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From International Communication to Global Media Studies. What Next?

First I would like to thank the conference organizers for inviting me here and giving me the opportunity to comment on Professor Straubhaar's presentation. I congratulate Professor Straubhaar on his excellent presentation, which I am sure we all enjoyed. He kindly sent me his new book, *World Television. From Global to Local*, which his presentation is partly based on. I would also warmly recommend everybody to read Professor Straubhaar's interesting and engaging book.

Another person whose work I have been recently thinking about and reread is the late Professor Jan Ekecrantz. His work contributed significantly to the discussion we have today around global media issues. I miss his intellectual and human presence here and will miss him again in many conferences to come. Today I will try to tackle the question Jan asked himself in his recent article: "How is media research conducted in a globalized world?" (Ekecrantz 2007: 169). Thus my commentary does not only have to do with Professor Straubhaar's presentation or book, but more generally with the paradigmatic changes from international communication to global media studies and how they have affected our work. My presentation is based on the assumption that, when we start changing the theory, we need to change the methodology we use and the empirical materials we collect accordingly. These changes will of course then have an effect on our conclusions.

From Globalization to Global Studies

In the last 15 years many exciting things have started taking place in the social sciences and in the humanities that have had consequences on almost every field of study, including the field of media and communications. The word globalization, which is now used critically or uncritically by almost everybody, was hardly used by anybody in the early 1980s.

The first groundbreaking research was mainly done outside media and communications studies, but in fields related to it, such as sociology, geography, anthropology and political science, and was considered a major paradigm change, a change from one way of thinking to another (Rantanen, 2004). Many of the early pioneers have now become household names: Arjun Appadurai, Ulrich Beck, Manuel Castells, Anthony Giddens, Ulf Hannerz, Saskia Sassen and Roland Robertson to mention a few. Each of them has contributed to *global studies* – I use it here as a generic term, even if many of the theorists used different concepts such as network society, transnationalization or cosmopolitanization.

Since the beginning of the debate the concept of globalization has become so contested and overused. As Giddens himself has noted, the concept of globalization is nowadays asked to do too much and has lost part of its explanatory power (Rantanen 2005a: 76). Even if this has happened, we need to ask: how, if at all, did the concept of globalization change our thinking? Where are we now? What are the lessons we have learned so far, especially in relation to media and communications studies? This is the question Professor Straubhaar also asked in his paper: ‘How many new information and entertainment sources are truly global, versus transnational, national, regional and local’?

Let me start with the key concept and theories that have been re-thought since the discussion on global issues started. I will relate them to the issues of media and communications.

Theoretical Issues: Key Concepts and Theories

Nation-State

1. Even if scholars disagree about the degree to which the nation-state has lost its power, we no longer automatically take it as *the* only starting point for our research, as we did in international communication studies. We do not divide the world only on the basis of nation-states. We do not unproblematically compare nation-states to each other. We acknowledge that they are not homogenous entities that can be compared to each other *an sich* or that nationality becomes the most important explanatory factor. We now further acknowledge that nations and states are not necessarily the same thing, and that they were not combined into the currently existing nation-states before the 19th century in Europe. They also have had ever-changing territories and boundaries. We can study nations and states separately. We acknowledge the power of states, but we problematize the connection between nations and states.

Culture, Language and Identities

2. We acknowledge the diversity of people living in nation-states and we understand that there is not only one national culture or identity, but several cultures and identities that are not fixed and change in space and time. Many of them are undermined or oppressed by governments or majority cultures within nation-states or by occupation by other nation-states, near or far.
3. When we acknowledge that nations are ‘imagined’, we stop conceptually uniting one language, one culture, one identity and one territory and recognize the junctures and disjunctures between the four. We no longer talk about one homogenous national identity threatened by homogenous global media. Instead we may be worried by heterogenous or multi-layered as Professor Straubhaar puts it, national identity (identities) being threatened by heterogenous or homogenous global media.

Political and Cultural Citizenship

4. We recognize that citizenship of a particular nation-state is only one of the defining characters of an individual. We have started to understand that an individual’s political citizenship may be very different from his/her cultural citizenship. We acknowledge that individuals and groups have dual citizenships and/or multiple affiliations that cross the boundaries of nation-states.

Global Mediation

5. We recognize that social relationships are increasingly mediated and individuals in different locations within and between nations and states are connected to each other through media and communications. As Roger Silverstone (2006, 5) wrote: ‘We have become dependent on the media for the conduct of everyday life. They have become the *sine qua non* of the *quotidian*. But they are also inexplicable and insignificant without the everyday, without in turn their being resources for thought, judgment and action, both personal and political’. Hence, the increasing use of media and communications is one of the most striking features of our age and defines the ways we live. Globally, outside our homes, as Castells puts it, established hierarchical social and political structures have given way to *networks* Castells (1996). These networks (and here is the major intersection with globalization theories) are non-isomorphic with nation states and increasingly enable individuals to communicate across the borders from their homes. In this way, the private and the public are connected not only to each other but created new plural virtual private and public spaces we have never seen before.
6. We understand that connectivity is part of global mediation. Mediation is a concept that can be used as a starting point for any analysis of contemporary societies, in the same way as, for example, society or social interactions are used in political science or sociology. The concept is required in order to acknowledge that the nature of societies and social relationships have fundamentally changed and become increasingly mediated through the use of media and communications. This change has broken traditional boundaries of national societies and given birth to new global connections, again characterized by their mediation. Mediation refers to both the material and the phenomenal nature of media and communication (Hansen, 2006). It brings together the study of innovation, technology, production, content and use.
7. We acknowledge that global mediation is a process in which some have more power than other. Professor Straubhaar asks ‘what impacts do global media have compared to national, regional or other media upon culture? In a larger sense, what impacts do today’s global media have on people’s identities and how should we understand both those impacts and the identities themselves in this new world? And what impacts to all of these phenomena and have on the structuring of cultural spaces and markets in at local, national, regional and global levels?’ However, we do not understand media effects any more as only a one-way street or as effects. Instead we could turn the question the other way round by asking what impacts do identities have on global media? This could free us from our media-centric approach and adopt a new approach in which mediation is seen as an active multi-way process (<http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/>).

Methodological Issues

Units of Analysis for Comparative Research

8. When we do comparative research across borders, we understand that we do not always need to compare nation-states to each other, but we can compare places, regions, cities and other sites to each other inside and across borders.
9. When we do comparative research we do not see a particular medium as representing a particular nation-state or its culture or identity; we realize that even if particular media and communications are defined by their nationality and thus ‘naturalized’,

such as with 'US television', ownership, investments, production, technology, content and/or audience are often split across national borders.

10. We need to re-operationalize our research in order to be able to identify what we mean by 'global', 'national', 'regional' and 'local'. When we do comparative research we do not see a particular medium as representing a particular nation-state, especially when it is defined primarily by its size or status, but understand that we need to compare a variety of media across borders, including minority and diasporic media, in order to do justice to their diversity within a particular nation-state and to see their similarities and differences inside and across national borders.

Changing Conclusions

11. Instead of seeing the consequences of global mediation in purely dichotomic terms, as either homogenization or heterogenization, we start seeing both of them on different levels (global, national, regional, urban, local) and the struggles between and inside them. We start forming new concepts such as 'hybridization, not complete resistance, autonomy (Straubhaar 2007)' and new formations, things we cannot yet identify or name.
12. We acknowledge that, in opening up to unforeseen consequences, when we conceptualize these as 'both and' (Beck 2005b: 257) we may risk losing the critical (and political) edge of our research as 'either or' when we can no longer say it is 'just cultural imperialism' or 'just globalization' to name our enemy.
13. As a result, we may be approaching the end of those global media studies, where globalization was used as a starting point, as a key theoretical concept, and a key conclusion.

As I said in the beginning of my presentation, Professor Straubhaar's presentation exemplifies these changes in our research. His research convincingly shows what we gain by using new analytical tools. As always, we also lose something. We may approach the point when need to think what's next: what follows after globalization?

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