

## Mapping Television Communities in an Age of Globalization

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I come at the question of community from the perspective of institutional and industrial analysis, or the ways in which economic and cultural forces shape perceptions of community among television industry workers. In addition, I conceive of the television industry—in particular in its global aspects, which is where my research is centered—as a community unto itself that develops and circulates dominant ideas about other communities. That is, I want to re-center, at least momentarily, our consideration of community away from issues of consumption and cultural resistance toward issues of production and control. I do not mean to suggest that industry discourses about community are determining of those communities' self-definitions, nor that they exist independently of those self-definitions. But, industry discourses do pick up on certain aspects of self-definition and leave aside others. More importantly, perhaps, industry discourses determine which cultural products are shared among which communities.

It has become a theoretical truism that cultural differences among communities have a formative impact on global flows of television programming, whether these differences are conceived of as “cultural discounts” that diminish the appeal and price of foreign programming, or as “cultural proximities” that shape program imports. While these ideas have been nuanced in recent years, in particular with the recognition that cultural proximities may draw on a host of identities that span local, national, regional, and global spaces, both conceptualizations downplay the role of institutional forces and discourses in shaping industry-wide perceptions of culture. The understandings of cultural difference and similarity that circulate among television industry workers—from program merchants to production crews—form what I call “cultural mappings” of global communities.

These mappings draw on a variety of available discourses, from developmental psychology to colonial racism, in an effort to articulate what is “universal” in human nature and cultural tastes. In other words, television industry workers are engaged in an intentional and active process of imagining the possible connections and disconnections between the world's communities. As in the era of colonialism, these discourses draw on the ideals of universal human nature, but unlike colonialist discourses, their main purpose is to encourage transnational communities of consumption, rather than to extract productive capacity. Moreover, while the ideals of universality during colonialism served to construct a transnational white European identity as against a variety of differentiated others, today's universality articulates several transnational communities which, while structured in dominance due to their perceived worth to the global media industries, still must recognize those communities' self-definitions to some degree in order to market programming to them. Finally, contemporary discourse of the international television industry are contested and transnational in origin, drawing on the cultural sensibilities and business practices not only of white European and Americans, but also containing the counter-discourses of nonwhites.

What I hope to talk about, then, are the ways in which television program merchants conceive of several transnational communities—specifically black audiences, women's audiences, men's audiences, and children's audiences—detailing how both business and cultural practices shape prevalent industry perceptions. As perhaps the most powerful gatekeepers of contemporary

popular culture, these industry insiders are involved in creating the dominant discourses of transnational human identity in an era of increasing cultural globalization.