

Globalization: Theoretical Perspectives
Professor R. Santhosh
Department of Humanities and Social Studies
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras
Lecture 47
Media and Global Culture

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Media and Global Culture

Douglas Kellner and Clayton Pierce



Welcome back to the class. We are beginning another session on a particular theme, and for today's lesson, we are looking at the exciting article on media and global culture. So, I mentioned in the previous session that from this week onwards, the tenth week ahead, we will be looking at the precise dimensions of globalization concerning particular thematic domains. So, in the previous class, we discussed globalisation and the environment and today's theme is media and global culture.

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- Modernity and the rise of bourgeoisie public sphere
- Concept of the public sphere, serves as a useful tool in theorizing the role of media in society and a global world because it highlights its mediating function between the public and the systemic interests of capitalist society.
- The reductionist and determinist positions on globalization and media, then, can be categorized as either positive and celebratory globophilia or negative and rejective globophobia about homogenization of cultures and western dominance
- contemporary global capitalism circulates difference, heterogeneity, hybridity and more pluralistic forms of culture.



Now, modernity and the rise of the bourgeoisie public sphere, I hope you are familiar with these arguments. So, this argument is that with the rise of modernity, especially in Europe, with the rise of print capitalism and the emergence of the nation-state, emergence of democracy, a something called this bourgeoisie public sphere began to emerge, where people rationally exchange with each other, rationally exchange ideas and arguments about their everyday issues and other things and that is how they start to decide to rule about themselves and to think about their affairs.

So, this emergence of the public sphere, one of the fundamental arguments of this German scholar, is significant. So, the sociological discussion about media is critical because media plays a vital role in the emergence of this public sphere. It could be radio; it could be print,

especially print playing an essential role, newspaper and other things, Habermas's argument about the public sphere are significant.

So, the concept of the public sphere serves as a valuable tool in theorising the role of media in society and the global world because it highlights its mediating function between the public and the systemic (absorbing) interest of the capitalist society. So, this scholar, Douglas Kellner and Clayton Pierce, and by the way, this essay is also taken from this globalisation reader by George Ritzer.

So, they argue that this fundamental analysis based on the public sphere is essential because the public sphere essentially talks about a sphere mediated by various forms of media. This media discussion about the mediating function between the public and systemic interest of the capitalist society because, why? Mainly because the public sphere is associated with the capitalist society, you hardly have any public sphere when you talk about it traditional or a feudal or an agrarian society here.

Because of public sphere requests, individualism, public sphere requests, a kind of a civil society organisation, the civil sphere is required, and democracy is needed, notions of individual rights are needed, individuality is needed, and these are all, to a large extent, institutionalised only during the period of modernity.

The reductionist and determinist positions on globalization and media can be categorised as either joyous and celebratory *Globo philia* or negative and rejecting *globophobia* about the homogenisation of cultures and Western domains. So, the scholar says that if you look at some contemporary debates about globalization, it tends to be a kind of binary.


A group of scholars and observers are pretty thrilled by the possibility of media. They say that it is happening to the society that every new season has been telecasted is reached; it reaches across the globe within no time. So, one is a mode of celebration, about *Globo philia*. The other is a negative rejecting *globophobia*, which says it is about the homogenisation of cultures and western dominance.

I hope you remember we discussed it extensively when discussing *McDonaldization* or several other themes. So, this group would say that the western culture is now invading the drawing rooms of others. Our culture and everything are now being polluted or taken over by Western media and culture in the young population.


But at the same time, there is an essential argument that contemporary global capitalism circulates differences, heterogeneity, hybridity and a more pluralistic form of culture. This is what we are witnessing today. We are not seeing a kind of homogenisation, as if somebody feared maybe some 20 years ago or things are not becoming precisely like America or Europe, in India.

Things are becoming both in India and across the globe, but things are also quite different. So, contemporary global capitalism does not want this singular or homogeneous identity, tastes, and products. They want such modern global capitalism; it circulates differences. It encourages heterogeneity and hybridity, and more pluralistic forms of culture. This is an excellent argument to look at the implications of media and globalization when discussing that.

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- A dialectic analysis, in other words, not only provides an articulation of oppressive forms of media and globalization, but also identifies how hegemonic forms of media and globalization have the potential to be turned against themselves, and how oppositional social movements can develop their own democratic media and democratize existing media.
- Global media outlets are overwhelmingly shaped and determined by transnational corporate interests.
- The superstructure created by this global media oligopoly is an example of globalization from above where the flow of information, images, cultural artefacts and entertainment is distributed from a uniform and increasingly unregulated source.



Douglas Kellner and his co-author propose a dialectical analysis, in other words, not only provides an articulation of oppressive forms of media and globalisation but also identifies how hegemonic forms of media and globalization have the potential to be turned against themselves and how oppositional social movements can develop their democratic media and democratise existing media.

So, this is a fascinating argument. They are proposing a rational analysis in which the idea that this significant media Tsar's or media or companies, media tycoons are not as simple as that. They are taking over this whole media world, but it is also really reproducing; it is also producing quite a lot of contradictory effects and contradictory processes, thereby a host of

social movements and others are resorting to the similar forms of media that to larger democratic ideals and more significant, more extensive and much nobler causes of democratic emancipation, for the articulation of rights and host of other things.

So, it is not a very negative or dismal picture that the authors want to paint. Global companies have taken over every entertainment industry and media, and everything is lost, inherently damaging to a democratic system. But they say that while it is accurate at the same time, there is the other process that also happens that various, a whole lot of alternative modes of media are being invented, they are being very efficiently put to use by organisations and moments that want to (force) to fight against these very ideas.

So global media outlets are overwhelmingly shaped and determined by transnational corporate interests, and I do not think I need to elaborate that. Suppose you look at the multinational corporations starting with the star networks or several other major Walt Disney corporations or several other things. In that case, we know that corporatisation has now been the order, but it has become more aggravated and led to powerful monopolies worldwide.

And how a specific business interest is entangled with the media industry. So, even in India, none of the media is free from this corporatisation. No media is entirely free from that major. For example, the industrialist Mukesh Ambani has a vast business interest in media. So, similarly, almost every TV channel that you watch every day or every TV channel in India, not only in India, every other place, are very strongly connected with one or the other business group or one of the other entrepreneurial groups.


So, that kind of consolidation has significantly shaped our mediascape or, if you borrow our Janapadure's terms. So, the superstructure created by this global media. Oligopoly is an example of globalisation from above where the flow of information images, cultural artefacts and entertainment is distributed from a uniform and increasingly unregulated source.

So, we are witnessing that. There is no doubt about it; with this Netflix and Amazon Prime being so omnipresent in our society, satellite television and other things are so common in our everyday lives. Now, we are witnessing the kind of production being done by some of these most powerful global media oligopolistic institutions. They are pushing down images, materials, displays with similar tastes across the globe.

For example, think about the case of a program by the big boss. In every regional language, the big boss is there, but we know that the big boss is invented in the US. So, we have seen

that kind of scenario. The authors refer to them as globalization from above, a deliberate, systematic attempt to refashion our interest and taste to be suited to global international production.

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- The McDonaldization process thus highlights another facet of globalization where iconic corporate entities not only colonize new markets, but also introduce a system of productions and consumption processes that reproduce global capitalist society.
 - Accompanying the 'globalization from above' model, therefore, is the extension of a consumer and media culture into diverse communities, blurring national boundaries while also creating the potential to either supplement and/or overtake local forms of media.
 - Through the emergent spatial environment of images and cultural representations a condition is formed where defining local or regional identities within global forces are of serious consequence. The image of the Europe and its diverse cultures
 - The tension between globalism and localism exemplifies the new spatial dynamics of globalized media and the diminished role of the nation-state.



And the McDonaldization process highlights another facet of globalisation, where iconic corporate entities colonise new markets and introduce a production and consumption process system that reproduces global capitalist society. This we have discussed earlier. So, McDonaldization Ritzer used in a more limited sense in terms of production and consumption of artefacts. When you turn into that of media consumption, consumption of cultural consumption, what we are seeing is that we are seeing a system of production and consumption processes that reproduce global capitalist society.

So, these cultural productions in the form of, say web series or movies or music albums or, these are an inherent part of the global capitalist society, it puts forward almost similar kind of similar idea kind of want, it wants you to consume more, it wants you to spend more, it wants you to it, it wants you to indulge in more and more wasteful kind of life. Now, accompanying the globalisation from the above model, there is the extension of a consumer and media culture into diverse communities blurring national boundaries while also creating the potential to either supplement or overtake local forms of media.

So, this is precisely the argument when substantial multinational corporations with, say, with deep pockets, come in and begin operation in different countries, come from the above. They want the local communities to listen to or receive their products. If you look into how a host

of regional channels have been closed down in the recent past, or regional TV channels have been taken over by this huge multinational company, both within India and outside. However, the numbers would be staggering.

So, you see that; they have to really to come; they are coming into different nations and blurring the national boundaries because many of these international web series or international programs, half consumers, viewers from across the globe, are truly global in his character, unlike say some in the 1980s or 1970s, where you did not have that, at that time maximum you have had a would-be the what you would have had would be some Hollywood films, which had audiences all over the world or at least in many parts of the world.

But now, these other kinds of productions, other kinds of web series or other forms of music albums and other things are released all over the globe simultaneously. Now, through the emergent spatial environment of images and cultural representations, a condition is formed where defining local or regional identities within the global force is of grave consequence the image of Europe and its diverse cultures.

So, this also raises a lot of challenges. On the one side, you want to present something as a global asset or a larger one, say, an American one or a European one. At the same time, you will be forced to be sensitive to the whole question of what is regional and what is local.

For example, the image of Europe, how do you represent the image of Europe, especially Europe, is quite often contrast distinguished with the US. Still, again Europe itself is not a uniform entity. There are enormous cultural, linguistic and regional diversities. So how do you account for the local and the global in that scenario? So, the tension between globalism and localism exemplifies the new spatial dynamics of globalised media and the diminished role of the nation-state.

So, that is a specific point that we have been discussing through the kind of attention between globalism and localism. Remember, we discussed glocal as a term invented, incorporating global and local elements. But now, that has a very significant impact on the boundaries of this nation-state. They are becoming more and more porous; they have the slightest respect for these nation-states.

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- On the other hand, the possibility for 'globalization from below' has begun to manifest itself through transnational alliances between groups that are struggling for better wages and working conditions, social and political justice, environmental protection and more democracy, freedom and social justice worldwide.
- Renewed emphasis on local and grassroots struggle that have put dominant economic forces on the defensive in their own backyard – often disseminating media and messages over the Internet
- Greater circulation of struggles and the possibilities of novel alliances and solidarities that can connect resistant forces who oppose capitalist and corporate-state elite forms of globalization from above



At the same time, on the other hand, we are talking about globalisation from above. On the other hand, the possibility of globalisation from below has begun to manifest itself through transnational alliances between groups that are struggling for better wages, working conditions, social and political justice, environmental protection and more democracy, freedom and social justice worldwide and this point we already discussed in the last week.

I hope you remember when we discussed the World Social Forum and the world justice movement. We discussed the argument that labour, gender and environment could be three families of social movement that can help counter-hegemonic globalisation; we discussed the same point. So, the other idea is against this globalization from above, as if some decisive say, multinational companies are imposing specific cultural agendas on the people.

The scholars argue that we are also witnessing globalisation from below; grassroots-level movements can now network with similar activities across the globe. They can resist quite a lot of such types of impositions. They can vary creatively negotiate and engage with this process of globalisation and often for the larger goal of protecting human rights or a far better, equitable, equal, and just society.

So, a renewed emphasis on local and grassroots struggles has put dominant economic forces on the defensive in their backyard, often disseminating media and messages over the internet. You look into a host of compelling arguments about new social movements. How new social movements have sprung up across the globe, activities for, say, cultural rights, campaigns for sexual rights, sexuality rights, campaigns for environmental rights, actions for linguistic rights.

So, these are all the kinds of movements that are the product of globalisation, and they have often fought very hard with compelling multinational companies. One of the immediate examples that come to my mind is a mightily, mightily, very well-known struggle in Plachimada in Palakkad, district of Kerala, where the local population have fought very, very fervently against the Coca Cola company, alleging that the company is taking, is depleting their water source and finally, the company had to close down and then leave the place. I think the state government also intervened by making a law.

So, we see we are n number of cases in India and other places where the local population is fighting some of the substantial mining companies or substantial multinational companies to evoke their language of rights and cultural rights. So, in each of these struggles, the use of media, the use of the networks, the kind of connections and networks that they were able to establish across the globe, turned out to be very useful; they turned out to be very, very powerful.

So, we do not see a wholly lost game as per the scholars; we also see fascinating counter-movements. We see intriguing initiatives from the grassroots for the more considerable glory of human beings. So more excellent circulation of struggles and possibilities of novel alliances and solidarities that can connect resistance force, who is, who oppose capitalist and corporate state elite are forms of globalisation from above.

The same point that we discussed, throughout the globe, there are fishers' collectives, workers collectives, there are farmers collective, women's collective, around the world and to what extent they can negotiate with the state and with the elites with the corporate things is something that we are witnessing in on a day-to-day basis.

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- www.indymedia.org: Indymedia is a locally produced and community-based operation that has evolved into an expanding international network that encompasses hundreds of like centres in numerous countries across the globe that focus on providing a space for local issues and community concerns over the Internet.
- GLOBAL MEDIA SPECTACLES: Images of major events producing qualitative shift in our media driven society where politics and media have seamlessly merged into one. 9-11 attack, 'war on terror' etc
- The example of Abu Ghraib; it was the media and communication technologies that enabled contradictory information into the public sphere, escaping mainstream filters that may or may not have sanitized these particular images as well as their political consequences.



One of the examples that they offer is this, the Indymedia. Indymedia is a locally produced and community-based operation that has evolved into an expanding international network and encompasses hundreds of like centres in numerous countries across the globe that focus on providing a space for local issues and community concerns over the internet. So please do check up on this particular website. It is a repository of a lot of information about global issues or local issues presented worldwide.

Then, the scholars also talk about global media spectacles, images of significant events producing a qualitative shift in our media-driven society where politics and media have seamlessly merged into one. Here they, what they are talking about, see. Usually, we understand media as carriers of a certain kind of message. We typically understand that when you watch TV when you read the newspaper, it is a very naive, understanding, clear understanding that we are using this medium, basically to receive some amount of information.

And we think that we can process this information and then consume it. But that is a very naive understanding. It is a very naive understanding because we do not realise how this medium has produced or refashioned the content or substance they are supplying.

So, especially in contemporary society, where politics has been internationalised. The line between what is the news and politics is completely blurred. Especially in today's period, we are talking about the post-truth world, where truth has no significant value. Established media houses champion pushing fake news, very unfounded news propaganda. They have become propaganda in the hands of ruling parties' mighty corporations.

It is essential. It is a very fraught scenario, and so, for example, some of the very important global spectacles like this, twin towers of New York being brought down by the flights by two aeroplanes. That visual video image has gone all over the place, giving so much faith and acceptance to a military move like the war on terror, whether in Afghanistan or Iraq. We know with, which resulted in disastrous consequences.

And another example of Abu Ghari, I hope you know that; otherwise, please check it up. Abu Ghari was a detention centre in Saudi Arabia, which Saddam Hussein constructed initially. But later, it was turned into a detention centre for the American forces or to keep Iraqi prisoners. There were allegations that much inhuman treatment was being meted out to the detainees by these American soldiers. But there was no evidence, and finally, a series of photographs and videos were released. Most interestingly, the military officers recorded these videos and pictures supervising all these inhuman treatments. All sorts of inhumane treatment were physical, sexual, and psychological torture institutionalised in those places, and these reports and video clips and photos were released. They spread worldwide like wildfire, which created quite a lot of commotion.

So, what does (that) this particular episode tell us? So, it was the media and communication technologies that enabled contradictory information into the public sphere, escaping mainstream filters that may or may not have sanitised these particular images as well as their political consequences. So, these images were distributed not through many of the prime channels but a host of other social media circles and other things. Of course, later, many of these mainstream channels were forced to telecast them.

But so here, what we are witnessing is that we are seeing the subversive potential, the potential of the other forms of media and other forms of collectivity to fight against some of these imperial powers and imperial groups.

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- The rise of alternative media sources over the Internet such as blogs and other independent media sources found, such as Indymedia and Free Speech TV, could be signalling a departure from our reliance for information and news from traditional mainstream corporate media outlets.

- The rise of social media

- Concerns of privacy, corporate interests and monopoly

- Democratic or anti-democratic spirit?



So the rise of alternative media sources over the internet, such as blogs and other dependent media sources found such as Indymedia and free speech TV, could be signalling a departure from our reliance on information and news from traditional mainstream corporate media outlets. Please keep in mind that this essay was written much before social media came into existence.

This, they are talking about TV channels and blogs. But we know that the rise of social media, especially after 2010, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and a host of other platforms, YouTube, other platforms are taking our world by storm. Now, what are the effects of that? And, again, it is a very messy situation.

It is a very messy situation. We know that Facebook and Twitter have been accused of interfering in even the electoral affairs of one of the most potent democratic countries, the USA and a host of questions about it and the same social media were once celebrated as the facilitators of democratic mobilisation, whether in the Arabian societies, in Muslim communities, the Arab Spring, an episode during 2011-12 or even in Delhi, the mobilisation against corruption, this social media, in our networks, social media sites were celebrated as the medium for new forms of alternative mobilisation.

But at the same time, we know that they are also trading our privacy, personal details, corporate interest, and then monopoly. There is talk about breaking, say Google, into different companies, or there are our talks about limiting the scope of Facebook, or there are quite a lot of concerns about I am sure that all of you are familiar with the recent problem about WhatsApp changing their privacy norms.

So this social media, what kind of role is it playing? To what extent can we say that social media can be used as a source from below, or are they being used from, for the above. Again, there is no clear-cut answer. There is not a yes or no kind of situation. It is not a black and white scenario.

It is the more complicated and vexed scenario; it is the fraught scenario. So ultimately, what it does to democratic or anti-democratic spirit, we will have to wait and watch. But it is; it escapes every straightforward generalisation. The contemporary media and cultures scenario escapes direct stereotypes; it runs all kinds of easy conclusions.

It is not as rosy as that everybody thinks it is not as gloomy as some others tell. So, what is essential for us is to keep it constant vigil and be sensitive to the changing transformations in this field. So, I am concluding here now, and we will meet for the next class. Thank you.