

Globalization and Cultural Imperialism in Jamaica

The Homogenization of Content and Americanization of Jamaican TV through Programme Modeling

NICKESIA STACY ANN GORDON
Barry University

There is a great deal of discussion about the globalization of media, particularly television, especially as it is being driven by the spread of satellite technology and cable. While certain scholars view this as promoting cultural heterogeneity and the diversification of programme content, others see this trend as a proliferation of the homogenization of programme content and American popular culture. The paper investigates the relevance of the two above perspectives within the Jamaican media context. By conducting informant interviews, as well as a programme analysis of content aired on local television stations, the research reveals that the cultural imperialism perspective remains quite relevant, as is evidenced through the modeling of programming originating predominantly in the United States of America.

Key words: Jamaica, Content homogenization, Cultural imperialism, Programme modeling, Jamaican television, Globalization, Media privatization

Introduction

The phenomenon of globalization has spawned myriad developments in a number of arenas, namely the social, political, economic, and cultural. As an industry that is inextricably linked to all four spheres just mentioned, the media has witnessed tremendous changes under the auspices of globalization. These changes have primarily been facilitated through privatization initiatives engendered by the economic paradigm of market liberalization, ushered in by globalization. As part of the adjustment to market liberalization imperatives, the media has been reinvented on the political and economic front through massive mergers, giving birth to the term 'media globalization' and the business entities known as transnational corporations (TNCs). Socially and culturally, the reinvention of the industry has intensified old debates and given rise to new questions. One of these debates is the relationship between media and cultural imperialism, and one of these questions pertains to the relationship between private media and content diversity.

Nickesia Stacy Ann Gordon: ngordon@mail.barry.edu
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On a global scale, there has been a lot of discussion about the globalization of media, particularly television, as it is being driven by the spread of satellite technology and cable. Certain scholars such as Tomlinson (1991), Sinclair (2004), and Waisbord (2004) view this as promoting cultural heterogeneity and the diversification of programme content. However, others such as McChesney (2004; 2005), Mody (2000), and Schiller (1991; 1996) see this trend as proliferating the homogenization of programme content and American popular culture. In Jamaica during the 1970s and 1980s, research on international programme flow (Brown, 1979; Dunn, 1988) concurred with the latter perspective, repeatedly pointing out and confirming the dominant position of the American audiovisual industry on Jamaican television. Since then, Jamaica's predominantly state-owned media have been deregulated, resulting in increased private ownership of media entities. How has this shift influenced international programme flow on Jamaican television, and has privatization lead to the diversification of content as proposed by the proponents of a free market system?

In an effort to extend the studies mentioned formerly and locate the current state of Jamaican television media within the globalization discourse, this paper questions whether or not the increased private ownership of television media in the country and the rising influence of globalization on the industry during the 1990s and onward signify a continued cycle of one-way television flow from the United States. This is a relevant question given the argument that privatization will augment political and cultural diversity in the media sphere by delinking mass communications from the state and placing it in the hands of private owners, the latter supposedly being better guardians of free speech and a free press. The contention that private media will best facilitate and encourage diversity in content is premised on the assumption that these entities have an inherent economic incentive to give the people what they want. If not, audiences would simply tune out and media organizations would simply lose money. Whether or not this promise has been lived up to in the Jamaican context is highly debatable and warrants some exploration, both from a cultural as well as socio-political perspective.

This paper focuses on these issues as they relate to television. This is because, in Jamaica, television is perhaps the medium most affected and transformed by globalization. It is also the medium most deeply implicated in facilitating globalization as a cultural process (Sinclair, 2004, p. 69). Specifically, the paper examines the programming of Jamaica's three national television stations, namely Television Jamaica (TVJ), CVM Television (CVMTV), and Love Television (LOVETV). Based on a programme analysis of content aired on these stations, as well as interviews conducted with Jamaican media practitioners, both from the private and public sector, the paper concludes that a one-way flow of information and cultural goods from more industrialized countries such as the United States to Jamaica persists in more nuanced ways. There is a strong tendency toward content homogenization and programme modeling on all three stations and a strong economic bias toward content originating in the United States in the industry overall. These may very well be new forms of cultural imperialism precipitated by media privatization and the accompanying economic model of a market-oriented media management style. After giving a brief background to Jamaica's television media, as well as the context within which privatization of television occurred, the paper delineates the competing arguments of the cultural imperialism and cultural hybridity perspectives. The latter contextualizes the paper's argument that content homogenization and programme modeling on Jamaican television constitute trends that

resonate with the cultural imperialism thesis. Cultural proximity, an extension of the cultural hybridity thesis, is also examined as it relates to Jamaican television, revealing that even as Jamaicans prefer to watch programmes that are reflective of their cultural or local orientation, what passes for local production is merely a localized version of American popular culture.

Background to Jamaican Television Media

At present, the Jamaican media are privately owned. Most of these privately owned stations burst onto the scene in the late 1990s after the changes in media regulation allowed private entrants into the media sphere. Prior to 1990, the airwaves were dominated by primarily two rival stations, the Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation Radio and Television (JBC) and Radio Jamaica (RJR). The former was government-owned, while the latter was a privately owned competitor. RJR was Jamaica's first commercial broadcasting station and began operations in May 1940 as a radio entity (Virtue, 2001, p. 12). Today, RJR, or the RJR Communication Group as the entity is now known, is the largest media entity in Jamaica, owning three of the island's 16 radio stations, as well as the largest of the island's three television stations.

There are three national television stations, Television Jamaica (TVJ), formerly JBCTV; CVM Television (CVMTV); and Love Television (LOVETV). TVJ is the largest and oldest of the three and began its operations as JBCTV in 1963. In 1993, CVMTV came onto the scene as a competitor to the then-government-owned JBCTV with a mandate to fulfill a 50/50 balance between local and imported programming (Virtue, 2001, p. 13). LOVETV followed later in 1998, and it provides religious programming for a Christian demographic. Subscription Cable Television (STV) provides access to a range of programming from North America to local subscribers, and at times, operators produce their own in-house programming which airs on community channels. The government's voice is represented by the Jamaica Information Service Television (JISTV), and it does not have direct broadcast capacity. JISTV programmes receive airtime on the other three stations during time mandated for government broadcast.

Literature Review: Issues of Privatization and Media

Privatization, in the sense that it is used by the World Bank and IMF in reference to developing countries, entails converting state-owned and -operated industries and firms into private ones (Stiglitz, 2003, p. 54). It is based on the belief that private firms can perform certain government (business) functions more efficiently. It is the hand maiden of the global economic paradigm, market liberalization, which paves the way for the removal of government "interference" in financial markets, capital markets, and barriers to trade. This conception/application of privatization constitutes what Audenhove, Burgelman, Nulens, and Cammaerts (1999, p. 388) refer to as the "dominant scenario," which informs the framework that guides development in so called "Third World" states.

Based on two macro-economic assumptions, that 1) competition on all levels is a precondition for economic growth, no matter the context, and 2) interventions by public authorities — the state — have

restraining rather than enabling effects on economic growth and prosperity (Audenhove, Burgelman, Nulens, and Cammaerts, 1999, p. 389), privatization was viewed by international financial institutions such as the WB and IMF as the way to achieve development goals in developing countries. It was seen as a tool for reforming the public sector in developing countries where the operations of public entities were presumed to be (and rightly so in some instances) inefficient and inimical to economic growth. Subsequently, between 1988 and 1993, approximately 2,700 public enterprises in more than 60 developing countries were transferred to private ownership (Turner & Hulme, 1997, p.190), most occurring as conditions to acquiring international loans from the above-mentioned institutions. Privatization of "Third World" economies therefore opened up the floodgates of competition nationally, but more importantly, internationally, from competing enterprises in a wide range of goods and services.

In the telecommunications sector, liberalization of the industry at the international level and the direction in which it will go have both been secured by the WTO, which, in an agreement between 130 countries, treats telecommunication as a service. This agreement was secured under the General Agreement in Trade and Services (GATS) during the 1994 Uruguay Round of international trade negotiations and came into effect in January 1995 (<http://www.wto.org>). The GATS establishes a set of multilateral rules covering international trade in services wherein negotiations concerning said trade "shall take place with a view to promoting the interests of all participants on a mutually advantageous basis" and "with due respect for national policy objectives and the level of development of individual members" (<http://www.wto.org>). However, outside of its formal declarations, the GATS operates to secure the dominance of industrialized societies by developing "a stringent international system of intellectual property rights protecting the technologies of transnational enterprises" (Rivero, 2001, p. 49). This means that communication products can largely be treated as cultural goods because the lines between digital services and cultural products have been somewhat blurred. Accordingly, countries will have little to no rights in establishing cultural rights or protective measures over cultural goods. International trade agreements perceive such independent cultural policies as unfair barriers to trade (Hamelink, 2003, p. 8).

Regarding communications, privatization of the industry is seen to be beneficial for the public good as it restricts government monopoly of information and ensures plurality in the public sphere (Sinclair, 2004, p. 79). Thus, where national governments attempt to apply measures of control over their media industries, they are seen as contravening WTO/international legislation. The WTO has gained enormous importance in managing communications networks and in regulating the circulation of cultural goods (Neveu, 2004, p. 332). Consequently, the pertinence of the nation-state as the analytical unit of economic and legal media regulation appears more and more doubtful (Neveu, 2004, p. 332).

Privatization is often seen as a strategy for revitalizing national media industries, primarily because such efforts are done to maximize the proceeds from sales to help minimize a state's fiscal balance problems, as well as to improve the overall performance of the sector. However, as Audenhove, Burgelman, Nulens, and Cammaerts (1999) observe of the South African context, "the question remains of whether and under what conditions privatization does contribute to the development of the sector" (p. 395). This is in light of the fact that, in many instances, sale packages are skewed toward increasing the sale prices of private firms rather than increasing efficiency of the sector. In addition, because the terms of exchange are not equal on the global scene, countries that embrace

liberalization and privatization may find themselves at a disadvantage and risk losing substantial power over the development of their media industries.

Apart from the economic and social drawbacks that accompany privatization, there is also the cultural dimension. As the cultural imperialism argument holds, privatization can affect sovereignty where, intentionally or not, imported programming weakens cultural bonds and accelerates the incidence of cultural attrition (Price, 2002, p. 98). This is because privatization affects content by reorienting its distribution from the public to the private sphere, which in most cases results in increased non-indigenous programming, rendering local systems as mere distribution systems for imported Western programming. The role that national media play in building national identities and stabilizing nation states is well documented (White, 1976; Cuthbert, 1977; George, 1981; Hafez, 1999; Price, 2002; Goonasekera, 2003; Hamelink, 2003; Curran, 2005). Where state-owned media is replaced by private media, the cultural rights of indigenous citizens are placed in the context of calculation, one where commercial imperatives do not cater to the linguistic and other cultural needs of ethnic minorities or indigenous groups, but instead to the financial bottom line.

Media Globalization and Cultural Imperialism

The rise of media globalization has precipitated the porosity of cultural boundaries, giving rise to concerns over cultural sovereignty and cultural rights. While such concerns have been dismissed by proponents of globalization as unfounded, for developing countries such as Jamaica, whose economic reality precludes the development of strong local productions and so fosters reliance on imported programming, these concerns are quite relevant. Research has shown that, where local productions are weak, inroads made by foreign media can be dangerous (Lee, 2003, p. 51). Media privatization exacerbates this reliance, given that it encourages the inflow of imported content on the principle that, within a free market system, there should be no barriers erected against the free flow of cultural products across borders. Most importantly, as private media rely heavily on advertising dollars for economic viability, there is a constant stream of cultural goods originating in North America and Europe that inundate the local scene by way of paid television commercials.

However, proponents of the cultural imperialism strain of globalization have been widely criticized by theorists who view their perspective as decidedly romantic and curiously oblivious to available empirical evidence that suggests otherwise. According to Tomlinson (1997, in Banarjee, 2003, p. 66), the cultural imperialism perspective makes "unwarranted leaps of inference from the simple presence of cultural goods to the attribution of deeper cultural or ideological effects." These critics suggest that instead of creating homogenization, globalization succeeds in producing a heterogenization of cultures. As such, the perception that the West has cultural dominance over world cultures is overstated. Aided by a postmodern theoretical sensibility, the global cultural perspective contends that globalization, instead of overpowering indigenous cultures and engendering a mono-culture, leads to cultural hybridity or heterogenization. In this respect, proponents of the cultural hybridity perspective argue against the cultural imperialism concept for its perceived assumption that the media audiences of receiving countries are cultural simpletons incapable of resisting or even negotiating such messages.

Although not a hardcore proponent of the global cultural perspective, Lee (2003, p. 51), makes an important observation that audiences usually prefer local to foreign media products, and usually have a taste for things local (Atal, 2003; Banarjee, 2003; Sinclair, 2004). This concept is better known as the cultural proximity theory, popularized through the work of scholars such as Joseph Straubhaar.

Cultural Proximity

The main assumptions of cultural proximity theorists are that local programming is more culturally proximate or relevant than imported programming originating from culturally disparate places and therefore preferred by local viewers. As a result, the point has been made that while Western media has penetrated the boundaries of other national cultures, they have only managed to do so in a conditional or negotiated sense. That is to say, because media companies compete and operate in a global as well as domestic marketplace for audience share and advertising revenue (Albarran (2005, p. 299), in order to gain local access, many transnational corporations (TNCs), such as Sony Entertainment Television and Star TV, have had to localize their products and advertising. This is based on the argument that local audiences still prefer local programming to imported content and will support local productions as long as they are of good production quality.

In India, for example, despite the fears of cultural invasion that accompanied the advent of Star TV and CNN in the early 1990s, it was Indian satellite to cable channels that captured the allegiance of the local audience based on their offerings of local programme content produced in Hindi (Sinclair, 2004, p. 78). Again using India as an example, Lee (2003, p. 50) points to the preference for local output when he says, "No channel of STAR TV can match the popularity of Zee TV in India, which employs Hindi programming and a hybrid approach." The same has been said of Asian countries such as China and Taiwan, and of Latin American countries such as Brazil and Mexico (Curtin, 2005, pp. 163-165; Lee, 2003, p. 51; Wang, 2003, pp. 36-41, Banarjee, 2003, pp. 66-67; Chadha & Kavoori, 2000, pp. 425-428), where local channels such as Phoenix in China and Taiwan, TV Globo in Brazil, and Televisa in Mexico dominate the local market.

However, the discourse surrounding the idea of cultural proximity is more often than not articulated in reference to Latin American countries such as Brazil and Mexico and Asian states such as Japan, Taiwan, and India. In these areas, regional markets for television programming have emerged based on geo-linguistic factors, which aided in the growth of regional media products. Populations defined by similar language, shared history, and other cultural characteristics tend to seek out cultural products, such as television programs or music, which are most similar or proximate to them (Straubhaar & Viscasillas, 1991; Straubhaar, Fuentes & Giraud, 2002). As such, places like Brazil, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Japan, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and India have witnessed an increase in local output as the demand for U.S. media products is less than that for local media (Straubhaar & Viscasillas, 1991). For example, over a period of 38 years, from 1962 to 2000, national production in Mexico has grown exponentially, from 59% in 1962 to 71% in 2000 (Straubhaar, Fuentes & Giraud, 2002).

In places such as Jamaica, cultural proximity does not seem to operate in the same way that it does in the above mentioned places. As will be discussed later on in the paper, there are no significant increases in national or regional production based on shared geo-linguistics. This is because the geo-linguistic similarities between Jamaica and places such as the U.S., as well as the former's poor economy, enable excessive programming importation instead facilitating regional exchange. In Latin America and Asia, language acts as a sort of shield from American cultural imports, which makes the resistance to such products through the circulation of culturally proximate ones more feasible and successful. However, whereas local programming appears to be the preferred televisual choice where the geo-linguistic context allows, it is important to note that in the media marketplace, that which scholars identify as cultural proximity, television executives see as a great business opportunity. That is to say, with the recognition that local audiences tend to prefer culturally proximate programmes, executives have come to understand the value of localization through programme modeling.

Programme Modeling

Programme modeling refers to the replication of the design, form, and content of a programme originating from elsewhere without any adjustments to fit the cultural, social, and economic context within which such a programme will be commercially disseminated by a station or network and viewed by a local audience. The term emerged from discussions based on the topic of this paper between the author and her mentor, Patricia McCormick. It closely resembles what Liu and Chen (2003) refer to as closed format adaption, but it varies in that the latter infers or presupposes some degree of alteration or conversion of the programme material to fit a local cultural context, while the former does not. Format adaptation is therefore less culturally intrusive than programme modeling. According to Liu and Chen (2003), format adaptation occurs where significant elements of a programme are copied or taken and adapted for local consumption. There are levels of adaptations which range from open, where selective generic elements are utilized, to closed, wherein a higher level of replication occurs (Liu and Chen, 2003). Muller (2008) even goes as far as to say that "while formats may carry certain recognizable elements, the content is always nationalized, adapted for different national markets and cultures." Programme modeling often becomes manifest where an imported programme is "localized" for national TV with a lack of distinguishing indigenous characteristics.

The dissemination of television formats from dominant industrialized nations has become very popular over the past ten years, with the United Kingdom accounting for 33 percent of the global market, making it the main originator of global formats (Worldscreen.com). These include shows such as *Dancing With the Stars*, *Got Talent*, *The X Factor*, *Wife Swap* and *Pop Idol*, the successes of which helped boost the global sale of UK programme exports by 20% in 2007, earning the industry an estimated US\$1.17 billion (Pact, 2008). Other global players include the U.S. and the Netherlands, which together account for 21% of the share of global formats in total (Worldscreen.com). As reported by Freemantle Media, the most successful global entertainment format of 2007 was the U.S. game show *Are You Smarter than a 5th Grader*, which entered 22 new countries within just eight months of its release. The latter is a testimony to the growing popularity of global format exports, which are available in an average of 200 countries worldwide.

While some critics argue that the popularity of television formats are reflective of the interconnectivity among television systems and industries worldwide (Waisbord, 2004), and that they are a vehicle for localization (Keane, 2002), there are very important socio-political implications that international format adoption has for lesser developed societies such as Jamaica. First of all, the exportation of television formats is a business wherein a few media companies are able to sell the same idea worldwide, where audiences tune in to a national variation of the same programme. Not only does this represent a standardization of content, but also a subversive glocalization wherein cultural imperialism is perpetuated in a more subtle form. TV formats thereby become a 'Trojan Horse,' to borrow a term from Keane (2002), in which foreign content migrates across national boundaries in a seemingly benign and nonthreatening way.

Imported formats are formulaic in nature, relying on the "‘pie and the crust’ model — whereby the format is the crust and the various localizations are the pie" (Keane, p. 7, 2002). In this regard, programme modeling is a more appropriate description of what exists when imported formats are adapted to local television. In the case of Jamaica, local programming resembles a miniature version of American television, given that is from where most of the programme formats are imported. While format adaptation is a global phenomenon, the implications of this trend for a country such as Jamaica are not the same as for more industrialized societies. As the social and economic capital of industrialized countries is similar, importation of models does not have the same socioeconomic consequences as it does for Jamaica — consequences such as stunting the growth of local industries while enabling the expansion of material consumption and the development of wants that are incompatible with the social and economic realities of a developing country. As Fung (2003) argues, "adapting global television formats might result in cultural globalization while being at odds with local cultural values . . . in most instances, cultural dissonance is inevitable and unavoidable" (p. 86). Local Jamaican television has not modified the U.S. television programmes to fit the "local structures of feeling" (Lee, 2003, p. 52) and the transnational adaptation of such programmes have not been deeply conditioned by the local cultural coding. The remainder of the paper addresses the cultural implications of programme modeling on Jamaican television and seeks to discover how present television content aired on Jamaica's three national commercial television stations compares to content aired prior to increased private ownership of television media in the country. Such a comparison will help to determine whether or not privatization has ushered in more localization as promised and if there is a continued dominance of U.S. cultural imports on Jamaican TV.

Methodological Framework

The study employed a programme analysis of content aired on Jamaica's three national commercial television stations, as well as informant interviews to investigate the nature of the flow of imported television content to Jamaica. A programme analysis was done to disclose the significance of particular types of programming or content based on the space or amount of airtime they are allotted. Such an analysis helps to determine the nature of information flow between Jamaica and the industrialized countries of the West by facilitating a quantitative comparison of the hours devoted to national programming and imported programming. It also helps to determine what types of content dominates the airwaves in terms of quantity of airtime, as well as to facilitate comparisons between the stations to

determine which stations, if any, exhibit a particular predilection for certain types of content, whether imported or local, entertainment or informative, etc.

The programme schedule for all three national commercial television stations, namely, TVJ, CVMTV and LOVETV, were analyzed over the period of a week starting on January 27 and ending February 3, 2007. While some stations remained on air for 24 hours, others went off the air after midnight. Programmes were analyzed according to 1) length, meaning the total airtime allotted; 2) type, meaning essential characteristics; and 3) origin, meaning point of production or creation. For the purposes of coding, several mutually exclusive categories were identified a priori.

This week was randomly chosen and does not take into account seasonal influences on programming which may affect the volume of content derived from the various points of origin identified in the study. For example, during the Easter season, Jamaican television has an increased proportion of religious programming, much of which may be classified as national in its origin. As a result, the amount and categories of imported content would be affected at times such as those days when "special" Easter programming is not available, and the proportion of non-religious and imported content would be increased.

Additionally, programming on Jamaican television is also influenced by seasonal sporting events such as cricket. For example, in 1999, a study conducted by McCormick (1999) revealed that Jamaican television programming was significantly influenced by a live five-day cricket match between the West Indies and Australia during the week of Sunday, March 28 and Saturday, April 3. According to the study, the days on which cricket was not aired, the hours of imported content on TVJ and CVMTV increased by approximately 2,022 minutes (McCormick, 1999). Thus, although the period that was examined was "normal" and free of special events programming, the results would refer to the overall nature of programming on Jamaican television.

The study also utilized the informant type interview as one of its primary data gathering sources. These were individual interviews that sought to garner the perspectives of key actors in the media industry, government, and civil society at large who have expert knowledge of, and insights into, the media industry and its practices. These individuals have special mobility within media organizations, meaning they have uninhibited access to certain domains of information, such as policing, making, and implementation. Interviewees were derived from the media industry, including personnel from the three previously mentioned national stations, the JIS, CPTC, and STV operators. They were also drawn from academia, including professors from the leading university's school of Communications; the government, including officers from the Ministry of Information and Development; and the professional sector, including Public Relations executives and practitioners. The discursive elements of the interviews were significant to the study in that they allowed for a comparative analysis with the data gathered from the programme analysis of content aired on the three national commercial television stations, as well as with the theoretical framework guiding the research.

Findings

For the week under review, the hours of programming for all three stations combined totalled 24,900. Of this number, 8,515 hours or 34% of this was devoted to programmes of national origin. A cursory examination of the data would indicate that the most significant category related to national programming would be religious. It represents approximately 1,860 or 22% of the total hours attributed to national content. However, closer examination of the data reveals that these hours are disproportionately distributed among the three national commercial stations, given that LOVETV, a religious station, accounts for 100% of such programming. Its percentage representation of total hours allotted to national content is therefore skewed and is more an indicator of the ideological framework of a particular station than it is of overall national content. When religious programming is excluded from the total hours devoted to national programming, local content is reduced to just 27% of total television airtime. As a result, the most important programme category of national origin becomes the news, which accounts for approximately 19% of the total national hours.

Programmes originating in the United States comprised 15,170 hours, or 61% of total airtime for all three national commercial stations, while those categorized as deriving from other international sources accounted for approximately 975 hours, or 4%. Together, the programming of U.S. and International origins make up 65% of the total airtime. The majority of imported programming coming from the United States falls under the category of religious. This category makes up 4,835 hours, or 32% of imported programming. However, as was the case with local content, this representation is more reflective of the religious bias intrinsic to LOVETV's programming than it is of imported content across the board. Outside of this category, the movies or feature films grouping become most significant, representing 3,630 hours or 35% of imported content. Children's programming follows closely, comprising 1,770 hours, or 17% of imported programming, outside of the religious category.

When compared to previous data, the overall airtime allotted to imported content remains fairly consistent. For example, in 1994, imported programming comprised 66% of total airtime (McCormick, 1994), which is only 1% more than that recorded for 2007. In 1999, imported content accounted for 79% of total airtime, but this spike from previous years is only indicative of LOVETV's entry into the television landscape the year before, as well as prolonged broadcasting hours, as indicated before. This also explains the apparent jump in the percentage of international programming noted in the same period, i.e., from 2.2% in 1994 to 17% in 1999. Therefore, what seems to be an increase in these categories of programming is probably indicative of the addition of more airtime that was not previously present. With regard to regional programming, this category shows a steady decline from 1994 to the present (see Table 3). In 1994, regional content made up 0.9% of total television airtime. In 1999, it comprised .01%, showing a decline of approximately 90%. At present, regional content is nonexistent on Jamaican television.

In summation, the data derived from the programme analysis seem to indicate that increased private ownership of television media in Jamaica since 1994 has done little to change the ratio of imported programming to local. While there is an observed 10% increase in local content between 1994 and 2007, it may not be a real indicator of growth, given that LOVETV was absent from the television scene in 1994

and only came into being in 1998. Thus, the hours of added airtime that LOVETV contributes to the overall broadcasting time is perhaps what this 10% difference represents. The proportion of imported content is still significantly higher than local content, and it has more or less remained the same since 1994. What are the implications of this trend?

Homogenization of Content

What the interview data and the programme analysis data imply is that there is little variety in the content that is aired on the three national commercial television stations. For example, the types of programmes aired on both TVJ and CVMTV are remarkably similar in nature and essentially take up the same percentage of airtime. Both stations appear to carry the same type of content, and in roughly the same proportion. For example, both TVJ and CVM have feature films or movies as their primary category of programming, which takes up roughly the same percentage of airtime on both stations, i.e., 18.8% and 18.3%, respectively.

This apparent lack of variety in programming is a classic example of the kind of media landscape that a market-driven model of media eventually creates. What the market reveals as financially sustainable is what everyone else is producing (Copps, 2005), and as a result, the same types of programming dominate the airwaves. Media operators are loathe to produce material outside of the handful of genres or types of programming that have already proven to be successful. As McChesney (2004, p. 193) argues, "Entertainment programming has mostly gravitated toward a handful of commercially successful genres with formulaic characters and plots." Innovative material is not necessarily attractive, as there is no track record of success that will guarantee large and sustained viewership and subsequent advertising dollars. Television networks thus operate on the basis of minimizing risk by relying on the "tried and true." This approach essentially stifles variety and promotes sameness of content, otherwise known as content homogenization, wherein repetitiveness takes precedence over inventiveness.

Globalization has ushered in what McChesney (2005) refers to as the conglomerate era, wherein, working through economies of scale, corporate media seek to bring about uniformity in their operations in order to establish an economic model that promotes synergy among various media products and entities. The homogenization that this way of doing business brings about means the packaging and promotion of programming through a one-size-fits-all strategy. Through expanding media globalization, content homogenization emerges in countries such as Jamaica with the indirect flow of ideas about program production and programming strategy through satellite from places such as the United States. More countries seem to be producing similar soap operas, talk shows, and reality shows, among other television genres (Straubharr, Fuentes, Giraud & Campbell, 2002). This tendency seems to be naturally affiliated with globalization as it relates to media industries, as Straubharr, Fuentes, Giraud & Campbell (2002) argue:

At the global level, we can observe the ongoing spread of underlying paradigms of cultural production, like the shift toward commercial cultural industries, such as commercial network television. Those changes do shift the boundaries of what is seen as

possible in television programming and production. We can observe an ongoing global convergence or homogenization of general ideas about how to program broadcast television networks, such as the prevalence of entertainment genres like soap opera, reality shows, comedy, sports, talk, and drama, especially in prime time. (pp. 1-2)

It is quite apparent that this general prevalence toward the standardization of content is present in Jamaican television programming. There exists what one participant refers to as a "bandwagon" mentality approach to content, meaning that most of the local programmes being produced and aired pivot around the same themes and are of the same genres. The types of local programmes produced by CVM and TVJ are strikingly similar, and the basis of their competition seems to rest more on their ability to "out imitate" each other, instead of any desire to be different. As the data from the programme analysis indicate, the vast majority of the content aired by the stations, especially CVM and TVJ, can be classified as entertainment, primarily as it relates to locally produced material. This is a clear reflection of what Chester and Larson (2005) observe as the market's strong economic bias toward the cheap and the imitative when it comes to television production. Figure one demonstrates just how alike CVMTV and TVJ's local productions are.

As the figure illustrates, what is available locally on CVMTV is merely a slight variation of what is available on TVJ. Each station seems to adopt a formulaic approach to producing content, which often entails a cocktail of hype, sex, and triviality, what is referred to as "lowest common denominator" programming. Having adopted the market model approach to media operations, national commercial stations try to minimize their risks by producing programming which will capture the attention of viewers across the population instead of creating original and innovative material, and as mentioned before, most of this material is strictly entertainment. What is also articulated by the stations' programming schedule, as well as by the programming managers, is that there is a strong need to compete with U.S. programming formats, as well as content. The types of programmes produced reflect the strong influence of U.S. media industries on the global scene. This dominance of the U.S. in the televisual market continues to foster dependence on imported products in places such as Jamaica through the competition it fosters with local economies. Media in Jamaica operate under certain economic boundaries which limit the cultural outcomes within them (Straubhaar & Hammond, 1998), meaning that such countries cannot afford to produce material with the blockbuster values, inclusive of the glitz and fancy graphics to which participant 5 referred, that characterize U.S. productions. While local programming may not necessarily need blockbuster values to be successful or popular among Jamaican viewers, Hollywood production values have become the standard by which local producers measure quality programming. It is partly for this reason that Jamaica has in the past, and still does today, import much of its content from the U.S., which has perhaps cultivated a taste for American genres, if not among viewers, then certainly among producers of television content. At the global level, the U.S. is the primary media exporter in the world, largely due to its economic wealth (De Bens & de Smaele, 2001). It dominates certain kinds of productions, such as feature films, which require huge investments, as well as certain kinds of television genres such as action-adventure, which also require big budgets (Straubhaar & Hammond, 1998).

<i>Stations</i>	<i>Programme Name</i>	Description
<p>CVMTV</p>	<p><i>The Party</i></p>	<p>A one hour programme that entails a dance party staged at a local café. It showcases the latest trends in Jamaican popular music, dance, and party style.</p>
	<p><i>The E-Strip Hit List</i></p>	<p>A music programme presented by two radio disk jockeys who play the latest music videos and host a special musical guest each show. The programme also provides the audience with a chance to appear on the show and to win cash prizes by voting for their favorite videos.</p>
	<p><i>Wad-Up</i></p>	<p>A half hour programme involving vox pops that ask questions pertaining to a range of entertainment and topical issues.</p>
<p>TVJ</p>	<p><i>Weh yu sey</i></p>	<p>Vox pops bringing the views of Jamaicans on topical issues of the day</p>
	<p><i>Hype Zone</i></p>	<p>A music video programme that entails interviews and profiles of Jamaican entertainment celebrities and highlights of popular parties. These are interspersed with music videos, and the show is presented by a host.</p>
	<p><i>Groove Music</i></p>	<p>A music video programme that profiles the party scene and airs local and overseas music videos chosen by viewers.</p>

Figure 1. Similarity of CVMTV and TVJ Local Programming.

It is therefore able to dominate the market and thus export its models, genres, and ways of creating and managing television, thereby becoming the driving force behind the increasing global economic structure of market capitalism that reinforces the attractiveness of U.S. models.

Perhaps the rationale behind the modeling of U.S. programming and the resulting homogenization of content on Jamaican television is related to the role that advertising plays as the primary source of revenue for media operations. Advertising has come to colonize much of media, "radically transforming its logic and content" (McChesney, 2004, p. 138). As a result, the interests of consumers are increasingly being filtered through the demands of advertisers who covet particular demographics. The end product of this commercial sifting is formulaic TV. A standard entertainment package is being leveraged across the various media corporations with the aim of capturing advertiser-preferred demographics. Seemingly, the repetitive nature of television content in Jamaica as iterated by media practitioners seems to be driven by the need to procure advertising revenue on the part of commercial media organizations. This compulsion drives producers to adopt a "copycat" approach to local production, so that, while a programme may employ Jamaican talent, it is merely a Jamaicanized version of American television as mentioned earlier.

As such, the argument could be made that the apparent influence of American programming on Jamaican television is evidence of the inevitable impact of globalization on world cultures. Globalization has ushered in growing cultural interdependency among nations (Goonasekera, 2003), and the global proliferation of media has heightened and hastened the porosity of cultural borders. This phenomenon is what critics such as Sinclair (2004) and Straubhaar (1997, 1999, 2002) refer to as cultural hybridity or cultural fusion, one of the benefits of globalization that is propagated through international media. According to these arguments, cultures are not static, but complex systems that respond to the introduction of new cultural forms through conduits such as television, through synthesis. Consequently, the apparent Jamaicanization of American programming could be read by such critics as evidence of this synthesis or glocalization, a concept that connotes the intersection or fusion of the global and local (Hines, 2000, p. 8). This argument is partly premised on the idea of cultural proximity as previously mentioned.

Cultural Proximity and Local Production

There is a general perception among those interviewed that "Jamaicans love to see themselves on TV," meaning that Jamaican audiences literally like seeing themselves on television. At the individual level, the ordinary citizen is keen on having his or her proverbial 15 minutes of fame on the television screen. However, more significantly, what this statement connotes is that at the macro level, Jamaican viewers are very interested in seeing culturally representative or relevant images of themselves portrayed on local television. This general attitude is reflective of what Straubhaar (1996, 1997) and other scholars refer to as cultural proximity, the idea that local audiences tend to prefer local cultural products when available over imported ones. Audiences are therefore inclined to favor media which are illustrative of their own culture nationally as well as regionally (Burch, 2002), as they "want to see people and styles they recognize, jokes that are funny without explanation" (Straubhaar, Fuentes & Giraud, 2002, p. 5). To use another framework, people acquire cultural capital based on their experience, family background, and education, which enables them to understand things (Bourdieu, 1984). Thus construed, it is therefore not

surprising to discover that Jamaicans have an impulse to see culturally pertinent images of their locality on display.

This is partially responsible for the popularity of the only available local soap opera, *Royal Palm Estate*, produced by Jamaican media owner and independent content producer, Lennie Littlewhite. *Royal Palm Estate* first aired on CVMTV in March 1994, shortly after that television station made its debut. It is one of the longest running and most successful local programmes which still air on television. For this reason, it is often used as the yardstick by which the potential popularity of local programming is measured. That is to say, the success of *Royal Palm* is often used as a sort of litmus test for the success of future local programmes. It is popular by demand, primarily because it satisfies that desire held by Jamaicans to see themselves on TV, meaning, the need to see culturally relevant images that are reflective of what they perceive to be Jamaican cultural identity.

In this respect, the idea of cultural proximity appears to hold true. Jamaican audiences gravitate toward *Royal Palm*, unlike other local productions currently being aired on TVJ and CVMTV, because *Royal Palm* does not just rely on local actors for its "Jamaican-ness." As a cultural product, it engages many aspects of Jamaica's socio-historical heritage for its authenticity. The script often pivots around traditional Jamaican mythology and folklore, such as obeah and folk religion, and also draws on elements of the current political and social milieu, such as rural and urban poverty, crime, and partisan politics, for inspiration. In this respect, Jamaicans do see themselves reflected on the screen, as life on *Royal Palm Estate* often imitates life as they sometimes experience it. Even the very name, "*Royal Palm Estate*," is evocative of Jamaica's historical past involving sugar and slavery, wherein the plantation estate emerged as emblematic of this era.

That *Royal Palm Estate* is popular based on its "localness" resonates with Lee's (2003, pp. 50-51) observation that audiences usually prefer local to foreign media products and will support local programmes as long as they are of good production quality. Such programmes capture the allegiance of local audiences and are a defense against the onslaught of imported media content, especially in a context such as Jamaica, where a *diseconomy* of scale makes it easier and cheaper to import media programming. Scholars such as Burch (2002), Ferguson (1992), and Straubhaar (1996; 1997) surmise that cultural proximity may act as a defense against the onslaught of imported programming, especially in regions such as Latin America and the Caribbean, by driving an increase in national production based on demand.

However, what appears on the surface as localization in many Jamaican programmes is, in fact, thinly veiled American popular culture. The localization of global media products constitutes Euro-American programme modeling, which becomes a front for the homogenization of content. Although it would appear that there is a market for indigenous content, and that that demand is being filled, what is being produced on Jamaican television cannot accurately be defined as local. This is because glocalization in its true sense connotes a space in which the local and the global exist as some form of hybrid, wherein, as Ingleby (2006, p. 3) argues, people continue to draw identity from their locality and its traditions but are also keen to take advantage of global cultural offerings. This is not what exists on Jamaican television. In practice, there is an override of the local by the global. Local programmes, such as TVJ's *Rising Stars*, a spin-off of FOX network's *American Idol*, and CVMTV's *Model Search*, a spin-off of the CW's *America's Next*

Top Model, are only local insofar as they rely on Jamaican talent. There is an over-reliance on American programme modeling, as is evidenced by the programme formatting and styles of production (see Figure 2). A simple reliance on local talent is not enough to say that producers are drawing on the identity of the Jamaican locality. There is no true localizing element which would legitimize the production as a truly 'glocal' product.

Programme Name	Programme Type/Genre	Description and Format	American Version
<i>Rising Stars</i>	Performance reality	A talent show that showcases untapped Jamaican musical (singing) talent. Contestants sing live in front of an audience and three judges drawn from the entertainment industry. At the end of each show, viewers call in their votes and the persons with the highest number of votes proceed to the next round.	Fox TV's <i>American Idol</i>
<i>Watch and Win</i>	Game show	A challenge/question and answer show where kids compete for prizes	
<i>On a Personal Note</i>	Reality	Goes behind the scenes of the lives of Jamaican personalities	VH1's <i>All Access</i>
<i>Weh yu seh</i>	Infotainment	Vox pops bringing the views of Jamaicans nationwide	
<i>Island Dreams</i>	Reality	A home decorating and real estate show that highlights the architecture and decorating details of upper-class Caribbean residents. It also gives decorating and building tips as well as real estate advice.	The Home and Garden Channel's (HGTV) <i>Homes Across America</i>
<i>A Day in the Life</i>	Reality	A behind-the-scenes look at the lives of Jamaican celebrities	VH1's <i>The Fabulous Life</i>
<i>Family Fortune</i>	Game Show	Two families square off for cash prizes	<i>Family Feud</i>
<i>Hype Zone</i>	Entertainment	A music video programme that entails interviews and profiles Jamaican entertainment celebrities and highlights of popular parties. These are interspersed with music videos, and the show is presented by a host.	BET's <i>106 and Park</i>
<i>Groove Music</i>	Entertainment	A music video programme that profiles the party scene and airs local and overseas music videos chosen by viewers.	BET's <i>106 and Park</i>

Figure 2. Description of Local Programming on TVJ.

Drawing upon issues that are identifiably Jamaican, such as reggae or popular Jamaican folklore, would help to make the tone of such programmes more local. Jamaican television is thus not adapting to global media trends as cultural hybridity theorists would suggest, but rather, assimilating. The difference between the two is significant, as adaptation implies some sort of mutuality or harmony, such as that which exists between parts of a mechanism, while assimilation entails absorption to the point where things become identical. While the former suggests a symbiotic relationship, the latter denotes erasure. Therefore, the observation that privatization of TV media will eventually lead to an increase in local content is problematic, as the legitimizing element of the local is overwritten. As successful as *Royal Palm* is, it is more an exception than the norm in terms of local production. Local production is not necessarily increasing as the ratio of local to imported programming has remained fairly consistent over the past 30 years. In 1972, imported content comprised 71% of national airtime (Straubhaar, 1996); in 1988, it made up 76% of total television airtime (Dunn, 1988); and in 1999, it constituted 79% of overall television airtime (McCormick, 1999). Imported programming, predominantly from the U.S., continues to dominate television airtime in Jamaica.

This by-product of cultural proximity has not been manifest in Jamaica for obvious reasons, the primary one being Jamaica's economy. Jamaica's media industries do not have an adequate economic base to create the type of programming that can compete with the slick productions emanating from the U.S. Thus, although there may be a national demand for national productions, Jamaica's economic constraints bind and frame its cultural possibilities. Notwithstanding, when it comes to the operation of cultural proximity at the Caribbean regional level, the economic argument does not adequately explain the lack of such programming in Jamaica. Although Jamaica shares many cultural similarities, such as language, history, and political system, with other Caribbean countries like Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados, there is 0% regional programming on Jamaican television, despite the fact that places such as Trinidad and Tobago have fairly well-established local production industries. While a regional news agency, Caribbean News Agency (CANA) exists, its focus is news, not television programming. Another regional entity, the Caribbean Broadcasting Union (CBU) produces a regional television magazine programme, *Caribscope*, which airs features submitted by various Caribbean countries. However, this organization is primarily a collection and dissemination centre for programmes produced by member states, and it does not develop content. While it was a feature of Jamaican television in the 1990s, *Caribscope* no longer airs on local television. The presence of regional content is therefore not very strong, and it is absent from Jamaican television altogether.

As the U.S. is the largest regional exporter of television programmes, national television stations are inclined to import content from that country. As Straubhaar, Campbell, Youn, Champagnie, Elasmar & Castellon (1992) point out, in terms of actual programs and channels directly watched by audiences, the "global" flow of television outward from the U.S. is probably strongest among the Anglophone nations of the world, such as the English-speaking Caribbean. These are the countries or regions where U.S. television exports tend to be most popular and best understood, based on language and geographic proximity. In addition, U.S. television media exports tend to be more accessible in Jamaica because it falls under the direct reach or footprint of U.S. television satellites (Straubhaar, Campbell, Youn, Champagnie, Elasmar & Castellon, 1992).

Conclusion

There are strong implications for cultural imperialism embedded in the use of imported models for producing local television content. While “commercial assumptions and modes of presenting society to potential consumers may very well survive such adaptations” (Straubhaar et al., 1997, p. 2), meaning that such models may become so localized to the point that their original formatting is unrecognizable, this does not seem to be the case with Jamaica. It is well recognized that in places such as Mexico and India, for example, the adaptation of American programme models have been so successfully localized that a whole, separate product has emerged, as in the telenovela in Mexico and the Bollywood film industry in India. However, there is no such successful amalgamation of genres in Jamaica. Local programmes do not bridge the gap between local and global to the point where an original genre is actually created.

The market model of media management that characterizes media operations in Jamaica has a bias for imported content which is extended by, and reflected in, the tendency to model current local content from U.S. programming. This business model further compromises the growth of quality local productions, as the convenience of modeling discourages the creativity and innovation required to produce local content on a budget. Given the market imperatives of privatized media, it becomes much easier to adapt successful Western programme formats in Jamaica than to create productions of local originals.

As previously discussed, the trend in adapting or modeling successful Western genres is not a phenomenon specific to Jamaica. Under the new market conditions of the multi-channel cluster brought about by new technologies and increased privatization of service, the adaptation of successful and popular TV formats from one country to another is occurring on an increasingly regular basis (Malbon & Moran, 2006). However, although this is a global phenomenon, the implications of this trend for a country such as Jamaica are not the same as for more industrialized societies. As the social and economic capital of industrialized countries is similar, importation of models does not preclude the growth of local industries in the same way that it does for Jamaica. In Jamaica, the modeling of programme formats exacerbates the local industry's dependence on Euro-American cultural goods, as most of these genres originate in the U.S. and England. Programme modeling in Jamaica gives a false sense of local production, as it is, in fact, unoriginal. A developing caveat concerning this matter rests with the fact that issues of copyright protection are now arising concerning the adaptation of formats. In the future, the media industries of the U.S. and UK are set to collect massive returns on format exports, having already cornered the global market, as those importing these genres may eventually have to pay copyright fees (<http://www.researchandmarkets.com/reports/300159>, retrieved 2/24/2007). In this event, programme modeling in Jamaica may only be serving as a temporary crutch bearing up local production output. This poses a double jeopardy for local programming. As modeling does not contribute to the creation of original local content, local programming is already weak. If national commercial stations have to pay for adapting Western programming formats, what now passes for local content may eventually dissipate.

That imported programming still dominates airtime and whatever local productions that do exist model U.S. programming formats and genres, means that most of the cultural images to which Jamaican viewers are exposed through television are not their own. The implications of this are that the cultural

imperialism thesis is still relevant in this age of increased private ownership of media in Jamaica. The resulting homogenization of content that this type of media operation encourages may be viewed as an extension of U.S. domination of the television content market. As De Bens and Smaele (2001) conclude at the end of a similar study done on television content flow in Europe, national governments face an important task in dealing with the continued imbalance of television content on national airwaves. Not only does television media policy in Jamaica need to adopt a more cultural approach, but the audiovisual sector and broadcasting stations are too important to be left only to market forces for their general growth and evolution. American soap operas and entertainment offer little substance to address the needs of the local poor, uneducated, dispossessed, and unemployed.

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