

**Putting hybridity in the mix:
globalizing the local and localizing the global in television studies**

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In recent years, scholars in television studies have focused attention on a rather difficult theoretical issue of reconciling two seemingly distinct and somewhat contradictory forces of globalization and localization. Historically, the “global” and the “local” have been largely theorized from two different approaches which have been fairly independent from and sometimes in opposition to each other: the international communications approach and cultural studies approach. The international communications approach (which includes such diverse traditions as mass communication research, critiques of political economy, and development communications) has traditionally dominated the study of the “global” in television studies (with influential theories such as cultural imperialism, world systems theory, and core-periphery models).

Since the 1970s, the cultural studies approach has steadily gained popularity due in large part to the close attention its practitioners pay to the specificity of local contexts in the study of global television. Inherent in the cultural studies approach is a critique of the theories in international communications which posit globalization as a top-down process of message transmission from powerful (Western) global centers to peripheral (non-Western) local cultures.

Television studies scholars trained in the traditions of cultural studies have been extremely critical of research in international communications for equating the political-economic power of the global television industry with its effects on cultural values around the world. For instance, Ien Ang has argued that by focusing almost exclusively on the political and economic workings of the media industries in the Western “centers,” top-down theories of international communications research have failed to account adequately for the creative power of audiences to make diverse cultural readings of television even in the most “peripheral” and exploitative contexts of globalization.

Therefore, Ang and other cultural studies scholars have focused on the creative ways in which viewers in specific local contexts use (and often abuse) the power/knowledge of television and popular culture to assert their own sense of identity, difference, nationality and transnationality. By stressing the importance of local context in the production, distribution and consumption of television messages, the cultural studies approach has paved way for theories of globalization as a bottom-up process of meaning making (which can be studied through textual analyses of specific TV shows or ethnographic research of specific audience groups).

Although extremely influential in redefining the debate on globalization in television studies, the rise of cultural studies approach has not been without criticism. Critics contend that the nearly exclusive attention paid to local contexts by cultural studies has created new theoretical cul-de-sacs. For instance, Nicholas Garnham has argued that while cultural studies offers useful insights into the ways in which audiences make

meaning in specific local contexts, the range of meanings audiences can make through television “texts” is determined in the first instance by the limits that global capital places on the relations of production. Critics like Arif Dirlik are less charitable in their assessment of the contributions of cultural studies as they fear that excessive focus on cultural processes meaning making in specific local contexts serves to obscure the complex ways in which capital operates in the global context.

As a way out of the impasse, most scholars in television studies these days embrace Stuart Hall’s popular view that the global and the local are mutually constituted, and argue for the necessity of studying both the global and the local in every context – but that is of course, easier said than done. Fortunately, there is now a growing body of scholarship in television studies which cuts across traditional divides such as “international communication” and “cultural studies” and posits that an analysis of the “global” must be articulated to an analysis of the “local.” While some scholars following Arjun Appadurai have used terms like the “global cultural economy” to bridge the political-economy/cultural studies divide, others following Roland Robertson and P.L. Baker have embraced neologisms like “glocal” and “centriphery” to go beyond traditional category systems such as global/local and center/periphery. While such creative concepts and neologisms may seem like mere wordplay to some, these scholars insist that their theories provide a more dynamic framework for understanding the relationship between the global and the local.

In a similar vein, I would argue that in the heterogeneous and over-determined terrain of globalization, studying television using essentialist category systems such as “global” versus “local” or “center” versus “periphery” is highly problematic. It forces us into an either/or debate even though these category systems are always-already hybrid. The appearance of hybridity *within* global/local relations forces us to acknowledge that the essentialization of a television program, or a media institution, or an audience group – whether in the so-called “Western centers” or the non-Western peripheries” -- as “global” or “local” is untenable *in the first instance* because it de-contextualizes the political, economic and cultural histories of the world we live in.

Therefore, the questions I would like end with are as follows:

- 1) How can we move beyond essentialist categories such as global/local, center/periphery or West/non-West that continue to frame many debates on the globalization of television (take for example, the debate on global TV formats where it is argued by many that the TV “format” is global and the “content” is local)?
- 2) How can we theorize hybridity as a constitutive element of both the form and content of television and television studies (and not merely as not as an after-effect of globalization in peripheral locations of the world)?

