

TELEVISION STUDIES – OCW UC3M

Topic VIII. Television, National Identity and Globalization

Outline:

This topic will take a close look at television as part of the profound economic and cultural changes resulting from globalization processes. We will take an introductory and heterogeneous approach to the way that television has represented and / or participated in globalization processes. The first part will define the importance of global television events such as the Olympics and its relation to national identities and economic flows. A second part will deal with the creation of transnational television productions via runaway productions and, in the framework of public policies to promote audiovisual content, European and international co-production. We will address the impact that these production mechanisms have had within the configuration of national and transnational identities in the context of postmodern societies.

A third section will discuss the relevance of international flow formats in contemporary television, both in fiction and in nonfiction. This section will use Albert Moran's theoretical concepts so as to address the processes of adaptation and the rise of globalized international formats. The last section will deal with the emergence of transnational channels thanks to the rise of satellite and cable television. It will look at both Western societies (ARTE and the European identity, CNN as an international news channel) and geographical areas where the development of television was slower, and where mechanisms of information that is alternative to the dominant representation are established (Al Jazeera and the pan-Arab identity). The screenings illustrate globalization on TV with examples of runaway productions, co-productions and remakes of global formats, while the compulsory reading is about the TV news channel Al Jazeera.

Specific objectives of the topic:

- Knowledge of the social function played by television and its relevance to understanding contemporary cultural change in the globalization processes.

- Knowledge of the institutional factors that determine the creation and reception of television texts in a global context.
- Appreciation of diversity and multiculturalism through the knowledge of television texts from other countries.
- Knowledge of television theory and its application to media story-telling.

Detailed content:

- Imperialism. Industrial and consumer capitalism.
- The television representation of globalization.
- International co-productions.
- The global formats.
- The international networks.

Introductory notes:

The analysis of the relationship between television and globalization must be framed by two elements. First, the use of concept of “cultural imperialism” in the field of media studies. *How to Read Donald Duck (Para leer al Pato Donald* in Spanish) is written by Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart in Chile in 1971 is a classic example:

“Underdeveloped peoples take the comics, at second hand, as instruction in the way they are supposed to live and relate to the foreign power center. There is nothing strange in this. In the same way Disney expels the productive and historical forces from his comics, imperialism thwarts real production and historical evolution in the underdeveloped world. The Disney dream is cast in the same mold which the capitalist system has created for the real world. Power to Donald Duck means the promotion of underdevelopment. The daily agony of Third World peoples is served up as a spectacle for permanent enjoyment in the utopia of bourgeois liberty”.

Secondly, the form that the process of globalization has taken in the area of communications, summarized by Eoin Devereux in *Understanding the Media* (2003):

1. The growing level of connectedness between individuals, societies and nation states at a global level.
2. The reduction in the distance between individuals, societies and nation states in terms of both time and space facilitated by technological developments such as the Internet and other media. These are usually referred to as Information Communication Technologies (ICTs).
3. The development of ICTs has not only resulted in major changes in the workings of the mass media but also allows the rapid transfer of information, knowledge and capital.
4. Increased awareness of global phenomena in people's (local) lives.
5. The globalization of culture and economic activity as a direct result of the activities of powerful transnational capitalist organizations.
6. It tends to assume a decrease in the significance of other kinds of identities such as the ethnic, the local, the regional or the national in people's everyday lives.
7. Globalization has increased the possibility of greater reflexivity amongst social actors. It offers the potential to human beings to become more critical of their immediate environment by allowing them to compare their experiences with those living in other societies or under different political arrangements.
8. Critics of globalization argue that it has resulted in even more exploitation of the Third World.

We can define four main features of television globalization and transnational television.

- The television representation of globalization.

Here we can define two big trends:

- The constant relevance of global media events. The case of the Olympics, whose international ratings are bigger in each occasion. The global and the national content during the broadcast.
- The globalized world represented in fiction. Traditionally, in spy dramas as *I Spy* (1965-1968), now in dramas with an international cast, multiple localizations and complex narrative structures, as *Lost* (2004-2010) and *Heroes* (2006-2010).

- International co-productions.

Co-production is a way to combine economic resources to produce ambitious programming, sometimes as part of public policy (the Ibermedia program and EURIMAGES - European Cinema Support Fund) and other to save budget money (as in the runaway productions of American movies in Canada and Europe). But sometimes they are in danger of becoming an identity “pudding”. See this opinion of a producer cited in the book *Global Television: Co-Producing Culture* (2008) by Barbara J. Selznick:

“I saw a German/Italian/French co-production. It involved three hour-long programs. A German girl went to Italy and met a young Italian. They fell in love. But the daughter of a French banker, who was more attractive than the German girl, eventually ended up with the Italian boy. . . . It’s what they call ‘Europudding.’ It won’t work. To construct a plot that should appeal to all three publics is too artificial”.

- The global formats.

International remakes of both fiction and non-fiction programs are very common in the television marketplace. Competition programs as the Dutch *Big Brother* and fiction series as Colombian *Betty, la fea* have so many version that are global formats.

Albert Moran, editor of the book *TV Formats Worldwide: Localizing Global Programs* (2009), defines the challenges from the point of view of production:

“As part of their franchising operation, global copyright owners of formats typically provide the services of a ‘travelling’ specialist. Working with a local counterpart – whether in the shape of an individual or a team – this visitor will help fashion a national, customized version of the program package. Usually, the consultant has had a good deal of background in the startup of new versions of the format program, is experienced in common problems besetting the teething stage of production, and is concerned to help the new version of the format program repeat its success in other territories. Consultancy of this kind means carrying specific production know-how, valuable industrial experience, and a specialized awareness of production organization and routines to all corners of the world”.

- The international networks.

Traditionally, channels operated in one specific country. Now, with the arrival of satellite and cable television, international networks are very common. We can establish some categories:

- International news channels: CNN, Euronews, BBC World News, Russian Today, France 24...
- International entertainment channels: Fox, AXN, Star, HBO Latin America...
- International cultural channels: 3sat, TV5, ARTE...