universe, to ensure the reproduction of social relations and practices necessary for transnational capitalism. Thus, in addition to the homogeneous transnational forms of media (telenovelas, competitive game shows, reality TV, factual entertainment, and Hollywood/Bollywood/Chollywood action-adventures), homogeneous themes of individualism, consumerism, spectacle entertainment, and deference to authority inhabit all localized, hybridized commercial media content according to the social class proclivities of each audience segment.

Even scholars like Marwan Kraidy, Michael Keane, Dayan Thussu, and Shuling Huang, who are keen on distancing their work from political economy and an overtly materialist cultural hegemony, supply ample evidence that local media employ "strategic hybridization to promote cultural products, entertainers," and other images that are "exploited by various businesses to gratify consumer desires for novel commodities" (Huang, 2011, p. 15). In her dissection of the local culture in Leixlip, Ireland, Martha Van Der Bly (2007) pens a more elegant obfuscation, claiming "heterogeneity, but within the context of one world culture" (p. 234). However one might couch it semantically, even according to the hesitant, we must concede that commercialized local hybrids (produced for diverse cultural and social class audiences) uniformly conform to transnational capitalist cultural hegemony. This is not just one possible description of media transnationalism. The themes (however locally composed) are exceedingly transparent: individual consumerism, celebrity entertainment, and acceptance of the power and authority of the capitalist market.

Transnational media and their local expressions depend on capitalist labor relations and undemocratic political practices comprising a cultural hegemony that promotes consumerism – to promote sales – to promote the

Cosmo in China

The global expansion of women's magazines reflects a somewhat different trajectory than that anticipated by hybridity theorists. In Holland, "the global already impinged on magazine readers, but they were not yet aware of it" because *Cosmo* and *Elle* were presented as fully Dutch (Machin & Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 35). However, within a few years, the global was "outed" and accepted: "Mostly American songs, magazines, and websites are directly accessed by local young women, in English, and without any mediation from Dutch cultural elites" (Machin & Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 36).

In the same two magazines in China, "featuring indigenous models," they take on the look and feel of "local" magazines but "they are hardly 'hybrids' because they reflect and transmit consumer values that clearly serve the interests of the global brands" (Firth & Feng, 2009, p. 170). If Beyoncé's "girl power" tour appears as liberating for women, then Chinese models in *Cosmo* must indicate liberalization of women's rights, as well? Firth and Feng (2009) insist "the over emphasis on women as consumers ... may actually limit women's understanding" of their potential roles in society (p. 172).

Likewise, South Korea's "stylish entertainment industry, driven by pop music and TV dramas, not only amuses but also serves as a potent and willing vehicle for marketing messages" (Beattie, 2012). In the Netherlands, China, Korea, and elsewhere, the culture of entertainment and consumerism predominates – most often through local hybrid variations on a theme.

social system that is based on wage labor that exists solely to produce and sell commodities. This capitalist cultural hegemony provides individual pleasures, but it does not aspire to meet human needs, to use knowledge for a sustainable, non-consumptive ecology, or to consider democratic collective solutions to global problems. Political economy and cultural hegemony are better guides to understanding transnational media, local cultural practices, and the possibilities for meaningful "hybrid" cultures that nurture humanity in all of its variations.

The hybrid content of contemporary entertainment media produced and disseminated by TNMCs meet the commercial, cultural, and ideological

needs of the developing transnational capitalist system. Under the current transnational media regime, hybridity contributes to winning consent for a transnational capitalist order. TNMC media content does not create a new social order, but consistent, repetitive, and comforting themes and narratives explain, reinforce, and legitimate social relations of class inequality that insist on atomized individuals tending for themselves in the marketplace. Hybridity gives one more recognition that TNMC media and cultural flows have “decentered the nation-based power structure and vitalized local practices of appropriation and consumption of transnational capitalist cultural products and meanings” (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 35) as a means to consolidate global capitalist power.

Hybridized media content parallels and bolsters social practices necessary for transnational capitalism, particularly individual consumerism and its corollary cross-beam of support, a politically disenfranchised transnational working class. In this matrix, global power has been dispersed, not reduced. Media and culture have erupted with diverse hybrid entertainment forms and content, but democracy has suffered. US dominance may have declined (excepting its military power), but the TNCC has consolidated its leadership over the global economy. We face a new hybridized corporate structure, as well: DreamWorks struggles as a US-based film studio, but after Indian capital injects \$325 million, DreamWorks survives to profit anew in transnational alliances with TNMCs nominally housed in Korea, China, Japan, Britain, India, and the United States.

Content by and for Transnational Capitalist Cultural Hegemony

Cultural hegemony explains that TNMCs actively create their own preferred hybridity. Through mergers, joint ventures, and co-productions, TNMCs build structures of consent among capitalist classes and their managers. The social relations of TNMC production provide minimal benefits to creative workers, securing consent among dispersed labor forces. And from these two hegemonic processes, TNMCs harvest an abundance of diverse, hybrid, local creative offerings for re-use in all media content. The resulting hybrid hegemonic content shares its attractive narratives and expressions replete with apolitical perspectives and lived experiences familiar to all and enjoyable for many. As the respected leaders of global entertainment and culture, TNMCs find and appropriate creative contributions of diverse

cultures to better package their stories, images, and products for winning widespread consent.

The dialectical process of merging and synthesizing diverse and often contradictory perspectives and communication into meaningful entertainment packages occurs within the context of transnational media business goals and practices. Programming content emerging from these relations of production aims to meet the cultural preferences of diverse audiences while encouraging consumerism and other cultural practices that will reproduce those same capitalist social relations. To bolster capitalist cultural hegemony, TNMC entertainment omits or expunges messages of class solidarity (beyond family or small group), anti-capitalist societal critique (beyond individual corruption), and participatory democratic decision-making (beyond product purchase).

Diversity in the Familiar

Popular entertainment has become homogenized in form, if not completely in content, in standardized theme, if not completely in narrative. “Global markets, mass consumption, mass communication, and mass tourism disseminate the standardized products of a mass culture ... the same [kinds of] consumer goods and fashions, the same films, television programmes, and bestselling music and books spread across the globe” (Habermas, 2001, p. 75) in all their local variations. Once standardization becomes internalized there is no need for policing, as participants consent to the hegemony of form, which can be seen in entertainment genres around the world.

Particular forms, from telenovelas to children’s cartoons, privilege dominant representations within prescribed conventions of form and genre. Transnational co-production agreements, format contracts in particular, impose a variety of constraints that local contractors and producers must accept as they search for hybrid local content and narratives. “Cultural forms are mechanisms for regulating public discourse” (Golding & Murdock, 1991, p. 27), but men and women view media entertainment without necessarily discerning the similarities of conventions across genres. Indeed, the form and theme conventions provide each specific genre and each unique program with a familiar and comforting invitation to audiences to imbine in the content.

Codes and conventions work to acclimate viewers to prompts and responses. Certain formulaic buttons trigger certain expected reactions:

laugh-tracks cue humor; dark and rainy settings portend danger; deep adagio music cues sadness; and so on. In a television, film, and Internet society, our tastes are inundated by TNMC messages and images. This world influences our conception of others and ourselves. We may be individuals, but we're often doing the same things and buying the same stuff, and mostly doing it passively as spectators and consumers of advertised products. Our lives have become atomized, as we turn to personalized blogs, twitter feeds, and Amazon preferences. The world of choice is indeed multiple, various, and dynamic. But it is the result of advertising and networks targeting audiences so that "something is provided for all so that none can escape" (Adorno & Horkheimer, in Bowman, 2012, p. 41). Still, "the culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises. The promissory note which, with its plots and staging, draws on pleasure is endlessly prolonged; the promise, which is actually all the spectacle consists of, is illusory: all it actually confirms is that the real point will never be reached, that the diner must be satisfied with the menu" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p. 139).

The conditions of media production and distribution place limits on the form and content of media, and consequently a thorough political economy of cultural hegemony must consider what the conditions and relations of production have wrought. Moreover, the conditions of production, the current structures, and general practices of transnational media outlined in previous chapters should suffice to enable us to make the great leap forward to media content.

Content for Consent

A brief foray into media entertainment content seems more than appropriate if the claims about "ownership → programming → social use" that were presented earlier are to be demonstrated. Political economy attempts to discern the structural constraints on human action; cultural hegemony attempts to discover the practices and understandings arising from those structural constraints that can be used to win consent for that same structure. The details provided on transnational corporate interlocks, transnational capitalist class political organizations, and the structure of transnational media, including its use of transnational social relations that profit from social class hierarchies in production, lead to content appropriate and necessary for building political and cultural consent.

John Fiske (1988) once recognized that television genres are instruments of power that "form the network of industrial, ideological, and institutional conventions that are common to both producers and audiences out of which arise both the producer's programs and the audience's readings" (p. 111). The codes and conventions that cling to specific genres also constrain the possibilities for the viewer's understanding, increasing the possible effects of media over time and across national boundaries.

Action movies, the most prevalent global film genre, dramatically illustrate the content TNMCs serve audiences everywhere. The next chapter provides examples of action movies from around the world. None of the examples are fully decoded semiotically; nor are they assessed with a rigorous content analysis. Recurring prominent themes are presented as the most likely intended meanings. Observations indicate the connections between ownership, programming, and cultural consequence that can be generated from a cultural hegemony perspective that attends to the political economy of global media at this historical conjuncture. With little doubt, the content and themes of action movies confirm the connections between media structure and programming, indicating the emerging contours of transnational capitalist hegemony.

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