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10.

International Communication and Global Changes

David Perlmutter & Mohamed El-Bendary

What the fireworks of international news illuminate or leave in the dark is the historic panorama beyond them. (van Ginneken (1998, p. 126)

When the US-led coalition forces attacked Saddam Hussein's Iraq on March 20, 2003, CNN and other television networks broadcast live reports from Baghdad to hundreds of millions of people around the globe. Such rapid coverage and global dissemination of a news event has now become routine. In the last few years, Web cams, cell phones, and satellite technology have allowed journalists to 'upload' digital video from anywhere to everywhere. In turn, since access to the Internet and television is now common, the phrase developed in the 1960s, for any given news story "the whole world [could be] watching" is now evident.

This media environment defines many events, ideas, and images that we do not experience personally, but become part of our consciousness. Among such events are Biafra, Kosovo or Abu Ghraib; examples of ideas are New World Order, War on Terrorism, or Clash of Civilizations; while shared images include Man Against Tanks at Tiananmen, Diana's Car Crash or Pulling Down of Saddam's Statue. Media, whether in New Zealand, the Americas, Europe, Africa or Asia, now play a pivotal role in forming the social, cultural, economic and political fabric of society.

This is a strange new world. In previous human eras, before motorised transportation and electronic communication, the distinction between local and foreign was unambiguous; the former was experienced, the latter murkily reported by hearsay and travellers' tales. In contrast, the twentieth century was unique in many ways. More people left their homes and travelled further to other locations than in any other time, although reasons varied as greatly as making war, conducting business, emigrating and tourism. Simultaneously, mass media allowed us to be anywhere and everywhere that a camera could penetrate. This allowed for the 'death of distance'; the far and the near are both equally accessible (Cairncross, 2004).

Globalisation, in this context, refers to the "expansion in the scale and speed of flows of capital, goods, people, and ideas across borders with the effect of decreasing the effects of distance" (Norris, 1999, p. 1). Disparate peoples can share the same moment and virtually inhabit the same place via media (Meyrowitz, 1985). Moreover, digital and Internet technology now allows an individual to broadcast to the masses. As a consequence, cultures and ideas easily flow across borders at a greater rate than ever before.

It makes sense then that a global perspective is needed if we are to understand international media. This chapter offers a brief survey of the international media systems and channels while touching on global changes. We do so by examining various theories that shape today's global media system and that in turn influence the transnational and transcultural flow of ideas, information and goods. In addition, the chapter seeks to explore the distribution of power in media relationships between peoples through debates over 'localism', 'hegemony', and 'cultural imperialism'.

Prominent Media Theories

Theories of media tend not to restrict themselves to localities. The great tension of international communications, both for researchers and professionals, is to understand the actual meaning of the term 'media'. Do we mean some sort of universal language conducted by a homogenised world culture or a set of heterogeneous cultures that speak to one another by different means? And, more normatively, what defines *successful* international communication? Is the act of sending information and receiving it from a physically distant source in itself a positive outcome, or is some direct benefit (for example the sale of a product, or a peace treaty) required? However, Aldous Huxley once noted, "Instead of uniting nation with nation, improved communications merely extended the range of collective hatreds and military operations" (1952, p. 158).

The five media theory systems listed below (authoritarian, libertarian, communist, social responsibility and developmental) try to address such practical and normative concerns. In *Four Theories of the Press*, Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1963) characterise the media in four ways: authoritarian, libertarian, communist or socially responsible. They argue that to see the distinctions among international media systems we must examine the social systems in which they operate and identify "the philosophical and political rationales or theories which lie behind the different kinds of press we have in the world today" (p. 2). To understand a social system and its relations to the press, we must look at the basic beliefs and assumptions that a society holds.

Authoritarian

The oldest of all theories, the authoritarian, was crystallised in Europe in the sixteenth century when printing was invented. European states required licensing of printing enterprises, which was seen as a way of putting restrictions on the press. Authoritarian states that did not impose licensing laws mandated that any printed material be approved by an official government censor. So today, authoritarian state systems mandate direct government control of the media. Such governments consist of a very limited and small ruling class. The media are not permitted to publish or broadcast anything that can undermine established authorities. An authoritarian government may punish anyone who voices criticism of the state's ideology.

Libertarian

A product of European and American thinkers like Adam Smith, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, libertarian theory emerged during the 18th Century Age of Enlightenment which yielded significant scientific and geopolitical discoveries. In his book *Areopagitica*, published in 1644, John Milton opposed state restrictions on freedom of expression and thought, arguing that God has blessed people with the faculty of reason, which granted them the ability to read and make sound choices.

Half a century later, John Locke stated that the rights of the individual should be the grounds on which to form the conduct of the press. In *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill (who is seen as laying the foundation for libertarianism) argued that if we are seeking the truth, free circulation of diverse opinions is needed. Truth, he wrote, "is . . . a question of the reconciling and combining of opposites," adding that it is only "by the rough process of a struggle between combatants fighting under hostile banners" that there is a "chance of fair play to all sides of truth" (Mill, cited in Bromley, 1997, p. 26).

Governments, this theory stipulates, instead of being a mouthpiece for the ruling classes, should not interfere with the free flow of information and should exist mainly to serve the interests of their people. Highlighting the independent role of the media in society, the theory was further empowered in the USA by the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights that guarantee free speech and free press for its citizens. In a libertarian media system, people write and publish freely. The government holds no power over the press (although there have been many cases in Western democracies where governments have exercised restrictions on the press). The transmission of news across a nation's borders should not be inhibited. The ultimate aim of the press, this theory maintains, is to help us discover the truth. The task of the state, on the other hand, is

to construct and maintain a stable atmosphere for the exchange of ideas. Proponents of the libertarian system argue that these diverse opinions are our only path for finding solutions to complex political and social issues.

Communist

The roots of the Soviet theory go back to the Russian Revolution in 1917. In a communist system, the state is viewed as infallible. Based on the teachings of Karl Marx (1818—1883) and Frederick Engels (1820—1895), the Soviet media system was not to be privately owned and was to serve the interests of the working class. Lenin dismissed criticisms that his regime was undemocratic by saying that, "Under bourgeois democracy, the capitalists, by thousands of tricks ... *drive* the people away from the administrative work, from freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, etc. The Soviet government is the *first* in the world ... to *enlist* the people, specifically the *exploited* people, in the work of the administration" (Lenin, 1975/1918, p. 470).

The media, thus, are owned and operated by the state and are closely integrated with instruments of state power and party influence. Under centralised command economies of state socialism, the media's profit incentive is removed. The closest examples of countries with communist press operations that remain today are North Korea, Cuba and, to a lesser extent, the People's Republic of China. The effects on verbal and visual content in news publications are and were self-evidently restrictive. This is called in the West 'press release' journalism, where the news medium is simply a conduit for government opinion and the news worker is a scribe for the public official.

Social Responsibility

The social responsibility theory is an extension of the libertarian theory. It emerged later in the first half of the twentieth century when criticism was mounting of how the press was deviating from the idealistic libertarian goals. The theory is the product of the Hutchins Commission of the late 1940s, which was formed in the United States to examine the state of the media, and which called for a 'socially responsible press' (Bates, 1995; Blanchard, 1977). It articulates that media organisations have an obligation toward society: to ensure accuracy, objectivity and the spread of truth. Both government and the media are placed on the same level, with each allowed to criticise the other. Within this framework, the media, it said, must offer a voice and fair coverage of various minority groups that help to form the social fabric. Like the libertarian system, social responsibility theory encourages the media to take a critical stand

toward the government. A persistent critique of such idealism though, is that "common good" is, as Denis McQuail put it, "a slippery concept and it inevitably becomes controversial when it is filled with specific requirements concerning what actually constitutes the common good" (1999, p. 28).

Developmental

The fifth theory, the developmental, is relatively new. It proposes that governments can mobilise the media to serve national aims in times of economic and social development needs. The theory received support from UNESCO, but was viewed with suspicion by some since "development" is sometimes associated with strict government rule and propaganda. A developmental journalist should convince readers of how serious the developmental problems are, stimulate them to think about these problems, and seek solutions (Chalkley, 1968). However, recent cases such as the genocide in Rwanda and the ethnic slaughter in Sierra Leone have reinvigorated quasi-developmental principles; in both those tragedies, Western-style 'freedom of the press' was employed by mass murderers to sow or exploit tribal hatreds and even organise killings (see Prunier, 1995).

Media and Globalisation

Each classic theory — except the last — has been thought of by its proponents as being a candidate for universal application. This universalism seems not a great leap because we can, as noted earlier, visibly see both the internationalisation of news and culture and the widespread use of the same technology. Critics view each of the four theories as inadequate in explaining the different concepts, divergent practices and varying degrees of press freedom. (Nerone, 1995)

One of the most prominent media theorists who tried to explain the interconnected and 'plugged-in' world was Marshall McLuhan (1911—1980), the former director of the Centre for Culture and Technology at the University of Toronto. Influenced by his mentor, Harold Innis, McLuhan championed 'technological determinism' as the key to understanding media. He perceived the electronic media — television in particular — as bringing us closer together, and making us members of a 'global village'. McLuhan was one of the first scholars to examine how people's means of communication contribute to the shaping and scope of their society. He argued that the "medium is the message" (McLuhan,

1965, pp. 7-21). In other words, content is largely irrelevant to understanding the influence the medium has on us.

For McLuhan, it is the technical forms of media that shape our perception. He wrote, "The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily without resistance" (1965, p. 18). McLuhan's metaphor of the global village, of an entire world united through long-distance communication technologies, has recently gained renewed popularity. The digital revolution — satellite, Internet and new technologies — has made it difficult to restrict the flow of information (such as democratic ideas and propaganda) from being disseminated. Some see this digital revolution as fulfilling the prophecy of the Canadian thinker's 'global village'.

McLuhan's vision has, however, been contested by critical researchers (Schiller, 1969; Matterlart, 1989; Golding, 1994) who cite the imbalances in news flow and commodities between the developed and the developing world in a globalised planet: less a village than a fiefdom. The "growing interconnectedness of different parts of the world" gives rise to "complex forms of interaction and interdependency" (Thompson, 1996, p. 149). According to Giddens (1994), "globalising influences are fracturing as well as unifying, create new forms of stratification, and often produce opposing consequences in different regions or localities" (p. 81). Other scholars see globalisation as a concept that refers both to the "compression of the world and the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole" (Robertson, 1992, p. 8). A key point seems to be that media are not simplifying but rather witnessing "rapidly developing processes of complex interconnections between societies, cultures, institutions, and individuals worldwide" (Tomlinson, 1977, p. 170).

Giddens (1990) sees globalisation as a function of the institutional and systematic dimensions of modernisation. According to him, four dimensions of globalisation exist: the world military power; the world capitalist economy; the international division of labour; and the nation-state system. The dimensions, he added, are the logical outcomes of the institutional dimensions of modernity. In the global network of media channels and news flow, Anglo-American dominance is manifest. Yet, technological advancements appear — although to a lesser extent — to be weakening the recognised political and economic control by allowing smaller groups and businesses to challenge the leading global corporations and organisations.

New Zealand Perspective

New Zealand is part of a global culture of wider forces, structures and processes. American cultural symbols have become an integral part of the Kiwi way of life. This is mirrored in everything from television to music, McDonalds and Coca-Cola. (Symbols of Asian culture, however, are rapidly growing in cities like Auckland, where a high percentage of the influx of immigrants and students are of Asian descent.) The impact of globalisation on NZ culture is resulting in a more complex and diverse political culture. For example, the US-Kiwi clash over free trade signifies the globalisation narrative and its endeavour to cope with the incongruities of capitalism and cultural imperialism. Cultural globalisation can be a "complex and diverse phenomenon consisting of global cultures, originating from many different nations and regions" (Crane, 2002, p. 1).

It is, said Schiller (1969), the interests of the US-based transnational corporations that benefit most from globalisation, with traditional cultures being destroyed by the imposition of Western values. According to the cultural imperialism theory, Western civilisation is the source of cultural influence, with non-Western and less developed countries viewed as being on the periphery, receivers of cultural influences. Some New Zealanders have exhibited deep concern about the supposed threat of cultural 'Americanisation' as a result of the transnationalisation of the media system. At the same time, 'human capital' is increasingly flowing (some call it draining) between borders; it is commonly noted that there are more Asian-Indian engineers in California than in India, for example.

International News Flow

Early studies have shown that the news media in all developing nations were heavy importers of news, while news audiences in developed countries were largely supplied with home-made news. Arguably, there is a 'centre-periphery' pattern of flow of international news today; that is, news flows mostly from the centre or dominant countries to the 'periphery' or dependent areas. However, it has been argued that in the field of international communication today the global is the local and the local is the global (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1991). Yet, it is important to stress here that there is a wide gap in power between the local and the global.

UNESCO Debate

In the 1970s and 1980s, a campaign for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) was launched. It stated that there is an imbalance in the flow of news and information between the developed and developing worlds as a result of the dominance by the Western world, which tended to portray the developing countries in a negative manner (Altschull, 1984). The MacBride Commission report (MacBride, 1981) identified the lack of technology and journalism training as one of the reasons for the imbalance in the flow of news. Developed nations suggested that groups like UNESCO and the World Bank should work to

improve the communication infrastructure of developing countries. Furthermore, developing nations complained that they were represented negatively in the Western press. They argued that news about them tended to focus on crises and negative incidents (Hester, 1974).

Media Imperialism Thesis

Media globalisation has led to the rise of cultural identity concerns, with nations noting that imported culture diminishes the development of their native culture. Almost all of the issues surrounding global mass communication have a direct or indirect connection with the thesis of cultural or media imperialism; both reflect the deliberate attempt by one nation (normally in the developed world) to dominate and subvert another media system or culture (normally in the developing world).

The global media market, argued Herman and McChesney (1997), was dominated by ten or so media conglomerates. Four years later the number of those multinational corporations, according to McChesney (2001), had shrunk to seven: AOL TimeWarner, Sony, News Corporation, Viacom, Vivendi, Bertelsmann and Disney. Several of these superpowerful media corporations are mostly US-based. The media imperialism thesis posits the historical rise of an unequal global system in which countries of the South cannot develop because they remain dependent on the former colonial powers. Their cultures are dismantled through the invasion of Western traditions and values. There are, according to the media imperialism thesis, at least four issues to study:

- Global media promote dependency rather than economic growth
- The imbalance in the flow of mass media content undermines cultural autonomy or holds back its development
- The unequal relationship in the flow of news increases the relative global power of large and wealthy news-producing countries and hinders the growth of an appropriate national identity and self-image of dependent developing countries
- Global media flows give rise to cultural homogenization, leading to a dominant form of culture (McQuail, 2000, p. 222).

American Dominance, Local Florescence

American television shows and Hollywood movies have had a powerful influence worldwide and have become global commodities. American film companies have succeeded in building film distribution networks internationally. This has resulted in film industries declining in many other parts of the world (with the exception of India and France). Michael Jackson's music can be heard and bought all over the world. The

Cosby Show, which ended its run in the early 1990s, has been translated into numerous languages. American prime-time soap operas such as Dallas and Dynasty are also widely popular in numerous countries around the globe. These widespread US cultural icons are seen as symbols of US capitalism and hegemony. Hence, it can be argued that everyone (no matter where he or she is) watching I Love Lucy is forced to think 'American'.

On the other hand, many note that globalisation hardly implies a conquest by American ideas if oppositional groups use them to spur dissent (McDonald, 1996; Dobson, 1998; Leonard, 1995). Indeed, it is clear that heterogeneity and homogeneity can exist at different levels of cultural production and consumption (Ram, 2004). Studies of the reception of American programming by audiences suggest a good deal of complexity in what messages and meanings they draw (Liebes & Katz, 1988). Finally, it seems possible for a culture to be both Americanised and also anti-American (see Berendse, 2003; Esman, 2002). It may be that it is more useful to think of 'American content' and 'American style' as export products that often dominate local markets but that can be digested differently and not always to the benefit of the perceived national interests of the American political establishment.

CNN Effect Theory

The influence of the information revolution on foreign policy has been immense. Images can shape the way foreign policy is constructed. International television is increasingly becoming a source of decisive rapid real-time information for policy-makers. The pictures of a butchered American soldier being dragged through a Somali warlord's camp, for example, resulted in a rapid change of direction in US foreign policy (Perlmutter, 1988).

The CNN Effect theory stipulates that global television has become a direct agenda-setter and perhaps plays a prevailing role in the formation of foreign policy. This was manifested following international television's (CNN in particular) coverage of the Tiananmen Square protest in 1989, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Princess Diana's death in 1997, and civil wars in sub-Saharan African states like Rwanda and Somalia. Similarly, the Qatari-based al-Jazeera satellite television channel has influenced many Arab governments and turned the entire 2003 war against Iraq into images of Iraqi victory in the minds of Arabs (El-Bendary, 2003).

Media After September 11, 2001

The international communication system underwent shock waves from the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York, with major challenges posed to nations and nongovernmental organizations. A US-led 'war on terrorism' was launched with a Bush doctrine stating, "You're either with us or against us in the fight against terror" (Bush quoted in CNN, 2001, para. 6). The media in many parts of the world are taking more nationalist, pro-government approaches, with debates focusing often on how the world after September 11, 2001 should be conceived and labeled. This created a heated debate not only in the media but on the media and their role.

Conclusion

Early studies have shown that the news media in all developing nations were heavy importers of news, while news audiences in developed countries were largely supplied with home-made news. Today, new technology has helped spread globalisation. Yet, the effects of globalisation have had varied interpretations — from breaking down barriers and creating new methods to being an ideological myth aimed at concealing the continuing dominance of international capital.

Certainly, the global spread of the media has been a success. Yet, the distribution remains extremely unequal. There are many less developed countries that have few media resources of their own. The developed world, according to Golding (1998), owns nearly six times as many radios per capita as the developing world and nearly nine times as many television sets. The global corporate structures of media tycoons like Rupert Murdoch, Silvio Berlusconi, Conrad Black and Henry Luce span continents. The global giants now control the creation, production and distribution of worldwide information and communication. Globalisation has often been applied to the spread of 'Western mediated products' across a globe from which few places are immune. This has led to the fear of global media domination as a threat to indigenous cultural survival. It culminated in the UNESCO Mass Media Declaration, the McBride Commission and the formation of a tenet of the New Information Order as moving from nearly *free flow* to a *free and balanced flow of* communication.

Almost all attempts (e.g., NWICO and the MacBride Report) to establish some normative guidelines by balancing terms of international news reporting and flow have failed. Arguments against such imbalances in news flow were based on the premise that developed nations did not typically give a great deal of space to foreign news. When they did, the coverage normally focused on conflict such as in the Middle East

and Southeast Asia. In the post-Cold War, post-September 11, 2001, post-Saddam Hussein regime global world, journalists committed to foreign coverage face compelling challenges, with further studies urgently needed on the transitional, ever-changing phenomenon of global media systems.

Ideally, the media should reflect and often more voice for the various groups in society and serve as a forum for the exchange of ideas — although, as we have seen, this seemingly benign notion becomes troubling when a group advocating terror or racism asserts its 'right' to free speech. At least we can say that it is good policy (and good business) for media to play an active role in raising our awareness of international events. The question is whether some sort of social or economic mechanism could be created to allow everyone to practise a fundamental 'right' to information.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank their referees for the feedback they gave on this chapter with useful suggestions on the content. Any errors or omissions of course remain the responsibility of the authors.

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