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*Trans*National Media Flows: Some Key Questions and Debates

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Globalization and media flows have been scrutinized extensively in media and communication studies. Compared to the totalizing discourse of globalization, the scope of transnationalism offers a more tangible entry point for studying both the cohesive elements brought about by virtual and material flows and the social and cultural tension fields that arise between the varied scales of the national and the transnational. Departing from the theme of this special issue, and based upon both geopolitical and cultural considerations concerning mediation, this article aims to survey some of the material and symbolic implications of contemporary media flows. Theoretically, it draws upon two tropes, geopolitics and cosmopolitanism, which provide paradigmatic tools to reflect upon technological, spatial, and cultural dimensions of flows.

Introduction

The past two decades were marked by a range of political, economic, and cultural transformations that did not fit within the narrow, neat discursive scopes of the *national* and the *nation-state*. Popular and academic discourses identified two interlinked phenomena as key in generating significant changes in all spheres of life from personal relations to political institutions. The first was globalization and the multivalent material and symbolic de-nationalization processes it jump-started (which gained momentum in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall); the second was the industry-pushed expansion of the technological environment that made "digital" and "digitalization" everyday buzzwords and changed the media ecology in seemingly fundamental ways. The new global "space of flows" (Castells, 1989) enabled by the dual forces of the media and the market, and ensuing "techno-cultures" (Plant, 1997; Spender, 1995) were taken to explain vicissitudes regarded as liberating and empowering by some, and socially and economically detrimental by others. Theories of globalization, in conjunction with Internet studies,[1] often highlighted technologically mediated change and deterritorializing aspects dialectically as both driving forces and consequences of transborder flows. In the field of media and communication studies, the manifold debates on the increasingly global and digital nature of media

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[1] Here I use the label Internet studies broadly to connote the body of uncritical, celebratory scholarship that has treated technology and media digitalization since the 1990s.

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production, circulation, and consumption are certainly not limited to the above considerations. Traditionally, the political economy of communications has critically addressed the structural and cultural dominance of the West and the ensuing power inequalities through the production hubs and circulation networks of its culture industries (Garnham, 1990; Mattelart, 1994; McChesney 2000; Mosco, 1996; Murdock, 1993; Schiller 1976). Increased spatialization of media through a hyper-connected new media environment, diversity of user and audience experiences, and the cultural and everyday implications of such conversions have been taken up in both celebratory accounts of Internet studies and critically oriented media research rooted in cultural studies traditions (Canclini, 1995; Carey, 1989; Hall, 1992; Martin-Barbero, 1993; Miller & Slater, 2000; Morley, 2000).

In the *Myth of Media Globalization*, Hafez (2007) critically engages the mythic role globalization plays and the way it discursively obfuscates the fact of general media audiences' continued reliance on local, national, and regional media sources for entertainment and information. He advocates combining theoretical precision with empirical backbone for a refined understanding of globalization and critiques media and communication studies as inadequately accounting for insights and knowledge produced within other disciplines, such as political science, history, philosophy, and sociology. David Morley (2012) has advanced a similar line of critique: "In some versions of the story of globalization, we are offered what I would characterize as an abstracted sociology of the postmodern, inhabited by an un-interrogated 'we', who 'nowadays' live in an undifferentiated global world" (p. 61). In bouts of disciplinary self-reflection, scholars developed more critical research agendas such as transnationalism, seeking to curb the scholarly enthusiasm for globalization and the allegedly borderless, weightless nature of mobilities (Khagram & Levitt, 2008; Vertovec, 1999, 2009), and thus counter the totalizing discourses of reductionist intellectualism.

With the aim of contributing a nuanced approach to ongoing debates on the symbolic and material aspects of media flows, in what follows I discuss globalization, transnationalism, and the current media environment from several perspectives. To begin with, compared with globalist discourses, the framework provided by the concept of *transnational media flows* permits a sharper view of the political-economic and cultural dimensions of global circulation of media. Situated in space, such a scope allows for consideration of both transborder, trans-local mobilities of virtual products (e.g., media texts and content) and human connectivity under particular social circumstances. One of the broad questions in this discussion thus asks what "transnationalism" and "media flows" entail in different regional contexts and at different points in time.

After surveying various perspectives on globalization and briefly linking them to transnationalism, I further situate the discussion within the context of geopolitics, which crucially frames practices of mediation and reception as well as the politics of capital flows today. Whereas the scope of transnationalism affords more concretely defined approaches to spatio-temporal variability, critical geopolitics (and its subcategory popular geopolitics) raises the discussion to a level where political, locational, material, and popular-imaginary dimensions of flows can be addressed together, with more specificity. The following brief discussion of cultural cosmopolitanism prepares the ground for critical interrogation of presumed cultural consequences such as world-orientedness, openness, and fusion, which are often attributed to globalization and the complex forms of mediation it enables. Needless to say,

transnational flows of media and global commercial cultures are far from de facto engendering a cosmopolitan ethos and open-mindedness.

With respect to the critical geopolitical context that frames such mobilities today, I argue that what is needed is an intellectual scope within which to locate flows more in terms of open-ended *multiple interconnectivities* of distant locales and identities than as either change or continuity. Consumption of media content (e.g., news stories and fictional narratives) and technological gateways of connectivity continuously reposition global audiences and users vis-à-vis institutions, social events, and each other. Such relationally constructed interconnectivities of geographically dispersed subjects and public cultures have the potential, depending on context and locale, to channel practices and dispositions that are at once rooted and open, local and universal, uniting and dividing, causing cosmopolitanism to be experienced as simultaneously a near and distant possibility.

The purpose of this survey article is to critically consider, from a media and communication studies perspective, some of the key concepts and debates that underlie globalization, digitalization, and media flows. It is intended as a theoretical and conceptual overview with the discussion drawing upon both current examples and the author's own work on the politics of popular communication, mediation, and globalization (Christensen, 2012; Christensen & Christensen, 2013; Christensen & Jansson, forthcoming).

Media, Globalization, and Transnationalism

Globalization, technological shifts, and the question of flows have been discussed extensively in media and communication studies as well as in various other disciplines of the humanities and social sciences. The research and theorization on these transformations amount to a sizeable body of scholarship, part of which was perceptive and inspiring (e.g., Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991; Morley & Robins, 1995; Sassen, 2008, 2010; Silverstone, 1994, 2006). Another portion, despite being speculative, opened up new debate and questions (e.g., Appadurai, 1996; Barber, 1996; Beck, 2004; Fukuyama, 1992; Giddens, 1990). Sassen (2010), among others, has criticized generalistic discourses of globalization and analyses of global processes for inadequately accounting for the role of the national and subnational processes. The term "global," as McMillin (2007, p. 12) notes, is often conflated with large industrialized nations such as the United States and the United Kingdom, with particular attention placed upon North American media flows.

To start with media and communication studies, the prominence of technologies in everyday life reinforced the political and cultural significance of the media, prompting various paradigmatic responses and theoretical-empirical reflexes. Some of the central questions in media and communication research (particularly in the 1980s and 1990s) were related to the increasingly transborder nature of media exports (and mediated mobilities), capital flows (and ownership concentration), individualization of technology, and consumption practices. Such research agendas found great resonance in cultural studies and political economy overall. Indeed, media and communication studies owes a great deal to the critical media research that took shape in the 1960s, bringing power and ideology into the picture and shaping the intellectual and methodological components of the field (see Hardt, 1989). Definitions were not regarded

as self-given but as constructed. Meaning making was a social production process, and power and ideology were socially constructed. Critical researchers were interested in mediation and social negotiation processes of varying form and scale (Grossberg, 1984; Hall, 1979; Williams, 1990).

From a more distinctly media and communications perspective, questions concerning the transborder flow of Western cultural products and reproduction of *dependencies* arose from the 1960s onward. In his seminal critique, Herbert Schiller (1969, 1991) maintained that Western colonialism (sustained through the combined forces of the military-industrial complex and economies of scale) found new life through the spread of not only Western films and television programs—which other countries obtained for a fraction of the cost of producing local programming—but the market ideology embedded in them. According to Schiller's cultural imperialism thesis, capitalism relies on spatial expansion; exploitation of new foreign markets therefore involves exporting not only programming but also the liberal logic of market economy and Western cultural values.

The cultural imperialism thesis met with criticism from both audience studies scholars and those seeking to explicate the complexities of cultural circulation. In the 1991 article "Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity," Straubhaar challenged political-economic formulations of dependency and cultural homogenization and posited a model in which audiences, given the choice, prefer culturally proximate media products. Similarly, Thussu (1998) pointed to the regionalizing role of globalization and the significance of contra-flows in view of the rise of regional media powers such as Egypt, India, Venezuela, and Brazil. In *World Television: From Global to Local*, Straubhaar (2007) further elaborated on the multilayered and multi-spatial qualities of media flows and identity processes, postulating a complex understanding that local, regional, national, transnational, and global levels both diverge and intersect. As he put it, complexity theory provides "a sense of complex possibilities, hard to predict exactly, but bounded by certain factors, such as technology and economics, and patterned by others, such as cultural formations like genres that flow among television systems" (Straubhaar, 2007, p. 8). The nation-state form, alongside other systems and geographies, remains relevant and significant. Nederveen Pieterse's (2009) analysis of emergent global dynamics points to parallel patterns whereby power dynamics, especially in material forms, shift rather than remain stable:

> We have entered the era of the "rise of the rest": in an economic sense in that industries and multinationals in the South play an increasingly important role; in a financial sense with a view to sovereign wealth funds; in a policy and political sense, in international trade policy and the G20; but less so in a cultural sense. (p. 222)

Although no single article can provide an all-inclusive survey of the field, it will suffice to recap by observing that overall, critical research brought a specific outlook, moral dimension, and theoretical character to media and communication studies, yielding a wide array of theoretical and empirical perspectives on the production and mediation of cultural products. In the 1990s, and particularly in the area I broadly label here Internet studies, that critical approach suffered from the haze created by technology use and transborder connectivity via human, capital, and virtual mobility. Some highly intelligent but utopian accounts made too much of de-territorialization, placeless space of flows, globalizing virtual mobility, and the evening out of power hierarchies and gender imbalances. To give a

few examples from gender and technology research, Dale Spender (1995, p. xxiv; cited in van Zoonen, 2011, p. 133) wrote in *Nattering on the Net: Women, Power and Cyberspace* that "where women have made the technology accommodate their needs, their success knows no limits." Likewise, Sadie Plant in her *Zeroes and Ones: Digital Women and the New Techno Culture* suggested:

> In spite of or perhaps even because of the impersonality of the screen, the digital zone facilitates unprecedented levels of spontaneous affection, intimacy and informality, exposing the extent to which older media, especially what continues to be called "real life," come complete with a welter of inhibitions, barriers and obstacles sidestepped by the packet-switching systems of the net. (1997, p. 144; cited in van Zoonen, 2011, pp. 133–134)

Apart from the problematic dichotomization of old and new media and the tendency to frame digitality as de facto cosmopolitanizing machinery, Internet studies during that period was marked by an equally problematic juxtaposition of "the real" and "the mediated," or the "online" and the "offline" (see van Zoonen, 2011 for further discussion), as well as a clearly discernible cultural centrism. In return, reductionist constructions of globalization and technological change met with skepticism from both scholars of political economy (see Garnham, 2004; Mosco, 2004; Schiller, 2000) and researchers examining the social, political, and cultural dimensions of media and globalization from critical perspectives (Curran and Park, 2000; Downing 2003; Sparks, 1998 to name but a few). While Curran and Park (2000) noted that it has become "routine for universalistic observations about the media to be advanced in English language books on the basis of evidence derived from a handful countries" (p. 3), Hafez (2007) emphasized that global media technology is a "necessary but not sufficient condition for global communication" (p. 2).

Today, although narrowly constructed appreciations of technology and the media continue to appear (the Arab Spring and global protest movements having provided a discursive platform for a resurgence of such accounts), they are countered by more balanced, contextually situated studies on media and communication systems and practices. In sociology and anthropology, for example, globalization, digitalization, and the expansion of media flows prompted an increase in studies focusing on new subjectivities, consumption cultures, multipositionalities of both collective and individual agents, and everyday discursive strategies for maintaining presence and belonging in an environment where spatial location and national frames of "high" and "low" culture, "domestic" and "foreign" values no longer constitute clear-cut categories. Madianou (2012), focusing on Filipina mothers who are domestic workers in the UK in her research on the gendered aspects of global migration, found that though these women take on the traditionally male role of breadwinner, mediation offers interesting new practices of *distance mothering*, which enables continued virtual presence in family life but also brings additional responsibilities and reifies nationally and culturally specific gender roles. Similarly, research on transnational migrants' lives in everyday contexts underlines the importance of seeing flow and fixity—cultural expansion as well as protectionism—as equally persistent forces in the current environment (see Georgiou, 2006, 2012).

Having become the leitmotif of late modernity, in many accounts globalization is stripped of any specificity, but it owes its lineage to earlier schools of thought going back to 19th- and early 20th-century

intellectuals (Held & McGrew, 2000). As McMillan (2007) writes, "Globalization is a hybrid theoretical perspective drawing from theories of Americanization, capitalism, Westernization, and postmodernity, each textured by varying approaches such as social science, political science, and cultural and critical studies to name but a few" (p. 10). Culturalist versions of globalization theory are closely linked with postmodern theory, and inquiry into the modern versus postmodern condition in social theory has gradually morphed into theories of globalization (Lizardo & Strand, 2009; Tomlinson, 1999). As Lizardo and Strand (2009) surmise,

> it no longer makes sense to distinguish between postmodernism and globalization as separate dynamics or "domains" in social theory; the now dominant models that have become institutionalized and are routinely used by social scientists in order to conceive of those trends previously classified under "postmodernism" do so by way of conceptualizing globalization as the institutional embodiment of the cultural currents that were first isolated under the banner of postmodernity. (p. 63)

It should be emphasized that nuanced and critical versions of the globalism paradigm are far from losing their popularity and analytic purchase today. Nevertheless, references to transnationalism, as a specific way of looking at globalization, transborder phenomena, and transnational media in social sciences, have significantly increased.

In fact, in discussing transnationalism, Gustavo Cano (2005) tracked this increase by counting journal articles using the term in the Social Science Abstracts database. He found an enormous uptick, from a handful pieces in social science journals in the late 1980s to 1,300 articles by 2003. Any online search today reveals thousands of publications, events, theses, and dissertations on myriad aspects of transnationalism in disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, political science, geography, economics, and law, as well as in interdisciplinary fields such as ethnic and racial studies, migration studies, international relations, business, gender studies, and of course media and communication studies. Thus transnationalism provides a conceptually meaningful starting point from which to pinpoint a wide range of transformations commonly associated with the broader frames of political and economic globalization and media penetration (otherwise labeled as the mediatization of everyday and institutional life). Mediatization (see Krotz, 2007, 2008) can be described as a long-term, extensive process through which everyday personal, social, and cultural practices as well as institutional acts and procedures mesh with the structures and operations of media institutions and technologies, thus gradually transforming the fabric of social life. It has considerable relevance in the context of globalization and digitalization debates, for mediatization, unlike techno-deterministic accounts, allows technological change and social penetration of the media to be considered in a contextualist, constructivist, historicist manner.

Vertovec (2009), who observed that two thirds of the pieces Cano counted were published between 1998 and 2003, characterized transnationalism as *social morphology*, *type of consciousness*, *mode of cultural reproduction*, and *reconstruction of place and locality*. As Khagram and Levitt (2008) wrote:

> A transnational perspective does not assume away the importance of the global and local, or the nation-state system form. It invites us to think about how these categories change when we don't assume that they are automatically linked to particular types of territory or space (p. 4)

As the authors note, taken for granted categories such as citizenship and identity need to be engaged critically when they are constituted both within and beyond national borders (ibid.). While certain geographies and subjects remain more open to mobility and are less restricted by institutional control, national and territorial frames of reference retain their material and symbolic significance in other locales, a fact cookie-cutter approaches to "space" and "flow" fail to account for. Many recent studies on transnational groups and translocal connections have focused on everyday communication technologies such as mobile applications and online social networking, producing new insights. For instance, my own research (among others') on global mobility, space, and mediatized life reveals inter- and intra-group tensions ensuing from increased transnationality and migration. Such tensions manifest themselves not only as cultural interconnectivity and recognition, but also as closure and distrust in urban centers (see Christensen, 2012).

In sum, transnationalism, as an entry point, lends itself well to the study of "'emergent dynamics' (e.g. shifts in power geometries)" and social questions such as "*cosmopolitanization*" (Christensen, 2012, p. 5), which are closely connected with highly complex forms and practices of mobility and media use, and with structural inequalities. It provides a tangible paradigmatic locus from which to regard both the universalistic elements brought about by virtual and material flows, and the social and cultural tension fields between the various scales and domains of the *national* and the *transnational*. The computer waste that is transported to "less developed" national territories for dumping is as much part of transnational media flows as are the transborder virtual connections enabled by that very technology.

Culture and the Geopolitics of Flows

In political science and geography, the end of the Cold War signified the close of an era of ideologically oriented geopolitics premised upon a world with clear-cut borders and moral winners and losers. The conceptual framework of critical geopolitics (Ó Tuathail & Dalby, 1998; also see Burkart & Christensen, 2013, p. 4), developed as a poststructuralist conception and a subdiscipline of political geography in the aftermath of the Cold War, required thinking of geopolitics not only in terms of international relations and foreign policy, but as current economic and political shifts in which media flows and cultural elements play a key role. Media and culture are seen as powerful forces that impact power dynamics and are also shaped by the geopolitical climate of the day, in terms of both content and the direction of their flow. As such, critical geopolitics is distinct from postmodernist takes on globalism, which foreground "soft power" dimensions over "hard." Therefore, it remains important for this article's socio-spatial framing to step further into the intellectual echelon of critical geopolitics in an effort to grasp the multilayered aspects of media mobility/mediated mobility in a *contextualist* manner.

As Dittmer and Dodds (2008, p. 439) note, the impact of geopolitical discourse has become even more significant since the events of 9/11. Not only did the attacks feed into a U.S. public culture of fear

through both political discourse and mediated imaginaries, but the resulting events (such as the War on Terror) led to shifts in politico-cultural power hubs on global, regional, and local scales. As a case in point, Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi (2013), discussing the rising popularity of Turkish culture industries in the Arab world over the past years, observe:

> In a shifting geopolitical context in which Turkey is assuming an increasingly central role in the culture, politics and economics of the Middle East, the popularity of Turkish television drama captures the notion of *Neo-Ottoman Cool*, a deeply ironic notion when Ottomanism served as the antiquated Other for both Kemalist Turkey and the Arab countries born from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. (p. 18)

In their analysis of Arab public discourse about Turkish media, the authors find that Turkey is being *discursively reproduced* in the Arab public sphere via the flow of television dramas. Whereas some Turkish dramas conjure up an accessible modernity, others employ a counter-hegemonic narrative that puts Middle Easterners in the role of heroes (ibid.). According to Ó Tuathail (2006, p. 7; cited in Dittmer & Dodds, 2008, p. 444), geopolitical cultures result from a state's encounter with the world and are shaped by various factors: "a state's geographic position, historical formation, and bureaucratic organization, discourses of national identity and traditions of theorizing its relationship to the wider world, and the networks that operate within the state" (ibid.). The material bases and symbolic dimensions of such formations shift continuously, so capturing them fully necessitates the incorporation of a place and political geography lens (to see the origin and direction of cultural-capital flows at a given time in history) as well as a media and popular culture lens.

Thus it is particularly important here to account for a popular understanding of geopolitics—or popular geopolitics, as it was termed in its development as a subset of critical geopolitics (see Dittmer & Dodds, 2013; Dittmer & Gray, 2010)—in the context of the media flows and mediatization that fundamentally reframe social life. Transnational media flows and geopolitics come together as an ensemble generative of critique about how popular imagination, expression, and popular cultural products such as media texts position (and are positioned against) politics, space, and power. As mediated everyday imaginaries flow and circulate through an increasingly wide variety of communication channels, they are tightly enmeshed with both the territorial, geographic contexts they originate from and stream into, and the market forces and local-institutional ideologies that charter this mobility.

Going back to the theme of this special issue, trying to think critically and reflexively about the conceptual assemblage of "transnational media flows" with technological change and cultural and geopolitical aspects in mind provokes many challenging questions. One fundamental, deceptively simple question inescapably arises in discussion of transnational media flows: What exactly is it that is flowing? Further, what types of political, cultural, and moral geographies do such flows engender? The excerpt below from a Turkish daily newspaper provides a quick, simple example relative to the above-quoted study of Turkish TV dramas and Arab audiences:

>   With new stores opened in Iraq, Libya, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Mavi
>   Jeans General Manager Cüneyt Yavuz explains that popular Turkish television shows
>   have had a positive influence in increasing their regional sales. ("Mavi on the Rise,"
>   2012)

Another example is this excerpt about eBay from BBC News:

>   Transnationalism has come under scrutiny from international tax collectors because it is,
>   essentially, a way for people to sell things without customs or duty taxes. So, in sum,
>   eBay has fostered the sense of dedication amongst its community members: a common
>   identity that transcends national borders. (Krotoski, 2009)

A last quote, again from BBC News, concerns the publication of Mohammad cartoons:

>   The row over the Danish cartoons would probably have remained a local dispute
>   between some Muslims and a Danish newspaper had it not been for three factors: (1)
>   the rise of violent political Islam; (2) America's war on terror; AND (3) modern
>   transnational media. (Abdelhadi, 2006)

These examples can be multiplied to illustrate that "media flow" signifies multiple objects and phenomena (imagined, virtual, or actual), and that use of the terms *transnational* and *media* requires continuously, critically unpacking their components and scales rather than taking them as stable concepts. The quotes affirm that the political economic and cultural aspects are truly intertwined (which would not be saying anything new) but also show how this intertwined-ness yields highly complex new levels and forms of change and continuity, extension and contraction, that can only be understood from a critical geopolitical perspective.

To return to some of the suggestions made at the opening of this article, the complex forms and scales of *multiple interconnectivities* then create communities, as in the case of eBay: They invoke internationalism and "the national" in the same discursive frame as transnationalism through enactments of legislation and jurisdiction; they sell commodities and lifestyles, boosting national economies; and they create a spatial loop by turning local conflicts into translocal and global ones, as in the case of the Danish Mohammad cartoons, and reinventing the global in myriad ways in local-national imagination. At the heart of these human and spatial interconnectivities are bonding and bounding elements generating both unity and clash. They can take the form of commodities, ideas and ideals, and cultural icons that embody identity politics. From an analytical point of view, "the national" remains a primary actor in its own transnationalization *and* reification. More recent phenomena urge us to continue thinking critically about the types of virtuality and materiality that transnational connectivity engenders as the *trans* and the *national* merge and collide. Micro-blogging and bullying, for instance, prompt questions about public morality, free speech, policing, and national jurisdiction. Developments on a global political scale, such as the Occupy Movement, the Arab Spring and the rise of street protests, the Pussy Riot collective, and advocacy networks, may also impel us to rethink what constitutes a national and transnational

communicative space, citizenship practice, and public deliberation today. Here cosmopolitanism arises as a relevant frame of reference, as will be discussed shortly.

To continue, for a moment, with these latter examples: Transnationally mediated discussions on the events of the past two years that made up the so-called Arab Spring, primarily in North Africa and portions of the Middle East, have provided poignant examples of contextualization of the multi-scale interconnectivities linking the local, national, regional and the transnational. In deterministic frames, these counter-authoritarian movements initially tended to be linked to use of technology (e.g., Twitter) and the transnational media's purported role in prompting and sustaining such movements following an initial dramatic incident in Tunisia. In trying to grasp the specific characteristics that discursively produced the Arab Spring, the discussion so far has featured two related aspects that now come to the foreground: the mediated communicative spaces (i.e., technology) and geopolitical dynamics (i.e., shifts from local to regional to global significance) that gave the Arab Spring longitudinal and global dimensions.

The geopolitical dimension is explained by a local issue—the self-immolation of a street vendor in Tunisia—that transformed first into a national, then regional, then transnational wave of uprisings. As Christensen and Christensen (2013) noted, the 2011 uprisings in Bahrain resulted in an alliance with Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the U.S., while the Shia opposition was seen as connected to Iran, Syria, and Hizbullah. Since then, the opposition of countries such as Turkey, Israel, and the U.S. to the possibility of a more powerful Shia movement in the region (El Alaoui, 2013) has reinforced the global dimension, producing "a geopolitical feedback loop wherein local events and politics received international attention, which then rebounded back, influencing power geometries at the local/regional level (and back again)" (Christensen & Christensen, 2013, p. 253).

The Arab Spring came to be seen as a mediatized, global *meta-event* linked both broadly and specifically to multitudinous global, regional, and local questions (Christensen, 2013). Thus the Arab Spring, having led to the region's rebirth as a *popular discursive territory*, attained global symbolic value. Additional global momentum followed in the wake of the Arab Spring and the similar "movements of the squares" (Burkart & Christensen, 2013), such as Occupy Wall Street. More specific debates on such topics as Turkey's cosmopolitan Islamism as a model added new discursive aspects. All told, from a media and communication studies perspective, the Arab Spring's morphing into a global phenomenon through translocal, transnational interconnectivities and discursive spaces showcases both the *trans* and the *national* dimensions of flows in highly illuminating ways.

Cosmopolitan Media, Mediation of Cosmopolitanism

As noted elsewhere (Christensen, 2012), both cultural studies and political science have returned to cosmopolitanism to account for various developments and phenomena, from multiculturalism and marginal communities to global protest movements and environmental crisis. Within the humanities and social sciences, attempts to address society's reactions to new conditions, such as mediatization and globalization of everyday and social lives, have relatively frequently used cosmopolitanism as an approach to reflect upon the political, economic, legal, and cultural aspects of globalization and transborder mobility. Several factors have contributed to the return of cosmopolitanism (Brown & Held, 2011): the

global political rhetoric and escalating tensions in the aftermath of 9/11, environmental crisis, and multiple financial meltdowns on the one hand, and an ever-increasing interconnectivity adjoined to a sense of shared global destiny on the other. Here cosmopolitanism has relevance in the interrogation of the cultural dimensions of global flows and mediation. As Hansen (2010) has suggested, "Cosmopolitanism illuminates how persons and communities at the proliferating cultural crossroads of our time can dwell in productive tension with one another" (p. 163).

To be sure, cosmopolitanism has a long history and appears in different (often conflicting) conceptualizations, so the scholarly pursuit of conceptually designing a cosmopolitanism that is at once rhetorically rich, convincing, and practically applicable across the board remains a challenge. The Kantian, Enlightenment origins of cosmopolitanism equate it with rootlessness, abstraction from a particular local and cultural belonging (e.g., Hannerz, 1990), and elitism. As Costa (2005) concludes, there is "no precise set of normative claims that unify all cosmopolitan positions" (p. 258). Cosmopolitan thought's many different definitions and trajectories include moral, political, legal, economic, and cultural cosmopolitanisms, which are not mutually exclusive scopes but heuristic categories of distinction between its various tenets. Simply put, there is no grand unifying theory of cosmopolitanism, but rather a wide array of principles and moral-ethical dispositions that are central to its variants and, at times, at odds with each other.

Hansen (2010, pp. 153–156), based on Kleingeld and Brown (2006), has suggested that whereas economic cosmopolitanism offers a critique of neoliberalism, moral cosmopolitanism revolves around conceptions of equality, justice, impartiality, and open-mindedness. Both Nussbaum (2002), who emphasizes universal morality, and Appiah (2006), who points to the significance of local culture and tradition, and hence "rooted cosmopolitanism," acknowledge the challenge of reconciling local and universal moralities. In a world of strangers, Appiah (2006) remarked, cosmopolitanism (or at least the potential for it) is what we have in common. Cultural cosmopolitanism provides "the capacity to mediate between national cultures, communities of fate and alternative styles of life" (Held, 2002, pp. 57–58) and concerns itself with questions of allegiances to local and intercultural values, hybridity, and cultural fusion. Werbner (2008) connected universal enlightenment and local specificity via the concept of "vernacular cosmopolitanism," pointing to how theorists of cosmopolitanism from the 1990s onward sought to go beyond elitist and solely universalist versions by incorporating contextual, local, spatial elements (Christensen, 2012, p. 892). Stevenson (2002, 2003) underscored the importance of bringing multiculturalism, cultural citizenship, and cosmopolitanism together in an ensemble connected to questions of "identity formation within and between national societies" (cited in Christensen, 2012, p. 892). This emphasis on identity formations and cultural positionalities *within* and *between* locales must be accounted for if one is to grasp, in a geopolitically situated contextualist manner, the social contingencies that result from a multitude of changes and continuities in the global order.

Cosmopolitanism, then, taken here in its simplest sense, implies a culturally open disposition—an invitational stance and hospitality to the world and to the Other. As Delanty (2006) suggests, when opposed to notions of globalization and universality, and plurality and particularism, "the cultural dimension of cosmopolitanism consists more in the creation and articulation of communicative models of world openness in which societies undergo transformation" (p. 35). Some veins of media and

communications research and popular discourse, have conflated cosmopolitanism with transnationalism by equating global media flows or human mobility with de facto cosmopolitanization of culture and political values (i.e., the automatic rise of a cosmopolitan democracy). On the one hand, at some level, mediated interconnectivity and globalization imply "the erosion of distinct boundaries dividing markets, states, civilizations, cultures, and not least of all the lifeworlds of different peoples" (Beck, 2007, para.1). On the other hand, globalization exacerbates economic and representational inequalities, and gives way to exclusivisms and tension, as in the case of Mohammad cartoons. In a world of continuously shifting power relations and values, the end result is the experience of interconnectivities as both bonding and bridging forces, and vehicles for boundary maintenance and creation of new borders.

As for the cultural dimensions of flows and the significance of adding a cosmopolitan dimension to the current discussion, a few aspects come to the fore. In the 1990s, when free trade, increased travel, and connectivity became part of the social reality of at least some portions of humanity, a discursive lens like critical geopolitics was needed to account for (a) how otherness was framed more as a multiplicity of voices and visions than binary opposites, and (b) the significance of media and culture in understanding power. Through their consumption of fictional, nonfictional, and interactive media forms, audiences and users in geographically distinct areas are increasingly positioned in relational terms. As discussed earlier, 9/11 brought further shifts in the positioning of commercial and state powers, one example being the spike in popularity of Turkish culture industries (bearing their own intrinsic ideologies and power aspects) and commercial goods in the Middle East. The Arab Spring is another distinct example of how a local incident transformed into global unrest and a mediatized meta-event, through which both universal and particularistic stances and questions were articulated via local, national, regional and transnational media. Cosmopolitanism therefore has increased relevance in these debates, given the possibility of a cosmopolitan frame of reference enabled by both political and economic shifts and accompanying turmoil (pertaining to macro power dynamics), and mediated interconnectivities (pertaining to the everyday realm). As Hansen (2010) points out, "While it esteems individual distinctiveness, agency and experience, cosmopolitanism presumes as mentioned an intersubjective rather than atomistic notion of the person" (pp. 156–157).

In sum, a cosmopolitan ethos does not automatically emerge with a globalized economy and mediated or actual encounters. The rise of racism and xenophobia (in Europe and elsewhere) and the human suffering due to illegal immigration and wars flout the visions of hope and fusion that accompany some versions of globalism. Meanwhile, "Big Media" often fail to convey a cosmopolitan imagination. Yet, through alternative circuits of visibility, solidarity, and connectivity at the cultural and intersubjective levels, the absorption of cosmopolitan dispositions remains possible. The "invitational" (Hansen, 2010) aspect of cosmopolitanism, then, has relevance and purchase in attempts to grasp the symbolic dimensions of globalization and media flows. Since selves and others are also shifting in terms of both state politics and cultural intersubjective positioning, a critical geopolitics of interconnectivities that accounts for national and transborder specificities remains integral to such considerations.

Final Considerations

In considering the rapidly, radically diversifying nature of politics and media in the late 1980s and early 1990s that this article pointed to at its outset, the globalization paradigm provides a discursive tool for emphasizing the macro dimensions that have yielded social and technological transformations. The ostentatious discourse of a "global, borderless economy," "placeless flows," and a dichotomization of the real and the virtual glossed over materialities. Vertovec (2009) notes that "just as transnationalism is a manifestation of globalization, its constituent processes and outcomes are multiple and messy, too" (p. 2). This overview essay has presented a number of views and discussions with the aim of expanding on the consideration of transnational media flows from cultural and geopolitical perspectives. The overall intent has been to offer reflections and indicate the directions these debates may take going forward.

The Oxford Dictionary defines flow as "the action or fact of moving along in a steady, continuous stream." The examples discussed here suggest that steadiness and continuity need to be seen alongside flux and disconnection. A complex array of factors in play continuously destabilizes the meaning and manifestions of "space," "place," and "power," posing both old and new questions about media, culture, and politics and their intersections in various scales. Altogether, globalization and mediated interconnectivities yield strong currents that impact politics and relations of production as well as identity processes.

It remains important that globalization and "global media" be unpacked through specific theoretical and methodological agendas (such as those afforded by considerations of transnationalism and critical geopolitics) in grounded frameworks. Finally, the recent shifts in politics have generated a notable uptick in publications addressing the political and legal dimensions of cosmopolitanisms. Critically oriented empirical analyses are clearly needed to intervene in the debate and address the prospects of the cosmopolitan vision for cultural considerations from the viewpoint of media and communication studies.

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