

## Transcultural communication for a polycentric world

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# Transcultural Communication for a Polycentric World

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**Abstract:** In the era of digitized and globalized 24/7 communication, the one-way vertical flow of media and mediated culture from the West to the East has given way to multiple and horizontal flows, in which Asian countries are playing an increasingly significant role. This is having a profound impact on transcultural communication in a polycentric world. Although the United States and some other western countries still maintain their leading position in the field of global media and communication hardware and software. This article suggests that new actors, harnessing the potential of digital globalization, have emerged in the past decade and provide new avenues for transnational communication. Such changes, it argues, warrant a re-evaluation of how we define the global in terms of media and communication. Focusing on the growing global influence and digital presence of China and other Asian countries, the article suggests that the ascent of Asia contributes to further internationalizing of media and its study.

**Keywords:** transcultural communication, globalization, cultural imperialism, cultural contra-flows, Asian cultural discourses, China

In his 2015 book *Transnational Communication*, the German scholar Hepp (2015, p. 3) distinguishes the concept of transcultural communication from intercultural and international communication, ‘which take[s] place between individuals or groups of individuals belonging to distinct cultures or nation states’. He points out that it ‘involves processes of communication that transcend individual cultures’ (Hepp, 2015, p. 3). In the digitized and mediatized world, he argues, we are exposed to cultural content from across the world on a myriad of platforms. The globalization of media communication, he suggests, denotes ‘the global development of mediatized connectivity, hence the increase of technically mediated communicative relationships’ (Hepp, 2015, p. 5). This connectivity and communication, however, are not evenly experienced, given the structural and

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cultural disparities that exist within the media globe. The global production and distribution of media and cultural products continues to be dominated by huge transnational corporations, mostly based in the United States (Boyd-Barrett & Mirrlees, 2019; Couldry & Mejías, 2019; Jin, 2015; Lee & Jin, 2018; Thussu, 2019).

The increase in transnational information and cultural flows has been enabled by the new technologies of communication and shifts in its economic, political, and legal infrastructure, including the harmonization of international regulatory and legal frameworks and the globalization of ownership and control in the telecommunication and media sectors (DeNardis, 2020). These factors have profoundly affected transnational and transcultural communication and it is therefore increasingly important to study media and cultural flows to discern patterns of transnational horizontal integration of media and communication structures, processes, and audiences. This horizontal communication is facilitating transnational patterns of marketing and political communication, where people are increasingly being addressed across national boundaries on the basis of their purchasing power. The increasingly complex relations between local, national, regional, and international production, distribution and consumption of media texts in a global context further complicate the globalization discourse (Thussu, 2019).

In the past, global culture was largely overlooked in communication discourses, which tended towards economic, technological, and political determinism. Culture was sometimes reduced to an economic commodity, with little importance given to other types of social and cultural relationships, based on ethnicity, religion, race or gender. It also did not take on board the issue of cultural diversity, aesthetics and spirituality, being preoccupied with the study of the production and consumption of material culture. For traditional liberalism, the advancement of the modern economy and technology was necessary for creating world markets and consumers. Both classical Marxists and liberals predicted a borderless world. In the idealized Marxian version, the proletariat across the world was to lead an international communism that would eliminate nationalism, class exploitation and war, while liberal interpretations saw the market as eroding cultural differences and national and regional particularities, to produce a global consumer culture. Missing from both models was a nuanced understanding of the complexity of the interaction of class with nationalism, religion, race, ethnicity and feminism to produce local political struggles (Thussu, 2019). The transnationalisation of consumerist culture has strengthened the historic global reach of American media and culture. What is hotly debated is how far other flows of media and cultural products have contributed to a more diverse transcultural media environment, reflecting the complexities of a more polycentric world.

# 1 Global Americana

In the global media culture, the influence of American media is large in the field of global communication. American companies have most of the global communication infrastructure, from satellites to telecommunications hubs and cyberspace, as well as multiple networks and production facilities.

The US boasts the largest global share of media and entertainment earnings for film, music, book publishing and video games (Lee & Jin, 2018). Its domestic media and entertainment market itself represents a third of the global industry and worth more than \$700 billion in 2020. The concentration of ownership of cultural production in a few transnational producers has resulted in a standardized commercial commodity, contributing to what has been called a ‘mass culture’ – influenced by the mass media and thriving on the market rule of supply and demand. It is not surprising that such US-originated and the world’s most profitable media franchise as *Star Trek* have iconic cultural presence across the globe. *Baywatch* was the most widely syndicated television programme globally; Hollywood blockbusters like *The Avengers*, *X-Men* and *Thor: The Dark World* grossed billions of dollars around the world –with Europe and East Asia being the largest markets (Thussu, 2019).

These examples of global successes are not necessarily owing to their intrinsic entertainment quality but rather that they are professionally promoted by huge media conglomerates, which have the resources to create and produce the content that is in such demand with the exponential growth of online media outlets. ‘Driven by free market fundamentalism and the forced weakening of national policy and cultural boundaries, the contemporary hyper-commercial media environment knows few boundaries,’ as two commentators on the globalization of media have noted (Miller & Kraidy, 2016, p. 180). A sleek marketing style has become institutionalized with the internationalization of the advertising industry and global branding. Wasko once noted that ‘the US film industry developed global marketing techniques as early as the 1920s and continues its dominant position in international media markets today’ (Wasko, 2003, p. 13, also see Thussu, 2019). The providers of such global messages are primarily Western, although they employ an array of regional and local strategies to maximize their audiences and advertising revenues.

The presence of Americana has been particularly strong in Europe, especially in film-based programming often dubbed into local languages where there has been a fourfold growth in commercial television channels in a decade (Thussu, 2019). Apart from the fact that Europe shares common cultural and civilizational links with the US, a key reason for global Americana in Europe, the continent is

also one of the richest and oldest overseas media markets. It has been argued that no ‘lingua franca’ unites European television viewers and if there is a media ‘*cultura franca*’, it is based on Hollywood-style popular entertainment forms – soaps, game shows, talk shows, hospital and detective series. Not surprising then that the crime drama TV series, *The CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (2000–2015) and its spin offs, *CSI: Miami* (2002–2012) and *CSI-NY* (2004–13), originally broadcast on CBS, have had phenomenal success in Europe as well as around the world (Miller & Kraidy, 2016).

With the availability of digital delivery mechanisms and streaming services, US programme imports grew substantially during the 1990s and early 2000s in Europe, as elsewhere. During Hollywood’s global expansion at the end of the Cold War, Jack Lang, former Minister for Culture in France (1988–92) warned that Hollywood ‘no longer or rarely grabs territory, but grabs consciousness, ways of thinking, ways of living’ (Waterman, 2005, p. 8). Beyond the economic dominance of Hollywood, the cultural dimension of US supremacy can also have a political sub-text (Darling-Wolf, 2014). The political dimensions of Hollywood hegemony can also be detected in military-themed superhero blockbusters such as the *Captain America* (2011–2016) and the *Iron Man* series (2008–2013), produced, notes a recent study, with ‘ad-hoc cooperation from the US federal government via the public affairs offices of specific military branches, including the Marine Corps Motion Picture and TV Liaison Office, the Air Force Entertainment Liaison Office, the US Army Community Relations Office-West, and the Navy Office of Information–West’ (Kokas, 2017, p. 25). Others have examined the ‘the Washington-Hollywood nexus’ in political films and war films (Haas, Krausmann, Wiedenhofer, & Heinz, 2015), some suggesting the security narratives depicted in popular culture might have been influenced – directly or indirectly – by US intelligence and security services (Jenkins, 2012).

## 1.1 Cultural/Media Imperialism and Its Critiques

The theory of ‘cultural imperialism’ as set out in the work of Herbert Schiller (1919–2000), argued that transnational corporations in pursuit of commercial interests – often in league with US military and political interests – undermined the cultural autonomy of the countries of the global South and created a dependency on both the hardware and software of communication and media in developing countries. Schiller defined cultural imperialism as ‘the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social

institutions to correspond to, or even to promote, the values and structures of the dominant centre of the system' (Schiller, 1976, p. 9).

In his seminal work *Mass Communications and American Empire* (1969/1992), Schiller argued that the declining European colonial empires – notably British and French – had been replaced by the emergent American empire, based on US economic, military and informational power. During the Cold War years, Schiller noted that the US government, a major user of communication services – including global satellite communications – played a crucial role in developing global electronic media systems, initially for military purposes to counter the Soviet security threat. Such communication hardware was also used to propagate the US model of commercial broadcasting, dominated by large networks and funded primarily by advertising revenue. As Schiller noted, 'Nothing less than the viability of the American industrial economy itself is involved in the movement toward international commercialization of broadcasting. The private yet managed economy depends on advertising. Remove the excitation and the manipulation of consumer demand and industrial slowdown threatens' (Schiller, 1969, p. 95).

Such commercialized media not only helped to advertise Western goods and services, but also promoted an 'American way of life', through mediated consumer lifestyles. This 'electronic invasion' threatened to undermine traditional cultures and emphasized consumerism at the expense of community values. In the revised edition of the book, published in 1992, Schiller argued that US power to shape global communication increased with the end of the Cold War, leading to what he termed as 'transnational corporate cultural domination' (Schiller, 1992, p. 39).

Narrowing down the concept of cultural imperialism to focus specifically on the media, Oliver Boyd-Barrett coined the term 'media imperialism', which examined information and media inequalities between nations. He defined the phenomenon as: 'The process whereby the ownership, structure, distribution or content of the media in any one country are singly or together subject to substantial external pressures from the media interests of any other country or countries, without proportionate reciprocation of influence by the country so affected' (Boyd-Barrett, 1977, p. 117). In his exposition of media imperialism, Boyd-Barrett analysed both the hard and software of global media and communication, noting that 'digital technology and the infrastructures that enable it (including cable, satellite and wireless networks) massively enhance communications activity across local, national, regional, international and even global markets, and compel us to understand the term 'media' as encompassing all technology-enabled forms of communication, irrespective of time or space (Boyd-Barrett, 2014, p. 4). He suggested that the term 'media imperialism' 'should not be thought of as a single theory but as a field of study which incorporates different theories about the relationships between media and empire, as well as theories that address

the exercise of forms of imperial power by media institutions themselves' (Boyd-Barrett, 2014, p. 14).

For its critics, such formulations largely ignored the question of media form and content as well as the role of the audience. They suggested that, like other cultural artefacts, media 'texts' could be polysemic and were amenable to different interpretations by audiences, who were not merely passive consumers but 'active' participants in the process of negotiating meaning. The cultural/media imperialism thesis also overlooked how global media 'texts' worked in national contexts, ignoring local cultures of media consumption. In his study of the global television format trade, Chalaby (2015, pp. 187–188) argues that it 'would be impossible for TV formats developed in the Western world not to convey values. Formats are not created in a vacuum and always begin life as local shows enjoyed by local audiences', adding that 'the fact that the world TV industry is now firmly embedded in international trade does not necessarily mean that local cultures and identities will disappear'.

In addition, there has been relatively little work done to measure the effects of Western media consumption among the different national audiences and societies of what was then described as the 'Third World'. One reason for such broadly Western generalization could be that many Western scholars lacked deeper understanding of Third World cultures, seeing them as homogeneous and not being adequately aware of the regional and intra-national diversities of race, ethnicity, language, gender and class. There have so far been few systematic studies of the cultural and ideological effects of Western media products on audiences in the South, especially from Southern scholars. Straubhaar (2007, p. 22) argued that 'consideration must also be given to the development of cultural industries that show increasing aspects of interdependence by creating more cultural products, adapting and changing cultural product models, and exporting both'.

A more theoretically plausible account of how the US media have been able to shape transnational cultural communication and the 'global popular' is to draw on Gramsci's conception of 'hegemony'. According to Gramsci, such a system exists when a dominant social class exerts moral and intellectual leadership over both 'allied' and 'subordinate classes' through its control of such social and cultural institutions as schools, religious bodies, and mass media. Gramsci argued that building consent by ideological control of cultural production and distribution was a more effective way for the ruling class to retain power than using military force. One of the most important functions of the state, Gramsci wrote in his *Prison Notebooks*, 'is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level (or type) which corresponds to the ... interests of the ruling classes'. Schools, courts and a multitude of 'initiatives and activities ... form the

apparatus of the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling classes' (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 258–259). This, he argued, was in contrast with a situation in which the dominant class merely rules, that is, coercively imposes its will on subordinate classes. This manufactured consent, however, cannot simply be assumed or guaranteed and has to be renewed, indicating that hegemony is more of a process that has to be continually reproduced, rather than an achieved state of affairs.

From the European Union to China and India, and the Islamic world, concerns have been raised about the impact of the American hegemony over national cultures. In the 1990s, UNESCO's *World Culture Report* gave many reasons why it was important to preserve cultural diversity, which it saw as a 'manifestation of the creativity of the human spirit', and was required 'by principles of equity, human rights and self-determination'; it was needed to 'oppose political and economic dependence and oppression' for 'sustainability' and was 'aesthetically pleasing to have an array of different cultures', it 'stimulates the mind' and could provide a 'reserve of knowledge and experience' about good and useful ways of organizing society (UNESCO, 1998, p. 18). That culture is being taken seriously at a global level was evident in 2015 when the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda for 2030, which was launched. This acknowledged for the first time at a global level the key role of culture, creativity, and cultural diversity in solving sustainable development challenges, noting that 'all cultures and civilizations can contribute to, and are crucial enablers of, sustainable development' (United Nations, 2015, p. 13).

Concerns about the impact of the US domination of transnational communication and media on culture are inextricably linked with the question of language and cultural identity and, in particular, the rise of English as the global language. Franz Fanon observed that 'mastery of language affords remarkable power,' because it results in possession of 'the world expressed and implied by that language' (Fanon, 1967, p. 18). It is a fact that the global expansion of the English language, due to historical British imperialism and US hegemony, contributed to the Anglo-globalization of media and popular culture as the global media act as 'both vehicles of Anglo-Saxon culture, and contributors to the anglicization of global culture's (Hjarvard, 2004, p. 75). Although more than three times more people speak Mandarin than English, the latter has retained its 'unrivaled position as a means of international communication. Most other languages are primarily communicative channels within, rather than across, national borders' (Svartvik & Leech, 2016, p. 1).

It has been argued that the ideological messages that US-made programmes may promote, such as individualism and consumerism, can damage traditional values such as respect for elders and the family as well as collective identities (Alatas, 2006). These values are widespread in the global South, especially in many African countries, where an unsustainable consumerist culture may be



compounding inequality and undermining social coherence (Iqani, 2016). The impact of Western culture and values is also affecting the environment and the quality of life globally, as a 2017 *New York Times* investigation showed. Transnational food companies like Nestlé, PepsiCo and General Mills have been aggressively expanding their presence in developing nations, part of what the newspaper called ‘transformation of the food system that is delivering Western-style processed food and sugary drinks to the most isolated pockets of Latin America, Africa and Asia’, with an unsustainable use of natural resources, especially water. The growing availability of high-calorie, nutrient-poor foods is generating a new type of malnutrition, one in which a growing number of people are both overweight and undernourished (Jacobs & Daniels, 2017). Across the world, more people are now obese than underweight.

## 1.2 Cultural Contraflows and Transnational Communication

A common theme in the academic literature is that the globalization of Western media has been a major influence in shaping media cultures internationally and has tended to increase Western cultural influence. However, it is also increasingly the case that the flow of media products is not just ‘vertically’, from the West to the rest. The UNESCO’s *World Culture Report* in 2009 noted: ‘While it is undeniable that globalization has played an integrative role as a ‘window on the world’, mostly to the profit of a few powerful international conglomerates, recent shifts prompted by technological innovation and new consumption patterns are spurring new forms of ‘globalization from below’ and creating a two-way flow of communication and cultural products’ (UNESCO, 2009, p. 131). The traditional domination of Western, or specifically American, media is being challenged by the availability of media from major non-Western nations, from television news in English provided by countries such as Russia (RT), Qatar (Al Jazeera) and China (CGTN), to entertainment from India (Bollywood), Japan (animation), Brazil and Mexico (telenovelas), South Korea (popular music and television dramas) and Turkey (historical dramas). With the convergence of mobile communications technologies and content via a multi-lingual Internet, such flows are growing and challenging the traditional US hegemony.

Since the publication of the UNESCO report much has changed and content from major non-Western countries is increasing its presence in the media sphere, as more and more people connect to a digitized and instantaneous communication environment. As such media globalize, it is possible they might develop alternative narratives on transcultural communication. The growing visibility of what has been called ‘subaltern flows’ is also an indication of the changing power structures

in the world (Thussu, 2007) and this trend complicates the discourse about transnational media and communication, requiring new paradigms and theoretical frameworks to account for these evolving dynamics.

The reception and consumption of media in a cross-cultural context pose a complex and contested terrain of academic inquiry, made more difficult with the paucity of many empirical studies. Much more research, especially from a Southern perspective, needs to be undertaken to ascertain the impact of Western media on non-Western cultures and vice versa. Way back in the 1990s, it was argued that rather than creating a homogenized culture, globalization of Western culture may be producing 'heterogeneous dis-junctures' (Appadurai, 1990). Others had suggested that the global-local cultural interaction was leading to a hybrid culture, blurring the boundaries between the modern and the traditional cultures, the high and low cultures, and the national and the global cultures. This cultural fusion, a result of adaptation of Western media genres to suit local languages, styles, and cultural conventions, using new communication technologies, has created cultural hybridization (Kraidy, 2005). Nederveen Pieterse has argued that globalization should be viewed as 'a process of hybridization that gives rise to a global melange' (Nederveen Pieterse, 2015, p. 67). In this 'globalization of diversity,' the 'melange effect' pervades everywhere, from 'heartlands to the extremities and vice versa' (Nederveen Pieterse, 2015, p. 72). Straubhaar has noted the complexities associated with the processes of cultural hybridization – 'accelerated in the 20th century with postcolonial migration, increased travel, transnational mass media and economic globalization' (Straubhaar, 2007, p. 41).

To the notion of 'active audience' research, a new dimension has been added in this age of interactive audience and presumes when 'circulation of media content – across different media systems, competing media economies, and national borders – depends heavily on consumers' active participation' (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3). In the digital age this 'participatory culture' has grown, Jenkins argues, into 'convergence culture' where 'convergence is taking place within the same appliances, within the same franchise, within the same company, within the brain of the consumer, and within the same fandom. Convergence involves both a change in the way media is produced and a change in the way media is consumed' (Jenkins, 2006, p. 16). The growing availability of media technologies has allowed users not only to consume, but 'to produce, share and reproduce media in an infrastructure that is more often than not informal and volatile, yet which has facilitated a velocity of media content which increasingly renders difficult if not obsolete any attempts to confine it and prevent it from travelling' (Eckstein & Schwarz, 2014, p. 2).

With the expansion of Internet access, increasingly on mobile digital devices, more and more people are entering into the global computer networks that

instantaneously circulate ideas, information, and images throughout the world, overcoming boundaries of space and time (Arora, 2019). What kind of transnational communication this is generating remains a hotly disputed subject, given that culture is an especially complex and contested terrain as ‘modern’ culture permeates traditional ones and new configurations emerge (Kraidy, 2005; Iwabuchi, 2014). Couldry (2012, p. 159) has emphasised the need to analyse ‘media culture’ referred to as ‘collection of sense-making practices whose main resources of meaning are media’. Some scholars have followed more innovative approaches to understanding globalization in view of the economic rise of Asia (Duara, 2014; Hobson, 2004).

### 1.3 Asianizing Transnational Communication and Cultural Discourses

A more inclusive theory is required to encompass the actual state of transnational communication, one that takes on board the extraordinary changes in large countries with long histories and rising economic and cultural power. The ‘peaceful rise’ of China, and to a lesser extent, of India— the two ancient civilizations have the potential to reconfigure transnational communication (Hobson, 2004; Thussu, 2019). However, historically Asia along with the rest of the global South has faced the problem of Eurocentric essentialism in theory and in research practice, limiting its abilities to contribute to a genuine global discourse. As Hobson has argued ‘... consciously or unconsciously Eurocentrism does not pick out the relevant facts according to a ‘scientific objectivity’ but picks only those ‘facts’ which select *in* the West and select *out* the East in the progressive story of world history. Thus only when we do away with Eurocentrism can we begin to produce a more inclusive, emphatic and complete picture of world history’ (Hobson, 2004, p. 317).

Beyond Asia, the dominant Western view of the global South continues to be profoundly influenced by Eurocentrism, defined by the late Samir Amin as constituting ‘one dimension of the culture and ideology of the modern capitalist world’ (Amin, 1988, p. vii). Many other scholars from the developing world have argued that contemporary representations of the global South are affected by the way the Orient has been historically constructed in Western thinking, for example, through literature (Said, 1993) and films (Shohat & Stam, 2014), contributing to the continuing subordination of non-European peoples in the Western imagination. Taking the Gramscian view of culture, the late Edward Said explored how dominant culture contributed to the expansion and consolidation of nineteenth-century imperialism. He wrote: ‘Western cultural forms can be taken out of the

autonomous enclosures in which they have been protected, and placed instead in the dynamic global environment created by imperialism, itself revised as an ongoing contest between North and South, metropolis and periphery, white and native' (Said 1993, p. 59). Said's work has inspired a generation of scholars especially from the global South to explore the notions of the 'global popular' in a transnational context (Chen, 2010; Dávila & Rivero, 2014; Sabry, 2012; Willems & Mano, 2017, among others).

The Chinese media marketization offers interesting areas for transnational communication research. China's substantial and growing aid for many developing countries has had a major influence in Africa, especially in such areas as telecommunications (Thussu, 2018). Since 2006, China has been the largest holder of foreign-currency reserves, estimated in 2019 to be at more than \$3 trillion. On the basis of purchasing power parity (PPP), China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) surpassed that of the US in 2019 making it the world's largest economy, according to the International Monetary Fund (2019). When the country opened-up to global businesses in the late-1970s its presence in the international corporate world was negligible but by 2020 China had 124 companies in the Fortune, 2020, the largest number in the world, surpassing for the first time, the US which has traditionally been in the top spot. Chinese investments have further globalized by such programmes exp as the 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI), which will become the world's largest infrastructural intervention, encompassing 900 projects (valued at about \$1.3 trillion) and involving more than 100 countries (Xing, 2019). Creating information and communication networks is part of the BRI projects, thus providing an infrastructure for Chinese or China-oriented content to reach the world, especially in the global South (Hong, 2017). In 2020, a billion Chinese citizens were online, making it home to the world's largest number of Internet users, while four of the top 10 Internet companies in the world ranked by market capitalization were Chinese, including search engine Baidu, e-commerce giant Alibaba, and social-media company Tencent – all digital conglomerates increasingly operating in a globalized digital marketplace (Thussu, 2021).

Though India's economic growth is no match to China's, on the basis of PPP, since 2014 it has been the world's third largest economy and, before Covid-19 hit the country, its economy was the fifth largest in the world in actual GDP terms (2019). There has also been exceptional expansion in Internet take-up in India: in 2000, only 5.5 million Indians (with a penetration rate of 0.5% of the population) were online; by 2020 that figure had climbed to 700 million (and the penetration rate had reached nearly half the population). India is also home to the largest users of Facebook and WhatsApp. Does this Asian growth indicate a decline of the West? As Fareed Zakaria, in his widely cited book, *The Post-American World*, notes: 'On every dimension other than military power—industrial, financial, social,

cultural—the distribution of power is shifting, moving away from US dominance. That does not mean we are entering an anti-American world. But we are moving into a post-American world, one defined and directed from many places and by many people' (Zakaria, 2008). Others have suggested possibilities of a 'post-Western', 'sustainable modernity,' based on Asian histories and cultures (Duara, 2014).

As in many other fields, the rise of China, coinciding with cracks within the neo-liberal model of US-led Western capitalism, is likely to challenge traditional thinking and research paradigms for transnational communication as power begins to shift away from the West (Acharya, 2018; Cooley & Nexon, 2020; Mishra, 2012; Stuenkel, 2016). Some have argued that the rise of Asia must be viewed as 're-emergence' or, as Kishore Mahbubani has noted, 'the return' of the continent to global prominence (Mahbubani, 2008). Taking a long view of history, as Maddison has shown, in 1500, Asia produced 65% of the world GDP, in 1820, 59%, suggesting that by 2030, Asia is likely to produce 53% of the global GDP – 'much bigger than the share of the Western world' (Maddison, 2007, p. 3). Jack Goody observed that 'the Western domination of the world of knowledge and of world culture persists in some respects but has been significantly loosened. Globalization is no longer exclusively Westernization' (Goody, 2010, p. 125). Media and communication in Asian countries are also expanding exponentially. Tunstall has argued that the US media are in decline and a vast majority of people in large population countries such as China and India, prefer 'local' content in the media – whether it is news, sport or entertainment. Globally, he has pointed out, the 'American media play a much smaller role than national media' (Tunstall, 2008, p.xiv).

Will the combined economic and cultural impact of China and India, aided by their extensive global diasporas – more than 35 million and about 25 million, respectively – contribute to a globalization with an Asian flavour? What impact would it have on transnational communication and its study which has traditionally been defined and shaped by Western or more specifically Anglo-American intellectual and cultural tradition? There is plenty of evidence to demonstrate a dependency relationship in the field of media and communication research in Southern countries. As Halloran (1997, p. 39) noted: 'Wherever we look in international communication research – exports and imports of textbooks, articles and journals; citations, references and footnotes; employment of experts (even in international agencies); and the funding, planning and execution of research – we are essentially looking at a dependency situation. This is a situation which is characterized by a one-way flow of values, ideas, models, methods and resources from North to South. It may even be more specifically as a flow from the Anglo-Saxon language fraternity to the rest of the world'.

However, in recent decades, there has been a greater degree of awareness about the world beyond the West as indicated by comparative research in fields such as journalism (Hanitzsch, Hanusch, Ramaprasad & de Beer, 2019; Pasti & Ramaprasad, 2017), audience discourses (Butsch & Livingstone, 2014) and communication research more generally (Esser & Hanitzsch, 2012; Chan & Lee, 2017; Hallin & Mancini, 2012; Nordenstreng & Thussu, 2015). Couldry (2012, p. 179) has counselled the need to grasp the *types* of significant differences in media cultures to which a genuinely internationalize media research must be sensitized'. Others have adopted a 'cultural political economy' approach which is 'pre-disciplinary in inspiration, trans-disciplinary in practice, and post-disciplinary in its aspirations and which combines, 'concepts from critical, historically sensitive, semiotic analyses and from critical evolutionary and institutional political economy' (Sum & Jessop, 2013, pp. ix–1).

The importance of culture has been emphasized by scholars who advocate a 'transcultural political economy' framework that enables us 'to integrate institutional and cultural analyses' (Chakravarty & Zhao, 2008, p. 10). Such endeavours would entail what has been called the 'deparochialization of the research ethic – the idea of research itself' (Appadurai, 2001, p. 15). As Appadurai noted, in the era of 'grassroots globalization,' the relationship between 'the knowledge of globalization and the globalization of knowledge' needs to be reappraised (Appadurai, 2001, p. 14). Others have advocated 'transnational interdisciplinarity' which encourages researchers to 'engage in, and try to connect to, knowledge formations and vocabularies that reside in other modernities and other temporalities that are either refused recognition, or are not adequately translated, in machines of knowledge production (Shome, 2006, p. 3). One area that needs particular attention, given the revival of religious communication – both militant and moderate – is to further explore the dynamics between religion and communication – a largely ignored area of research, especially among critical scholars.

To further 'internationalize' transnational communication research (Lee, 2015), a re-evaluation of pedagogic parameters, as well as research agendas and methods, is warranted. Many scholars have questioned the adequacy – both theoretical and empirical – of dominant strands of communication research to comprehend the complexity of a new globalization in increasingly mobile, globally networked multi-vocal and digitized world (Chen, 2010; Iwabuchi, 2014; Lee, 2015; Thussu, 2009; Wang, 2011; Wasserman, 2018).

As digital communication becomes more intensive and extensive, a new transnational communication order is emerging, driven by the exponential growth of media in countries such as China and India (which account for more than a third of the planet's population, with the two biggest Internet populations in the world) (Khanna, 2019; Thussu, 2021). This boom has the potential to reorder the cultural

contours of transnational communication, if not its economic character. There is a pressing need for innovative and inclusive research dialogue, one that cuts across disciplinary and intellectual boundaries to address the emerging landscape of global communication in a polycentric world. Such an approach will also contribute to a more cosmopolitan transcultural communication.

It may be appropriate to end this essay with the words of late Said who wrote in the preface of the 2003 edition of his well-known book, *Orientalism*: ‘Rather than the manufactured clash of civilizations, we need to concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other, and live together ... But for [this] kind of wider perception we need time and patient and sceptical enquiry supported by faith in communities of interpretation that are difficult to sustain in a world demanding instant action reaction’ (Said, 2003, p.xxii).

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