# GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA

A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

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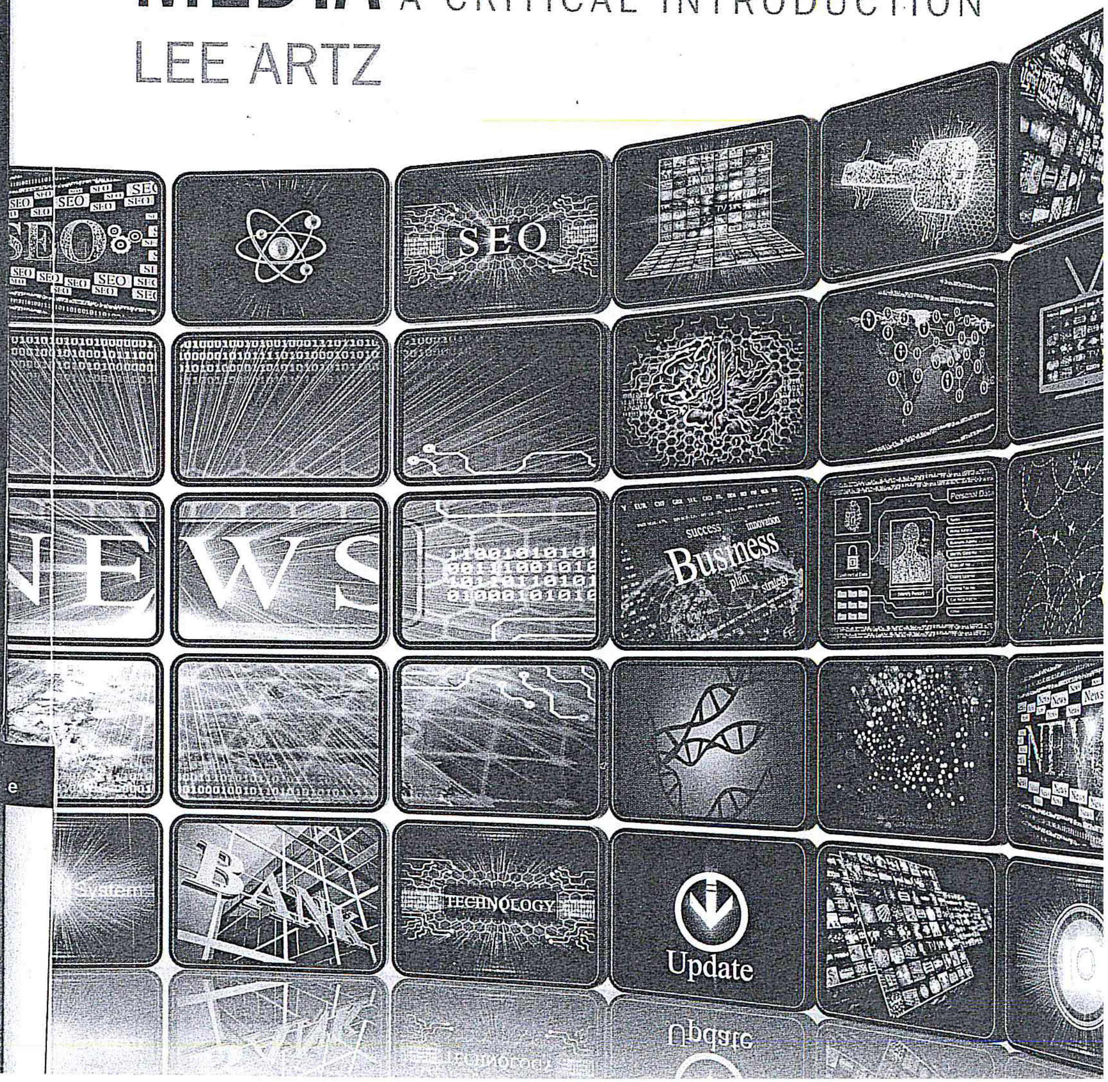

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## Further Reading

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# Transnational Media

Everything is for sale. The market determines all. Meanwhile, media entertainment delights and distracts. The influence and power of media entertainment can be debated, but it cannot be denied. For many people, media is the only way of reaching beyond their own location. What we know about civil war in Syria or elections in Venezuela comes mostly from media. Likewise, how and what we learn about fashion trends, music and cultural innovation, and prevailing social norms are largely drawn from media. It is not a leap to claim that the new, emerging global order of transnational production and distribution cultivates power and mass consent (or at least acceptance) through the daily interactions of individuals and classes caught in the web of entrepreneurism and the daily struggle for survival. Simultaneously, the commodification of everything without public regulation undermines human solidarity and tends to reproduce atomized, consumerized social relations. In this unrelenting tide, the media add to the flow of tolerance and consent for capitalism, through news and information selection that validates the competitive urge and through entertainment genres that distract and gratify individuals with narratives and formats that cheer on consumerism.

Media exist within and contribute to dynamic social relations within each society and increasingly the world. Media cannot be singled out from their historical and social contexts: media practices reflect and reproduce the transnational transformation of capitalism. Media are "instruments, not instigators, of other social forces" (McQuail, 1992, p. 273). Transnational media are instruments of and for the transnational capitalist class (TNCC). Media are simultaneously technologies, forms of communication,

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programmers of content, and institutions. Media are industries and promoters of industries; media are commodities and promoters of commodities. Media have the power to create and distribute messages, images, meanings, and ideologies to millions. Media, particularly television and movies, have a crucial role in constructing and disseminating representations of what is and what is possible, thus often playing a critical role in politics through entertainment narratives. As the US occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan continued, television programming featured stories about terrorism and military actions on behalf of American security, such as *24*, *NCIS*, *Homeland*, *Sleeper Cell*, and more – all clearly advocating restrictions on civil rights (Keeton & Scheckner, 2013). Media do not begin with ideological goals; they are first and foremost capitalist institutions, for-profit enterprises contributing to and participating in the transnational capitalist transformation of social relations in every nation and territory. While economic restructuring can be conveniently defended in the United States as the need for competition in the face of global attacks on "our" way of life, elsewhere market imperatives for entertainment and ideology appear differently.

In Asia, transnational media corporations (TNMCs) try to "exploit and produce desire among the people to be members of the middle class in a modern capitalist society. Thus, Japanese capital and transnational manufacturing companies have supported Japanese media efforts with the aim of marketing consumer commodities in Asia" (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 103). Koichi Iwabuchi (2004) notes that "transnational media flows are being reorganized in a highly dispersed and ubiquitous power structure through the intensifying collaboration of media corporations and media creators that are based in various developed nations" (p. 77). It would be inaccurate to describe transnational media development in the twenty-first century as Americanization or Westernization. It would be just as wrong to imagine that local media have secured space for their own unique cultural products.

Sony is not "Japanizing" the United States or India through its media mergers any more than Disney "Westernizes" Argentina or India with its joint ventures. Transnational capitalist investors and managers are reorganizing media production across borders and cultures to improve their net profits by lowering production costs and increasing consumer activity in new locales. Sony buys into Hollywood, Disney buys into Bollywood, Bollywood buys into China, and China's Chollywood seeks partners everywhere, all to consolidate production and distribution, to build diversified entertainment conglomerates through transnational interlocks. TNMCs party together, building networks of production and distribution. Comcast buys NBC Universal to have content to distribute. News Corp and Liberty Media/ Discovery Channel invest in DirecTV's satellite business to better distribute their content. Not all partnerships are economically or organizationally successful (as Time Warner and AOL discovered), yet the impulse and activity continues because of the capitalist drive for profits and the new transnational market reality.



Local partners are crucial for facilitating entry into new markets. If "Japanese media industries and cultural products cannot successfully become transnational players without partners" (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 37), the "merge or die" condition is all the more pressing for other, less resourced, national and regional media firms. This is true everywhere. Australia TNMCs have turned to co-productions in other regions. In 2003, British television distributors earned $920 million from international co-productions, licensing, format, and DVD sales – three times the international income from British-produced and exported television programs (Havens, 2006, p. 33).

The transnational process entails a profound restructuring of media production and content. Transnational media efforts and successes are not separate from the universal transformation of social relations. A dialectic unfolds as capitalism reorganizes its chains of production: Entertainment media and advertising provide themes and narratives to emerging middle-class consumers that say, "This is who you are. This is what successful entrepreneurs and managers do. This is what professional lifestyles look like." In other words, TNMCs and their advertisers only enter nations where privatization and the accumulation of wealth through increased wage labor production has become accepted. Increased productivity of labor provides capitalist wealth as well as income for middle classes who then become dedicated consumers. Conversely, during the prolonged economic recession in Asia, unemployment ramped up, consumer spending collapsed, advertising revenues declined, and regional TNMCs retreated from lower-profit nations (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 107). Transnational media influence is not independent of social relations, material conditions, or, for that matter, creative expertise in delivering popular messages. Transnational media do not fly solo; they ride in tandem with capitalist development.

Global expansion has become a matter of survival and consequently media have developed in line with the transnationalization of all capitalist production. Having flooded their own markets, national media must inevitably consolidate and expand to other countries to maximize revenues and profits. Mergers and acquisitions of all or part of another nation's media provide one form of expansion, but national regulations restricted foreign ownership until recently. Satellite technology opened the possibility for unregulated cross-border broadcasting, often making national regulations unenforceable. Meanwhile, the influence and leadership of segments of the TNCC in each country secured policy changes and dramatic media deregulation in all but the most authoritarian countries (e.g., Zimbabwe, Burma), permitting increased foreign direct investment (FDI), transnational mergers, and joint ventures. Driven by TNCC thirst for consumer audiences, most nations soon privatize media, while TNMCs gobble up the best outlets – startling citizens concerned with pluralism and media democracy (Bruck et al., 2004). TNMCs expand program diversity in many places, but curtail public media and media democracy in all places.

Direct foreign investment, strategic partnerships, and mergers and acquisitions create a geographically dispersed and culturally diverse media enterprises that quickly outpace media that rely on selling globally standardized products abroad (Flew & Gilmour, 2003, p. 12). The rapid growth of News Corp, Rupert Murdoch's media empire, testifies to the efficacy of transnational strategies. Standardized production practices, consumer market segmentation, and customized localized media supplement the more traditional single global media product. Licensing formats in television programming assure not only transfer of cultural content, but perhaps just as importantly for long-term effects, formats also bring professional media management protocols, expertise in production, distribution and marketing, training and supervision in corporate media entertainment norms, and transnationalized "commonsense" notions about branding, audience creation, competition, business ethics, shared industry values, and how to deal with local government protocols.

In Europe, the Council of Europe and the European Union led the way with the "Television Without Frontiers" directive that enforced unrestricted television broadcasting across borders (Aubry, 2000). In other regions, IMF structural adjustment programs and WTO guidelines on media overrule national regulations. Deregulation in every case contributed to a recognizable loss of political diversity and democratic access to the media (Boas, 2013; Bruck et al., 2004; Jakubowicz, 2007; Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002; Hong, 1998; Zhao, 2008). "The incapability of national authorities to deal efficiently with cross-national developments [in media] is increasingly evident" as the Council of Europe "obliges Member states to remove obstacles to the operation of the internal [media] market" (Bruck et al., 2004, pp. 15, 17). Changes and contradictions in transnational production have



had repercussions on political, ideological, and cultural formations; media production has been no exception.

Media and culture are also prime commodity-producing, profit-making industries. The global entertainment and media market is estimated to reach $2 trillion in 2015 (Li, 2008; Bond, 2013). A few examples should verify the economic possibilities for telecommunication, entertainment media, and culture industries. In the twenty-first century, media can make some people very rich.

## Media for Profit

Carlos Slim, *Forbes* magazine's richest man in the world ($65 billion), became a billionaire following a sweetheart deal takeover of Mexico's public telephone company TELMEX and his subsequent acquisition of América Movile, the Western Hemisphere's fourth largest telecommunications company. Slim owns stakes in Independent News & Media (a large newspaper chain with outlets in Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, and South Africa) and the New York Times Company. Incidentally, as part of the TNCC, Slim also sits on the board of the RAND Corporation, a TNCC global policy research center serving government and corporations (Menotti, 2011).

Billionaire Vladimir Potanin, owner of Interros, an industrial and financial consortium, owns Profmedia, Russia's largest media group, with magazines, radio stations, movie theaters, and Russia's dominant television network (Menotti, 2011). Profmedia broadcasts Russian versions of transnational programming, such as MTV, relaunched as Pyatnitsa with $100 million investment in 2012 (Profmedia, 2013). Profmedia "works with the premium target audience" through a number of famous Russian brands, including TV3 and 2×2 in television, Avtoradio, Energy, Radio Romantika, and Humour FM in radio, Central Partnership in film production and distribution, Cinema Park in cinemas, Afisha in print media, and rambler.ru, lenta.ru, afisha.ru, 101.ru, and other major Internet brands in RuNet (Profmedia.ru, 2013). Profmedia joined George Soros in Syaszinvest, a leading Russian telecom firm. In 2013, Profmedia joined with Dutch-based TNMC Sanoma Independent Media to publish 20 new magazines (Russian joint, 2013), which has Russian partnerships with Hearst, Wall St. Journal, and Financial Times (Sanoma, 2013).

Alisher Usmanov, primary shareholder of Metalloinvest, Russia's primary iron ore producer and the fifth richest man in Russia ($17.7 billion), owns *Kommersant*, Russia's leading business-oriented newspaper, owns 59% of Telecominvest, and is the head of MegaFon, Russia's third largest mobile phone company. Usmanov's Digital Sky Technologies has investments in Facebook, Zynga, and Groupon. He also has shares in South Africa-based TNMC Naspers and is co-owner of a TV media holding company that includes a sports channel, a music channel, and 33 regional TV broadcasting stations. Usmanov owns the Sekret Firmy Publishing House, as well as the Internet website Livejournal.com, the Internet newspaper Gazeta.ru, and several popular web portals, including Mail.ru, Odnoklassniki.ru, and Vkontakte.ru. (Menotti, 2011).

More than 100 other Russian billionaires made fortunes in their gallop from state bureaucracy to private enterprise. To consolidate political power, many branched out into media, as lucrative venues for accumulating more wealth, while ensuring direct media access to 150 million people across nine time zones, promoting consumerism and the market ideology essential to winning popular Russian support for transnational capitalist practices.

Rupert Murdoch's News Corp brings in on average $34 billion in revenues annually and $700 million in profits, demonstrating the enormous wealth that can be generated from media commodities and selling audiences to advertisers, but smaller transnational corporations (TNCs) have snatched some profits from telecommunications and media entertainment on the global periphery. In India, the Ruia brothers, Sashi and Ravi, control the Essar Group – a highly diversified TNC with global interests in shipping, steel, energy, and telecom. Essar clinched a $350 million deal with Dhabi Group's Warid Telecom to acquire a majority stake in firms in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Menotti, 2011). Essar owns several global ICT companies and a UK joint venture in Paprika Media magazine. Essar underscores that transnational media are capitalist enterprises: telecommunication, media entertainment, and information and communication technologies (ICT) contribute to the Ruias' wealth as clearly as profits generated by selling steel or transporting commodities.

As these and other examples testify, media and culture are not peripheral to transnational capitalist economic formation (e.g., see ketupa.net; mediedatenbank.com). Media "contribute to the commodification of all productive forces and become a commodity in their own right" (Mosco, 2012, p. 571). In general, media gain capitalist profits by selling media products for more than producers and creators are paid for their labor



### Berlusconi/Mediaset

Mediaset earns $4 billion in annual revenue. Much less global than other TNMCs, Mediaset is Silvio Berlusconi's political and economic power base in Italy. Mediaset comprises three national television channels that collectively cover half of the national television audience and 58% of advertising revenue (Mediedatenbank, 2013). Berlusconi owns Publitalia, the leading Italian advertising and publicity agency, reaping profits from advertising sales and production on both ends of the audience commodity exchange. Berlusconi owns Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, Italy's largest publisher, including *Panorama*, a popular news magazine. Berlusconi is major shareholder of Fininvest, a multimedia company, which is among the 10 largest private companies in Italy. Berlusconi has interests in cinema and video distribution (Medusa Film and Penta Film) and owns AC Milan, one of Italy's most popular football teams. Mediaset has US, Canadian, and British shareholders with additional French, German, and Dutch investors. Mediaset has joint ventures with Comcast's CNBC and Time Warner, is majority holder in the largest television network in Spain and has shares in Telecinco TV, Digital Plus, and Prisa TV in Spain, as well as a 25% partnership with Nessma TV, an Arabic station in Tunisia. Mediaset owns 35% of Pegaso (which has 83% of the Caribevision network broadcasting in New York, Miami, and Puerto Rico) and has a 49% partnership with the China Media Group, which broadcasts the China Sport Network (Mediaset, 2013). Mediaset illustrates the hegemonic appeal that the transnational agenda pledges for all TNMCs: adopting a cross-border production and distribution regimen brings economic rewards; failure to adapt means death by national and domestic attrition as audiences migrate to larger, more appealing TNMC programs.

and creativity. Transnational media are important contributors to TNCC wealth and the transnational capitalist transformation as media firms join other TNCs in border crossings to build alliances for producing and distributing multicultural, multinational entertainment and its consuming audiences.

## Media Entertainment and Transnational Capitalism

Those who own and control media production and distribution have more ability to determine media content and practice. Yet, the structure of media is not the complete picture. Beyond concerns about owner abuse of power, the shifting relations of transnational media raise questions about how production practices and commercial strategies influence cultural production, including the standardization of entertainment formats and the consequent reduction in political diversity and citizen access to the media.

Political economy provides a lens for understanding the relations between ownership and content, because it encompasses the full complement of social relations, particularly power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources; political economy addresses the totality of social relations that constitute the economic, political, social, and cultural fields (Mosco, 2009; Boyd-Barrett, n. d.). Political economy approaches consider ownership with production norms; production practices with programming choices; programming choices with commercial goals (or public service aims); advertising revenues with audience programming; audience effects with cultural norms; material commodities with symbolic meanings; economic relations with ideology; and more. In other words, the production, distribution, and consumption of media are not simply economic or structural conditions – in each process a panoply of social relations is forged and implemented.

Media structures frame production practices and programming content. Programming forms and themes that dominate transnational media set political agendas, contribute knowledge, and influence attitudes and behaviors – depending on the social and cultural background, skill, consciousness, and interest of the audience. Media institutions, professional practices, and the social consequences of media are stirred by existing social class relations, their antagonism and contradictions. This does not suggest structures are insurmountable or predeterminant; rather, it recognizes the concrete conditions under which reproduction or change is possible.

Michael Keane (2006) imagines "Asianess is colonizing international communication" (p. 839). Jan Nedverteen Pieterse (2006) claims global culture is being "Easternized" (p. 122) and Dayan Thussu (2007) argues that new networks from the global South are circulating "subaltern flows" (subordinate groups expressing alternative worldviews) which construct new identities for international viewers (pp. 23, 25). What is sorely lacking is recognition of the structure of capitalist social relations. Keane, Thussu, and Hafez (2007) and disparate others are astute enough to see the changing global media environment, but as they don't admit that social classes exist their conclusions are handicapped.



Insights from international media studies need the backbone of international political economy to explain the changing relations of production globally, and in each country: increased labor productivity from technology and industrial rationalization creates such wealth that fewer humans are needed to produce the necessities of life; capitalism has flooded national markets with the overproduction of goods and has been forced to increase pressure on the working class and also to look globally to accumulate more profit; cross-border production and distribution depend on the deregulation of public interest. Neoliberalism forcefully requires international integration of production and trade; and finally, as former state-controlled nations collapse and authoritarian regimes lose power, structural adjustment programs and rapid privatization create new capitalists in nations previously off the market economy grid. In other words, a political economy lens makes sense of what all can see, but is not yet fully explained, including making sense of global entertainment media as an expression of global class relations.

## Transforming the Political Economy of Global Media

The production and distribution of global media entertainment conforms to transnational capitalist social relations of production. Capitalism has grown and re-formed as transnational. There is a dominant, irrefutable influence on global cultural production, but it is not from Western culture per se. Rather, a transnational capitalism regime demands low-cost labor to produce mass entertainment, world citizens to be consumers, all cultures to be commodified, and the entire world to become a source of accumulation of wealth for a voracious transnational capitalist class. Media are at the center of this economic, social, and cultural process.

Significantly, media around the world have signed up with the transnational media corporations. Local media are not "striking back" against transnational media (Rantanen, 2002) because TNMCs appear as paternal guides to riches. Local commercial media seek their own advertising revenues and audience share, bringing side dishes to the transnational buffet of consumerism, as they line up for admission to transnational markets in response to the invitation by TNMCs to make more local productions. Meanwhile, TNMCs "thrive on respect for and exploitation of local cultural values" (Mooij, 1998, p. 299).

Shifting alliances and antagonisms among transnational media play out like a world domination board game – with human costs. Leaving old partners for new often means abandoning workers in one locale for a cheaper labor force in another. National interests do not explain Lenovo's purchase of US-based Motorola, or its investment in Germany and Brazil. The same American and Asian workers will produce and distribute IBM ThinkPads and Motorola Razr phones across borders, while shareholders of diverse nationalities will reap profits across borders. The more complete picture shows that US capitalists, Chinese capitalists, Indian capitalists, and Finnish capitalists are each poised to prosper from Indian and Chinese labor productivity and consumer sales without any regard for labor in their

### Nokia: Transnational Competition and Consolidation

In 2010, Finnish-based Nokia had $57 billion in revenue from information technology (ICT) produced in seven countries. Nokia also has joint ventures with Microsoft, Sanyo, Siemens, and dozens of other firms in China, India, Kenya, Switzerland, United States, and the United Kingdom. Yet as Nokia discovered, transnational joint ventures do not preclude transnational competition – capitalist investors expect a continuous return of profit. Exploiting lower labor costs and a more efficient software platform, Huawei and ZTE are gobbling up Nokia's market. Microsoft's "Windows" rescue of Nokia may not even save the once former leader in cellular phones (Gasseé, 2012). Vodafone, Telefónica, Deutsche Telekom, Ericsson, Sony, Motorola (now owned by Lenovo), China's Huawei (the world's largest telecom equipment maker, which works with all of the world's top telecoms), and other telecom and ICT manufacturers are also transnational in structure, production, and distribution (UNCTAD, 2011). In 2013, Japan's Sofbank investment firm paid $21.6 billion for a 78% stake in Sprint-Nextel, instantly making it one of the world's largest transnational mobile operators (Gabriel, 2012). All of them are circling the wounded Nokia and attacking its lingering market share, even as they each look for new transnational partnerships.



own nations. Smaller TNMCs are involved in the transformation of global telecommunications as well: Qatar Telecom has a joint venture with Korea Telecom, IndoSat (Indonesia), and ATT; Nippon TT owns shares in Singapore's StarHub Cablevision; Telecom Italia owns 30% of Globo.com; and Microsoft is a major investor in Globo Cabo, Brazil's largest cable provider.

The impact of global class realignments cannot be ignored, with the TNCC implementing cross-border, cross-media production relations among social classes, eroding democracy and destroying the environment in the process. We have entered the transnational era. Transnational capitalism's cultural aspirations are not US dominance, but profits for the few and consumerism for all (Sklair, 2001, p. 289).

Media in all nations reflect existing social relations. Today media relations are transnational capitalist relations. This is not a denial of agency; but absent conscious, organized alternative social movements, the TNCC will continue in myriad ways to influence nations and peoples on behalf of market values. We can identify the owners of entertainment media, ascertain their financial interests and goals, discover the norms of their content production, list the participants and agents in their production and distribution chains, and ascertain the social, cultural, and ideological character of their programming. Transnational media have transnational owners, managers, and co-producers attempting to create programs that will attract audiences that can be sold to advertisers. Those advertisers want audiences "ready to buy" consumer goods, so programming has structures, themes, narratives, and ideologies conducive to individual consumption. Global, national, regional, local, and cultural signs and symbols appear according to the intents, skills, expectations, resources, and commonsense practices of the creators of programs – all in line with transnational accumulation goals.

Accordingly, the maturing political economy of transnational entertainment media predicts that programming genre diversity will flourish, but democratic access will recede. More diversity, less democracy. In Latin America, for instance, "a competitive radio market essentially means multiple music options rather than different news perspectives" (Boas, 2013, p. 5). In the Middle East, where there is "a high number of channels available, there is a wide variety of genres and content on offer for the pan-Arab audience" (Dubai Press Club, 2010), but there is scant democratic participation in media or society.

Transnational media have morphed beyond the previously known and recognized species of Western, national, or international media to become new agents of cross-border entertainment feeding on local, regional, national, and linguistic ingredients. Although TNMCs broadcast programs across borders to countries not hosting TNMC production (Bruck et al., 2004, p. 6), it is a "misconception that global and local are mutually exclusive and contradictory processes" (Sklair, 2001, p. 256); both are part of the transnational production and distribution system. Media partnerships may not exist beyond an individual project, but local producers welcome TNMC collaboration "because it leads to increased production funding and increased revenues, which can be used to cross-subsidize local producers' other projects" (Havens, 2006, p. 51). Additionally, TNMCs recruit and hire a multitude of local firms for technical, logistical, and creative assistance for almost every aspect of production, from building sets to providing lighting, from script editing and translation to wardrobe and makeup, to post-production editing and distribution via multiple media platforms – all flowing within the current of TNMC production practices for local and cross-border distribution.

## Diversity in Transnational Media Operation

Multi-territory channels broadcast locally with independent programs for local audience interests. Over 100 pan-European networks specialize in niche genres broadcasting over country-specific or region-specific channels. Time Warner's Cartoon Network, Fox Kids, MTV, and Discovery are typical examples: they each attempt to localize their broadcasts by dubbing or subtitling language and split the satellite or cable feed to allow local programming windows under the international brand. Pan-European broadcasters that have combined local adaptability with country-specific channels have been more successful. These channels share a brand style as well as network resources. Networks benefit from creative contributions of local co-producers that can be shared across channels. Viacom/Paramount has been particularly active with a headquarters in Rome, co-productions with Spanish cable giant Sogecable, and other ventures with British, French, German, and Belgian companies (Havens, 2006, p. 51). Firms based in Europe have struggled to combine their support of economic neoliberalism with national film subsidies for co-production of pan-European-based regional and "world" projects (Miller et al., 2008, pp. 175, 178–182). Chalaby (2005) concludes that transnational networks transcend national cultures by respecting and incorporating cultural difference in their programming.



Pan-European channels have not displaced smaller multi-territory transnationals, but find common ground in co-productions and other joint ventures in a shared drive for audience share. David Fernández-Quijada (2013) relates how TNMCs like Endemol, Sony, Fremantle, Banijay,and Zodiak contract co-productions or merge with domestic "independent" media like Shed, Tinopolis, and Boomerang to create TNMC webs of production and distribution in Britain and Spain. Across Europe, TNMCs of all types recruit local media producers to maximize profits. There are no global/local barriers that cannot be reduced to parameters for making media and profits.

Media are crucial to the transnational production circuit (distributing information and advertising for other products) and to the potential success of TNCC hegemony (producing and legitimizing consumerist and market ideologies). Summarizing years of research, Chalaby (2009) observes that "transnational television does not merely participate in the globalizing process, it also reflects our globalized world" (p. 227). As part of transnational capitalism, media production shares many of the same structural and procedural characteristics of other transnational corporations – including the inexhaustible drive for profits as national markets become saturated or concentrated. Media are an industrial segment of transnational capitalist production, making commodities for profit in the global market. Transnational media extract content and revenue from around the world. *Hard Rain* (1993), the Paramount action adventure movie, was co-financed by UGC (France's largest theater chain), the BBC, Telemuchen, and the Danish Nordisk Studio, as well as Marubeni and Toho-Towa, Japanese film distributors.

In general, transnational media production chains in multiple nations gather local directors, television and film studios, local technicians from videographers to editors and manufacturing workers, advertising, public relations, and marketing staff, actors, writers, copyeditors, lighting crews, and all the other necessary and ancillary workers. The location of these workers and their work is secondary. Thailand has become "the top production destination and post-production site for many international projects for low-cost labour, scenery, facilities, and logistics," while other Euro-Asian productions set up shop in Europe, India, and Australia to tap talent, resources, and markets elsewhere (Davis & Yeh, 2008, pp. 97, 99–105). Media corporations have trajectories similar to other TNCs. Whether appliances, automobiles, or movies, transnational capitalism has rearranged production and distribution of commodities across borders.

## Media Apparatus

Media's unique characteristics make them instrumental for transforming the global social order. Yet, the complexities of their characteristics, forms, and functions often complicate discussions. Media can be understood as:

1. Technology: AM/FM/Short wave radio, television, print, cellular, digital, with attendant material processes: sound, print, electronics, ether broadcast, coaxial cable, and more.
2. Form: poster, book, magazine, newspaper, radio, television, video, film, Internet, mobile.
3. Content: news, information, entertainment, education, advertising, propaganda. Media content may also be understood stylistically as genre: news, news magazine, drama, melodrama, situation comedy, sports, game show, documentary, factual entertainment, and more.
4. Institution: public, private, government, community.
5. Social function: information, socialization, identification, persuasion, and so on.

Of course, media have additional distinctions or categories and can be further sub-divided. Often disagreements or confusions about media arise because individuals are talking about different media dimensions using different vocabularies and assumptions.

## Media Content as Social Lubricant

Media entertainment content is crucial for assembling consent for TNCC policies and practices, providing messages and symbols promoting, representing, and legitimating transnational production social relations with "global 'semiotic constructions,' through images of the world, nations, institutions, people and activities, that media create and distribute, or not" (Boyd-Barrett, 2006, p. 28). Media, particularly entertainment media, supply the consensual lubricant for cultural hegemony among diverse cultures, nations, and classes.

> The goal of dominant political groups and classes [is to] disseminate their own ideas throughout a society such that these ideas become dominant, cohering a social formation in a process of cultural and political leadership and absorbing or articulating in this way the discourses of other groups and classes in order to nullify their potential antagonism. (Castagno, 2012, p. 334)



MediaAsia, one of the most active pan-Asian TNMCs, courts upscale youth across Asia with movie characters fluent in a variety of cultures, proficient in languages, fashion, food, and stylish travel as well as the latest technology in a "pointedly twenty-first century amalgamation of commodity and entertainment values" (Davis & Yeh, 2008, p. 107). The movie and media industries replicate the structure and practice of other transnational industries, while TNMC commodities carry symbolic content that further advocates cultural behaviors appropriate for a transnational capitalist system. Media are influential as a primary means of communicating values in every society. Thus, the Chinese bureaucracy has begun substituting state propaganda with consumerist media entertainment as an improved means of social control (Hong, 1998; Zhao, 2008, p. 123).

## Media: Industries for Profit

Media are capitalist industries. Capitalist entertainment media have become transnationalized in production and distribution for private profit, generating billions in revenues from sales of media products, including newspapers, magazines, DVDs, CDs, and audiences for cinema, radio, television, and digital media. Whatever the medium, TNMCs profit from commodities produced by the wage labor of creative workers, either as salaried or hourly wageworkers, or as private contractors hired for their labor power, their creative ability to produce content which is essential for print, broadcast, music, and film. Media profit from the wage labor of production workers, who create value through their production of magazines, newspapers, CDs, DVDs, and other material goods. Media profits are extracted by paying workers less than the value of the products they produce.

Estimates put global media revenue at $2.2 trillion in 2012. Media produce and sell products. Each medium has a specific commodity form as determined by its capitalist producers and their target consumer market. In their various divisions, media produce and distribute: (1) programs and other content; (2) advertising; (3) audiences; and (4) ideologies (expressed in the values and beliefs manifest in the messages and narratives of news and entertainment programming). Media products have a more profound social consequence than most other commodities because they exude meaning as their essential appeal and effect. Media explicitly transmit and elicit symbolic meanings, values, norms, and beliefs. Indeed, meaning as a primary ingredient in media provides a major motivation for consumer behavior. Thus, ideology (including consumerism) is produced and distributed through all media goods and services.

Revenue streams for the media industry depend on the sale of commodities, including:

1. Media technology (phones, computers, televisions, radios, and other devices)
2. Media access (cable and satellite connections, premium channels, pay-per-view, downloads, movie admissions, concerts, and other user access fees)
3. Media content as commodity (DVDs, books, magazines, comics, and other media commodities that can be retailed)
4. Media program formats may be sold, especially internationally, and producers can add training, supervision, promotion, and other add-ons
5. Media programming sold through syndication to distribution networks, when programs are sold per episode or season to a broadcaster
6. Non-media commodity spin-offs (toys, games, video games, clothing, and other goods featuring media content, characters, or icons)
7. Media audiences attracted to programming are sold to advertisers directly or through product placement in programs and movies.

Not all TNMCs produce and distribute every media commodity or for every media use, but all global entertainment media either contribute to or profit from each of these commodity forms in one way or another.

Profits can be generated in several ways. Most media now profit from multiple delivery systems. Film is produced for a "per viewing" consumption. Movie-goers pay for each single viewing. Film producers also copy their movies into discrete consumer products in the form of DVDs. Broadcasters purchase films for distribution on television, including through pay-per-view and traditional "free" TV. Record companies likewise mass produce copies of music as CDs or other digital formats. Books and other printed material are produced for individual sale, as well. Newspapers and magazines are material goods sold to individual consumers. With the Internet, publishers now also garner revenue through on-line reader subscriptions.



### Phones for Fun and Profit

The demand for mobile phones is not a "mechanical outcome of technical progress, but the product of the balance of forces that shape society. [For individuals] it is an attempt to wrest a measure of personal control in a social world out of control" (Schiller, 1999, p. 8). For corporations, cell phones are lucrative consumer products and a means for further software sales and advertising. Rather than becoming a means to improve human communication, mobile phones have been configured as consumable media commodities and a means to access other media commodities. The transnationalized telecommunication industry has developed multiple revenue components: the phone itself is technology sold as individual commodity; the monthly or per use purchase of phone connectivity is another major source of revenue; finally, consumers may purchase special applications and services for their phones as a one-time buy, per use, or through monthly service fees. Multiple revenue streams explain why transnational telecommunication equipment makers and service providers are among the richest TNCs (ATT, Vodafone, Telefónica, NTT, Huawei, Nokia, Deutsche Telekom). Digital technology for cell phones, cable, and Internet broadband opens the transmission of media content by telecommunications firms, which are challenging traditional broadcasters and publishers for audiences (Bain & Company, 2012; Mastrini & Becerra, 2011, p. 54).

Cable, satellite, and pay-per-view systems collect subscription and user fees directly from audiences. China Telecom, Jiangsu, Comcast, DirecTV, BSkyB, T-Sky India, and other Sky systems, Dish Network, Time-Warner, TelMex, Nippon, Naspers, and another 100 regional TNMCs have millions of subscribers and collectively turn revenues in the hundreds of billions annually (Zhao, 2013).

Some content creators like Disney make programming decisions anticipating the potential market for toys, games, music, clothes, and other spin-off consumer goods based on characters in their films. Larger firms contain costs and increase income through vertical and horizontal integration. Vertical integration refers to a company's control over resources for all the steps in the production process: a newspaper might own a paper

### Super Girl, Super Profit

Social media have added to the revenue stream of integrated TNMCs. Text message voting generates millions for networks and telecommunication firms. TV voters for their favorite contestant on *Super Girl* – the Chinese version of the *Idol* format broadcast on Hunan Satellite TV – were charged 13 cents per vote. At the end of the 2004 first season, revenues from text messaging gave Hunan Satellite $11 million, Shanghai Tianyu, the local producer, $4 million, Internet providers $3.5 million, the merchandizing firm $12 million, and the telecom provider $1.5 million. The show's sponsor, Mongolian Cow Yoghurt, which paid millions for access to the television audiences, raised $89 million in revenues from products advertised on *Super Girl*. (Keane, Fung, & Moran, 2007, p. 133). The model quickly caught on with other TNMCS. By 2005, 55 million text message and phone call "votes" to *Indian Idol* were generating almost $2.5 million in telecom revenue (Pudnathambekar, 2010, p. 247).

mill, or even timber, as the *New York Times* does, printing presses, and delivery trucks. Horizontal integration means a company has expanded its holdings of other companies in the same medium: Clear Channel purchases multiple radio stations in single markets to increase its leverage with advertisers and encompass more radio audiences with diverse genres. Multiplatform media (vertically and horizontally integrated) promote synergy among their offerings and holdings: a movie provides music CDs, a cartoon provides characters for a video game, a movie becomes a stage performance, a television program markets a theme park, and similar cross-promotion activity (Gershon, 2005, p. 23). Although cross-promotion revenues do not accrue directly from cross-promotion, the ability to advertise its own products is value-added to any media company.

While all media commodities must elicit some desire in the consumer, self-acting, power-broking audiences aren't the source of demand for any particular product; calculations of distribution, sales, and profits based on whether media content elements can be marketed and promoted more often determine what will be produced (Miller et al., 2008, pp. 260–266). Concentration among TNMCs tends to standardize formats, increase entertainment diversity, and decrease political diversity because commercial



interests are paramount and consolidation improves a TNMC's ability to influence markets, labor costs, and national and international media programming. Increased profits may result from the successful negotiation of these economic and political variables.

## Audience as Commodity

The kernel of capitalism is the market imperative for all production-for-profit: commodities are produced for sale. There are no profits until the products are sold. In this process, modern-day capitalism relies on advertising to promote and speed up the circulation/sale of commodities. Production for consumption is what drives, organizes, and over-determines all production, including the content of media programming.

Television networks produce programs, but programs are not their primary product. Viewers don't buy network television shows. Advertisers don't buy television shows. Advertisers don't buy "time," either. Advertisers pay big bucks to networks for viewers: advertisers buy audiences. Advertisers need viewers who are potential consumers essential to the sale of products.

Media profit from the "sale" of audiences to advertisers – about $350 billion annually for television, some $65 billion for Internet advertising. Advertisers "buy" readers, viewers, and listeners as discrete demographic units, so the production of audiences requires an appropriate programming form and content. In the 1960s, Dallas Smythe (1994) first explained this process: advertisers "buy the services of audiences" who will pay attention to their messages (p. 270).

Television networks have little interest in audiences per se; their primary concern is to attract audiences that have commercial value to advertisers. Networks do not care about audiences any more than automobile manufacturers care about cars or fast-food restaurants want hamburgers. Audiences, autos, hamburgers are products, a means to an end. Each product must appeal to its buyer. Audiences are not the end-goal of the networks, any more than automobiles are the end-goal of auto manufacturers. Cars are sold; audiences are sold.

Programs are thus produced and broadcast for different audiences, largely according to social class, but also delineated by gender, ethnicity, and culture (Garnham, 1990, p. 29). Audiences have more or less worth depending on the value of their demographic to product producers: denture manufacturers value over-50 viewers, candy manufacturers prefer younger viewers, beer producers target males 21–34, and so on. An award-winning television series will be canceled in an instant, if advertisers don't want that particular viewing audience.

Transnational broadcasting in Europe depends on the class character of viewing and consuming audiences, explaining programming and even station choices of TNMCs. Fashion TV, Travel Channel, Eurosport, and documentary channels have a "more upmarket audience than that of terrestrial stations" (Chalaby, 2009, p. 91). The audience profile of news and business channels, like CNN and Bloomberg, translates into maximum advertising exposure to the desired elite audiences and "minimum audience wastage" for luxury goods, technology firms, and elite service providers because these stations "offer an advertising environment that is adapted to an affluent business audience" (Chalaby, 2009, pp. 91–92).

Wherever other niche audiences are desirable due to their available disposable income (women or youth in Europe and North America, for example) programmers provide low-cost shows expected to have significant appeal to that demographic. "Small town audiences with their cut-price tickets and queues of eager young fans don't matter as much as they used to" since more profits can be made from multiplexes catering to affluent, upper-middle-class youth in India (Mishra, 2006, p. 175). For years, STAR TV, Zee TV, and Sony provided no local language programming in Northeast India "simply because the region did not represent a commercially viable market" – advertisers had little interest in the economically distressed states. Thus, Zee TV, Eenadu, and Sun TV broadcast in Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu to audiences in the more prosperous southern regions (Punathambekar, 2010, pp. 245–246).

Reality shows, relatively cheap to produce, are now the leading drama format on television. Although some active-audience advocates celebrate reality television as the "feminization" of the public sphere, the emergence of the format can best be understood as a cost-cutting measure and an instance of niche marketing (Miller et al., 2008, p. 95).

Mass-produced, advertiser-supported transnational media depend on the audience commodity to realize profits at the end of the production-distribution-consumption chain. Understanding the audience as commodity admits that audiences are assembled as marketable units that have exchange value for programmers and advertisers. Audiences are sold to advertisers for their exchange value – they are useful to advertisers who need viewers and readers who will attend to their persuasive messages. The larger the audience and the more the audience has demographics matching



the buying characteristics of potential consumers, the more value that particular audience has to an advertiser.

The real significance of transnational media content is this: "in economic terms the main function of the mass media in this system is to produce audiences prepared to be dutiful consumers … The real end-product is the commodity to be sold, and the audience produced by the mass media is but part of the means to that end" (Smythe, 1994, p. 251). The primary task facing transnational media content producers is how to attract, capture, and deliver those local audiences (and their attention) as consumers to transnational advertisers. Content producers create programming not for global audiences per se, but for specific localized audiences which have exchange value – that is, audiences which are desirable and can be sold in discrete time blocs to advertisers. Audiences that will be consumers.

For transnational media that means the standardization of localization – creating hybrid media with local translations of global consumerist themes. Programming content or form must facilitate the intended purpose for broadcast: priming audiences to buy.

### Pay Per View

Pay television – direct consumer purchase of content – has earned billions for TNMC cable and satellite systems, such as Comcast, Liberty Global, and News Corp's Sky TV. Programs produced for premium cable stations are bought by content aggregators and media distributors, as well as consumers. In most cases, viewers buy programming without advertising: media profits are skimmed off the difference between program costs and monthly subscription fees or per-view purchases. This system of financing runs in tandem with advertising-funded media. Movies or programs on one system often appear later on the other. Still, even with pay-per-view television and DVR recording devices that allow viewers to "skip" commercial advertisements, television and film producers can market audiences to advertisers. Products appear directly in programs, either as logos, incidental spots, or background shots of the product, or when the characters use the product. Just about every product seen in a film or TV program is the result of a product deal.

Audiences must be attracted and stimulated, but not reflective or thoughtful. Programming must include appropriate cultural norms and ideological preferences that prepare audiences for consuming the products advertised and consumerism in general (Garnham, 1990, pp. 24–29). Audiences must be nurtured and raised so they may be harvested by networks and delivered to advertisers as retail consumers.

A crucial part of audience cultivation is ideological. Media entertainment must share the virtues of consumerism. Entertainment programming must flow with commercial spots to socialize viewers to self-interest, celebrity worship, and instant gratification – ingredients valuable to advertisers and marketers. Messages important for transnational capitalism.

From this more critical political economy position, we can better understand television programming decisions as actions based on market projections and share dividends, not on public preferences. Within these parameters, hegemonic programming must have compelling cultural ingredients, sensibilities, and themes to carry the larger purpose of bringing local audiences to the market Jesus.

As all TNMCs share the same economic imperatives, it is not surprising that few stray from standard formats, themes, and genres best suited for advertising and consumerism.

The costs of producing a marketable audience are high, requiring scriptwriters; directors, producers, and editors; animators, amateurs, or actors and their attendants; set designers, lighting staff, camera crews, technicians, and diverse skilled assistants; audience researchers, promoters, and more. Networks continually search for low-cost, low-risk advertising-audience friendly programs such as reality television, game shows, and animation.

Advertisers have little interest in content, because they are concerned with one criterion: will the desired audience be available for my commercial? Thus, in general, advertisers have little motivation for the censorship of ideas. Indeed, a little controversy or titillation might even improve audience size and enhance attention. Viacom's Comedy Central network routinely airs programs that challenge decency standards that many citizens would find offensive, but because advertisers are purchasing 18–34 year old (mostly white male) audiences, they "are not particularly concerned with offending other viewers" (Croteau & Hoynes, 2001, p. 124). Advertisers only balk at content that might "damage" the desired audience product or disrupt the smooth delivery of that audience to the advertising spot. Status quo local cultural values rule – with a dash of trendy edginess or cosmopolitan seasoning for some targeted audiences.



Images and representations, as part of the creative process of communication, arise with the material production of audience-as-commodity in mind. The battle for legitimate news, creative culture, or educational programming is meaningless disconnected from the fight to wrench media production out of the hands of transnational commercial networks and their transnational capitalist allies and advertising clients. Capitalist entertainment media content and advertising have no existence separate from one another. Media content and advertising are symbiotically connected with separate agents and sites of production; recognizing audience-as-product is central to any understanding of transnational media practice. Media are industrial institutions with similar strategies and goals as all TNCs, but media function more complexly with additional communication features that are deployed by the TNCC for its global political strategy.

## Transnational Media Production

Evidence of transnational ownership of corporations through mergers, joint ventures, and FDI verifies the incomplete but continuing development of transnational production. "Joint production arrangements are now well established between U.S. enterprises and French, British, Swedish, Australian, and Italian companies, with connections to television, theme parks, cable, satellite, video, and the Internet" (Miller et al., 2008, p. 124). Multiple capitalist-class institutions and formations indicate an emerging transnational capitalist class that owns and controls cross-border production and plans and leads transnational planning and policy groups.

Satellite broadcast, mobile devices, and digital technology have spurred transnational media expansion, as TNMCs, advertisers, and consumer product manufacturers seek to tap into the disposable income of middle class audiences across the world. Media technology should not be construed as a cause of globalization, but seen for what it is: a tool of transnational capital and TNMCs that are driven to secure more profit. Technology appears as both a media product for sale and an efficient means to increase profits using the speed and ease of technology for transnational transactions. Although consumers treasure their mobile devices, Paul du Gay (1997) argues that mobile, privatized, personal devices atomize citizens and comprise a technological sabotage of collective identities and socially responsive human relations – recognizable side effects of transnationalism.

Undeterred by human costs, transnational co-productions provide the means for media expansion, audience attraction, and profits across borders. TNMC networks transcend national boundaries even as channels share a common broadcasting philosophy, produce well-defined, branded television content, and attract and sell a clearly defined audience. TNMCs benefit from local adaptations within their networks. Centralized resources like Turner Classic Movies (TCM), for instance, appear across the network but are never shown at the same time. TNMCs can acquire material for a specific market: Time Warner's Boomerang buys and airs *Babar* cartoons in France and *Pink Panther* in Britain. Local content is produced both at national and regional levels. MTV's partners produce local music shows. Disney and Time Warner co-produce and commission original content for specific European channels (Chalaby, 2009, pp. 212–213). All TBS entertainment properties are fully localized, including TCM, Boomerang, and the Cartoon Network.

Consolidation of media across nations and territories is a necessary process for capitalist media profit. Diversification and vertical integration mitigate financial risk. Transnational media do not promote a particular national ethos (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 28), although a few established brands appear distinctly American – McDonald's, Coca-Cola, Disney, to name the obvious. An astute transnational leadership hammers out strategies for expansion and control, including the promotion of its free market policies and its ideology of neoliberalism, which insists on national deregulation of ownership and production, privatization of all human activity, and the commercialization for profit in the production of goods and services. As the TNCC through its national and transnational institutions and legions of managers rearranges the legal, political, commercial, and technological environments within nation-states, TNMCs thrive.

To summarize: transnational media are multi-faceted producers, profiting from global sales of many media products, including audiences. TNMCs communicate on behalf of the TNCC, providing the technological means for global advertising and communication for global transnational production and finance.



## Finding the Choke Point for Profit: TNMC Planning and Policy Groups

In the last several decades, corporate media, their managers, and transnational agencies have been advancing cross-border capitalist practices and free market perspectives. The World Economic Forum (WEF), for example, organizes "select Member companies" from transnational media firms in "Industry Partnership Meetings on Media, Entertainment & Information" and "Global Agenda Councils" (World Economic Forum, 2013). The WEF also hosts international conferences on media strategy and public affairs and sponsors media industry workshops in East Asia, Rio, and New York to advise transnationals in content production, aggregation, and distribution.

In 2011, the WEF challenged transnational media to grab "the 'choke point' of the new [digital] value chain" by "making a concerted effort across industry sectors (content, platforms and devices) … to transform this potential business opportunity into real profit" (World Economic Forum, 2011). The report includes fact sheets on media infrastructures and strategies from around the world that demonstrate successful transnational strategies, like the media city twofour54 in Abu Dhabi that has attracted Fox, CNN, BBC, Sky, Viacom, and others to the "only content creation community in the Arab world" (Orsten, 2011).

Media for profit, not for humanity. Democracy appears only as consumer-responses to media content production or as social media providing "user generated content" to "drive a number of business goals" for TNMCs (Bain & Company, 2012).

Consumer choice is cultivated as the essence of freedom. Diversity is to be filtered by media firms that must "reinforce their competitive position across the video ecosystem" (Bain & Company, 2012). Diversity to shut down democracy. TNMC content produced to "choke" information flow.

Other international media conferences like the UN's World Television Forum also serve transnational media, linking investors and content producers from Europe and the United States with media from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Television worldwide is now governed by the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) as part of the World Trade Organization's protocol on culture as commodity. WTO talks "entrench privatization and deregulation," voiding most domestic democratic controls over media corporations (Gould, 2001). The pending Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and the Trans-Pacific Partnership are set to ensure more corporate control without any democratic oversight (Monbiot, 2013).

The World Bank Institute has its own media programs for building a TNMC development model (World Bank Institute, 2012). The International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the United Nations' agency for communication, once was a collaboration among nations working on international media policies. Under pressure from the transnational capitalist class, the ITU opened its membership to private business in the late 1980s (Thussu, 2000). The 193 member nations have since added over 700 private-sector entities and academic institutions. The ITU now functions essentially as a pseudo-transnational state agency enforcing commercialized media policy (ITU, 2013).

TNMCs also convene their own industry-led conferences to network on concepts and strategies, including: the MIPTV (Marché International des Programmes de Télévision), an international entertainment conference and trade show, arranging financing and joint ventures, selling programs, and networking on media business models and trends (MIPTV, 2013); the Telenovelas and Fiction Industry annual conference which shares formats and discusses "new ways to profitability" (Telenovelas, 2009); the Global Business Dialogue on Electronic Commerce, which gathers governments with hundreds of top media executives, so "basically global business leaders [tell] governments what to do in the governance of CyberSpace" (Hamelink, 2001, p. 15).

These international policy-making organizations (and other regional groups) contribute to transnational entertainment production and distribution norms under the leadership of global entertainment media. Joint ventures, investments, and collaborations are cooperatively organized by media firms and facilitated by governments favoring transnational capitalist relations. Parallel to media industry practices based on market projections, audiences are treated to appealing entertainment that promotes similar social practices of consumerism and other audience market impulses. Media profit economically, while they politically and culturally represent and promote transnational capitalism. Some of the leading TNMCs and their collaborations on behalf of transnational capitalism are presented in the next chapter.

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