

UNDERSTANDING THE FLOW OF SYMBOLIC GOODS IN THE GLOBAL CULTURAL ECONOMY*

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ABSTRACT

The media imperialism thesis is the most widespread systemic account of cultural globalization. In this paper, I argue that the media imperialism approach, as a global version of mass culture theory, shares with it many of its analytical and empirical limitations. While ethnographic approaches in global media studies provide a useful perspective from which to correct some of the empirical flaws of the media imperialism paradigm they are unable to produce an alternative account of equal analytic and systemic scope. I attempt to remedy this situation by proposing a “sociostructural” approach to theorizing the process of cultural globalization which is both consistent with recent research in the sociology of taste and in line with the empirical evidence on transnational patterns of cultural flows and culture consumption. This approach takes seriously the changing macro-structural context of cultural recap-tion across developed and developing societies in late modernity as well as the irreducibly relational and sources of the demand for symbolic goods. I close by comparing the theoretical and empirical implications of this approach with competing macro-level perspectives in the anthropology of globalization.

INTRODUCTION

The literature on globalization and culture is currently divided between two competing approaches. One is a systemic macrolevel perspective usually referred to as the cultural/media imperialism thesis. The other is a more processual microlevel approach that attempts to describe and theorize the way in which the consumption of global culture is integrated into everyday routines and traditional ways of life usually by way of detailed observations of local behavior. The media imperialism approach is distinctive in the close attention that it pays to macrostructural inequalities in cultural exchange, patterns of ownership of cultural industries and infrastructural and technological divides across the economically dominant and dominated regions of the world. It is also notable in its attempt to decry these inequalities. Media imperialism theorists see cultural globalization mainly as bringing with it the end of national cultural diversity. They conceive of cultural globalization as

mainly sapping the vitality of indigenous cultural worlds as these are replaced by the homogenous sterility of a U.S. dominated global popular culture industry. For these reasons the media imperialism approach can without much worry about oversimplifying, be thought of as a—Frankfurt-school inspired—global version of “mass culture theory” (Hannerz 1991: 109, 125; Sreberny-Mohammadi 1997: 49).

Like mass culture theory before it, the cultural imperialism paradigm has come under recent critical fire by the more micro-oriented global audience reception studies on the empirical side and by more contextual, agency-centered approaches to glocalization on the theoretical front (Appadurai 1996; Robertson 1992). These analysts have noted the apparent lack of empirical adequacy of the media imperialism approach, as well as its lack of attention to issues of human agency in considering the cultural object-receiver link (Griswold 1987). Global media theorist Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi is representative of this new critical attitude as she is ready to abandon the cultural imperialism perspective as a useful paradigm. She notes that “[t]he notion of ‘cultural imperialism’ became one of the staple catchphrases of the field of international communication. Yet from the beginning, the concept was broad and ill-defined, operating as evocative metaphor rather than precise construct, and has gradually lost much of its critical bite and historic validity” (1997: 48). This stance is in agreement with Griffin (2002), who adds that “... the theories of dependency and cultural imperialism, which arose in reaction to ethnocentric, Cold War notions of post-colonial development and modernization, have constituted a necessary but insufficient stage of macro-level analysis.” In this paper, I attempt to go beyond the narrow conceptual straitjacket of the media imperialism paradigm while also noting the insufficiency of micro-empiricist critiques like “...more recent postmodern conceptions of ‘globalization’ lack coherence and specificity.”

However, in contrast to Griffin’s proposed solution to the problem, which involves a renewed emphasis on ethnographic studies of local strategies of engagement with global media products I propose that we need a theoretical reconstruction on a sounder sociological basis of a systemic approach to cultural globalization and global culture consumption in a way that goes beyond the narrow localism and fragmented empiricism of ethnographic approaches. It is true that the more empirically oriented micro-phenomenological approaches that have recently challenged the media imperialism thesis have the advantage of being closer to the local reality of dissemination and consumption of cultural goods. Unfortunately, they have the disadvantage of losing the systemic and macro-structural feel of the cultural imperialism orienting strategy (Schiller 1976, 1992, 1998), which as noted by Boyd-Barrett (1998) while not being able to deal well with issues of meaning, audience and reception remains unrivaled in its sound grasp of political economy. These micro-constructivist approaches tend to be primarily oriented to detailed empirics and the subjective discursive orientations of global

cultural audiences. In this sense they leave the job of reconstructing a theoretical account that might help explain the actual macro-level patterns of culture consumption and audience segmentation that can be observed in the global arena largely unfinished.

It can be said then that if the cultural imperialism thesis is mass culture theory in global form the contextual approaches leave us with no other systematic and truly macrostructural perspective to replace it. This is in spite of the fact that they do provide useful empirical challenges of the media imperialism thesis, which can be the fodder for further theoretical development. Because this last endeavor is seldom undertaken by analysts of the more constructivist persuasion popular in cultural studies instead of theoretical or analytic reconstruction we are left with a plethora of disconnected observations of localized practices and consumption styles across the global arena (for instance see the papers collected in Murphy and Kraidy 2003). What is lacking therefore is a theoretical framework that may help explain more macro-level patterns of national and transnational cultural consumption (as was the promise of the old media imperialism approach), but that also provides an account of the role of symbolic goods in local relational contexts. That is, as Hannerz (1991: 110) notes "...an overall conceptualization of contemporary culture which incorporates the pervasiveness of globalization" and which transcends the ethnographic penchant for telling "... a myriad of stories."

This new theoretical perspective on cultural globalization—which I term a "sociostructural approach"—is consonant with the "glocalization" (Robertson 1992) and neo-Smithian (Cowen 2002) rejection of the media imperialism perspective. In particular it takes into consideration the latter perspective's emphasis on the continuing vitality and possible resurgence of local cultural variety even in the wake of increasing transnationalization and commodification of products, peoples and ideas (Cowen 2002). The sociostructural perspective offered here however primarily draws on various strands of the sociological literature on culture and consumption rather than on the Marxist political economy tradition of media studies that fuels the media imperialism approach, the neoclassical economics characteristic of the market-approach or the post-structuralist cultural anthropology that animates most ethnographic empirical fieldwork on global culture consumption.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: in the next section I show how the media imperialism thesis shares many of the same flaws at a global level as older mass culture theories displayed at a societal level of analysis. In the following section I go on to outline an alternative approach to the study of global media and arts flows which takes seriously the social constitution of demand for symbolic goods. I then proceed to develop the empirical and theoretical implications of this stance toward the expected patterns of flow of cultural goods in the global symbolic economy. I close by comparing these implications to alternative approaches to understanding the global patterning of cultural flows in the contemporary world system.

A SOCIOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF THE MEDIA IMPERIALISM APPROACH

The deficiencies of the cultural imperialism approach to the study of globalization and culture are eerily similar to those that plagued older mass culture theories, of which DiMaggio (1987: 440) provides the most succinct summary. The virtue of the media imperialism approach is that it calls attention to the systemic and global-level interconnections between cultural consumption patterns and the hierarchical core-periphery structure of the world system (Lee 1979). However, like mass culture theory before it we can trace the media imperialism thesis' current difficulties in failing to describe empirical patterns of consumption to the fact that "... much of its appeal [is] ideological" (DiMaggio 1987: 440). In the case of contemporary media imperialism theory the basic parameters of the approach revolve around a reworking of Gramscian notions of cultural hegemony from the perspective of a Frankfurt school inspired attention to the possible "ideological" role played by the products of the global leisure and entertainment industries.

In place of the domestic hegemony of the national capitalist class the global popular culture industries are seen as sustaining the global hegemony of the American (or Euro-American) multinational capitalist class by promoting certain "Western" or "American" values and ideas (Schiller 1976, 1998), a notion that did carry some weight in the immediate postwar context (Boyd-Barrett 1998). However, like mass culture theory before it which "...by the mid-1970s...had been decisively rebutted on both empirical and theoretical grounds" (DiMaggio 1987: 440) the media imperialism paradigm has begun to enter a degenerative stage of increased empirical disconfirmation. Most of the recent work on heterogeneity, glocalization and the "dialectic of homogeneity and difference" inspired by globalizing trends (Appadurai 1996), and the empirical studies of situated consumption practices of global popular culture have on the whole failed to support most of the predictions of the media imperialism thesis at the point of the receiver-object link.

Like the previously dominant mass culture paradigm, the contemporary media imperialism approach attempts to draw an unproblematic line of connection between oligopolistic and Western dominated popular culture industries and homogenizing, dehumanizing and ideological culture consumption practices on the part of dominated peripheral masses. Most research has shown that on the contrary, the consumption of Western cultural products can coexist happily with practices of resistance, opposition and even indifference toward the West on the part of non-Western populations (During 2005). The upshot of these studies has been the realization that global popular culture products can be put to many unintended uses, as when Palestinian youth draw on the oppositional stylings of American Hip Hop music to make sense of and vocalize their struggle (Aidi 2002).

THE MODEL OF RECEPTION IN MEDIA IMPERIALISM THEORY

It is important to note that the *some* conception of the relationship between the consumer and the object of consumption has to be part of any theoretical effort (however, “systemic”) to understand the structure and functioning of cultural flows in modern societies (and in the global system). This is the case whether we take a macrolevel or mesolevel perspective or a more grounded observational approach of situated practices. Thus, any attempt to reconstruct a macrolevel theory of global cultural flows must deal with the role that consumption of symbolic goods plays at the level of situated consumption practices and micro-relational contexts.

For instance, the conception of the individual-cultural object link in media imperialism accounts is usually left *implicit* (due to its focus on large scale patterns of industry structure, ownership and product flows). It is fairly clear however, that the underlying model is one of a largely passive audience, especially in film and television consumption studies. This audience is theorized as incapable of engaging in “oppositional” decodings of the cultural object (Hall 1980). The consumer is thus conceived as being left vulnerable to the ideological encodings of the producers and as having little or no ability to counteract the dominant reading.

In theoretical lineage the implicit model of the receiver-cultural object link used in the media imperialism tradition is *behaviorist* with the media flows conceptualized as the “stimuli” and the alleged effects (i.e. consumerism [Schiller 1992, 1998] or support for American values and practices [Delacroix and Ragin 1978]) on the audience as the “responses.” This was the same “Pavlovian” model that Gans (1999[1974]) dismissed in his classic analysis of the “mass culture critique.” This notion of “media effects” while having a long history in social studies of media use has come under withering critique in recent research (see Gauntlett 1998 for a critical review; for an earlier and equally critical review, see Gans 1999[1974]: 42-56). This reconsideration of the effects tradition has noted the lack of reliability and validity of the alleged “effects” that the mass media is supposed to reliably produce. Gauntlett (1998: 120) concludes by noting that “[i]f, after over sixty years of a considerable amount of research effort, direct effects of media upon behaviour [sic] have not been clearly identified, then we should conclude that they are simply not there to be found.”

Yet from the media imperialism point of view, the “effects” of global cultural packages on “human consciousness” are self-evident and unquestionable (Alexander 2003:162-163; Inda and Rosaldo 2008). Audiences are assumed to engage in very little higher order processing of media messages, and instead the effect of media flows on the “senses” is emphasized. This is what has been deemed the “hypodermic model” of media effects (Liebes and Katz 1990). Schiller (1998: 4) provides a clear

example of the media imperialist version of culture consumption. Speaking of the ability of global corporate giants to synergistically combine their products (making novels, into films, films into TV series, etc.), he notes that

The net *effect* of such total cultural packages on the *human senses* is impossible to assess but it would be folly to ignore... In one poll, data was assembled and tables constructed on 'What People Think They Need.' The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) received some of its support in Mexico ... from the people's 'Hunger for US Goods,' seen 'on imported television programs and in movies.'... The worldwide impact of the transnational cultural industries, it can be argued, may be as influential as other, more familiar, forms of (US) power: industrial military, scientific... People everywhere are consumers of (mostly) American images, sounds, ideas, products and services.

This is the facet of the media imperialism approach that has come under the more strenuous attack by audience reception and globalization approaches, who instead emphasize the "local uses" of global media for identity construction and constitution (Gillespie 1997[1995]). From the point of view of these alternative stances the individual/cultural object relationship is conceived as one of at least partial underdetermination and symbolic mediation. Defenders of the cultural imperialism thesis (Boyd-Barrett 1998; Hallin 1998) contend that this characterization of the cultural receiver in media-imperialism analysis—as relying on a "hypodermic model" of media effects—can sometimes devolve into a overly convenient argument against a meaningless "straw man" (Curran 1990). While this is indeed sometimes true the fact is that proponents of the media imperialism thesis simply have not devoted any time and effort to developing an *explicit* model of cultural reception that is consistent with the ethnographic evidence coming from studies done from an "active audience" standpoint.¹

As shown by the bulk of recent research on "audiences," (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998), cultural appropriation of media content and messages are instead of being directly determined by producer intentions or "objective" message contents, subject to the interpretative contingencies of the local subcultural and relational micro-environment.² The meanings afforded by cultural content are thus conceived as being in a constant state of negotiation in the context of small groups (Fine 1979). These are only "settled" provisionally for the purposes of navigating local social worlds and creating interpersonal linkages (or drawing social boundaries). The basic model here is one of culture consumption as *expressive*. Culture consumption (whether local or global) allows socially situated groups and individuals to enact, reclaim and sometimes transform socially constructed identities. In this manner,

culture consumption communities are seen as being capable of connecting in creative ways local cultural practices to global cultural flows.

This identity-construction approach continues to carry with it an implicit version of the “theory of needs” characteristic of the “uses and gratifications” perspective in media studies (Blumler and Katz 1974). Only that from this perspective identity expression is the most important of these needs. Furthermore, insofar as identity construction and identity negotiation are seen as the most important “uses” that can be made of the media, the theoretical model tends toward exposing the ways that social constructed “subjectivities” (whether conceived at the individual or at the group level) are confronted with broader discursive practices and symbolic systems represented by global media and cultural flows. From the point of view of this neo-phenomenological approach to identity what tends to be understated is the extent to which the uses of culture consumption are not only relegated to expressivity and identity construction, but to *social* ends conceived in a more mundane way.

These social uses of culture are not necessarily disconnected from identity construction but are essentially and irreducibly relational (DiMaggio 1987; Frith 1998; Ikegami 2006; Lizardo 2006), as cultural goods come to form an essential part of the content of conversation that animates local interaction rituals (Collins 1981). In this manner, culture consumption comes to be intimately related to conversation and “sociability” (in Simmel’s [1949] sense of interaction for its own sake), which is a point that is obscured by the undue neo-phenomenological attention to cultural meanings and subjective narratives of the ethnographic approach. Thus, the *practical* uses of culture outweigh those that can be accessed by way of relying on the explicit discourse and textual productions of situated audiences. This alternative relational stance on the cultural-object individual link offers a bridge between these neo-phenomenological approaches and the sociostructural model offered here, and which I proceed to outline in the following section.

WHAT IS CULTURE GOOD FOR? A SOCIOSTRUCTURAL APPROACH

An example of this more “mundane” social role of culture consumption is offered by John Fiske (1987), who points to the pivotal role that arts and popular culture consumption play in facilitating *social interaction*—by way of serving as topic for conversation—for contemporary “mass” audiences. For Fiske, while there has been a lot of critical attention devoted to “... the mass media in a mass society,” a charge that can easily be made about media imperialism analysis when conceived as a global mass culture theory. Fiske notes however that most analysts have tended to ignore “... the fact that our urbanized, institutionalized society facilitates oral communication at least as well as it does mass communication.” Although the household is now the primary

site of leisure culture consumption, it is important not to forget that most individuals "... belong to or attend some sort of club or social organization. And we live in neighborhoods or communities. And in all of these social organizations we talk. Much of this talk is about the mass media and its cultural commodities." For Fiske, while these cultural commodities take on primarily expressive functions, they can also help in the more everyday life work of sustain-ing routine social relations, enabling the representation of "... aspects of our social experience in such a way as to make that experience meaningful and pleasurable to us. These meanings, these pleasures are instrumental in constructing social relations and thus our sense of social identity" (Fiske 1987: 77-78).

DiMaggio (1987: 442-444), drawing on the foundational work of Douglas and Isherwood (1996), provides a framework in which the social uses of culture take precedence over its more "expressive" functions and which does not suffer from the implicit textualism of neo-Foucauldian perspectives in which lone individuals (or entire subcultures) are seen as confronted with overarching significatory structures. Furthermore, this more socio-structural framework can help us understand the difference—sometimes elided in media imperialism accounts (and also some ethnographic observations) in their haste to connect patterns of media consumption with values related to American-style "consumerism"—between the consumption of *material* versus *media and aesthetic* culture. The reason why this distinction is important concerns the greater facility of media and arts-related culture to figure in a more diverse array of interaction opportunities outside of familiar local settings: "material goods are physically present and visible, whereas cultural consumption ... is invisible once it has occurred. This evanescent quality makes artistic experience, described and exploited in conversation, a portable and thus potent medium of interactional exchange" (DiMaggio, 1987: 442-443).

Sociostructural trends towards increasing geographic mobility of peoples, media and material and financial goods within and across post-industrial and developing societies (Appadurai 2008[1996]; Hannerz 1990), in fact *increase* the importance of the "portable" knowledge—or "embodied cultural capital" (Bourdieu 1986; Holt 1998)—produced by the media, arts and popular culture industries. These transformation concomitantly decrease the importance of other less "portable" markers of social position—i.e. the customized material goods of the old upper middle class (McCracken 1991)—as generators of social interaction and as practical tools for the formation of both bridges across social positions and "fences" across socially constructed social identity markers (Douglas and Isherwood 1996).

Thus, the consumption of global media and popular culture should be expected to become most important not in unobservable processes of identity constitution but in mundane and observable conversational rituals. This is consistent with the position of Simon Frith (1998: 4) who notes that "[p]art of the pleasure of popular culture is talking about; part of its meaning is talk ...". This has the consequence

that global cultural flows that are not useful to sustain local encounters and to suffuse local interaction with useful fodder for its maintenance will not figure as important in the local lifeworld of consumers regardless how “colonized” the national media is by these foreign influx of popular culture. Thus most of the “negotiation” and resignification practices enacted vis a vis global culture occur in the context of social interaction in small groups (Fine 1979).

It is in this sense that we can connect micro-constructivist concerns with the role of culture in local relational and cultural transactions, with macro-level analyses of global cultural influences and the growing influence of transnational (and regional) popular culture industries. For instance in her study of Western and Hindi media (i.e. Soaps) and film consumption among South Asian migrant families in London, Gillespie (1997[1995]: 324) finds that “... the viewing of Hindi films is often accompanied by an airing of views and intense debates on tradition and modernity; indeed ... the content of Hindi films is discussed far more, by views in India and Britain alike, than is the content of Western film.” Supporting the suggestion that *locally and relationally relevant culture* will be more likely to be integrated into recurrent interaction rituals—and thus be more avidly consumed—than locally irrelevant cultural products.

It is possible therefore to extend DiMaggio’s sociostructural framework—initially formulated to explain the changing class and status bases of taste in modern postindustrial societies—to explain the role of transnational flows of cultural goods in the globalization process. DiMaggio highlights common patterns of social change among the world’s most economically advantaged societies all of which exhibited postwar trends toward increasing mass education, increasing or stable rates of social mobility, and the rise of the welfare state (see also Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997). This has led to a decline of community-based status orders which featured clear boundaries between the consumption practices and lifestyle of local status groups and which exhibited a strong correlation between cultural habits and local status standing (Holt 1998; Peterson and DiMaggio 1975).

This emerging social arrangement instead features a more mobile class-status system in which the arts and popular culture take center stage as providing the younger upper-middle class elites with the type of “mobile” cultural capital appropriate for the formation and maintenance of their now *national* networks of mutual recognition and acquaintance (DiMaggio and Mohr 1985). In a similar way, across the developed and developing world, the relational reach and social “coverage” of certain privileged upper-middle class strata are expanded beyond local communal circles beginning to stretch not only to the national level but also to expand to the *transnational* scene (Castells 1998; Hannerz 1990).

These processes are intensified with increased urbanization and the expansion of more encompassing state projects (Meyer *et al.* 1997) as well as with the “stretching” of time and space that come with the

transition to and integration into the infrastructure of information and telecommunications technology of the global “network society” (Castells 2000; Giddens 1991b). This brings with it a related intensification of (post)modernization trends brought about by increasing interconnection across localities and spaces, or what is usually glossed over under the banner of “globalization” (Giddens 1991a; Sassen 1999).

This implies an increasingly important role of mass produced *global* culture (both regional and local) as providing the default forms of cultural knowledge that can be used to connect with individuals and groups beyond the local community (Hannerz 1990, 1991, 1997[1989]). As DiMaggio (1987: 444) puts it, “When social worlds extend beyond the town to the metropolis and the nation, the home becomes less important as a focus for sociable interaction. *Subjects of conversation* supplant *objects of display* as bases of social evaluation” (italics added). This means that “[s]ymbols (goods or tastes) become increasingly important to the organization of social life as the division of labor and the number of human contacts increases” thus reconfiguring the role of the mass media and the culture production field in the everyday lifeworld of the consumer.

In contrast to media imperialism approaches which usually refer to a fairly homogenous, consensual and hierarchical global culture, most studies that pay detailed attention to situated culture consumption and culture production practices find that global culture instead of becoming more and more homogenous, appears to in fact be *increasing* in diversity (Cowen 2002; Robertson 2001). In terms of DiMaggio’s (1987) framework of the dimensions of artistic classification systems (ACS), media imperialist approaches, like old mass culture theories (DiMaggio 1987: 441) think of the global cultural ACS as weakly *differentiated* (dominated by American popular culture) and highly *universal* (high cross-regional consensus as to the superior value of Western popular culture). However, ethnographic and more empirically oriented approaches have found that the global culture ACS is instead highly differentiated (with hybrid cultural forms and reconstitutions of old “local” cultures actually proliferating under conditions of cultural globalization) and only weakly universal in what Hannerz (1990: 237) refers to as “... an organization of diversity rather than ... a replication of uniformity,” with differentiation and de-universalization widely seen as accelerating trends.

This changing the structure of global culture appears to mirror the changes that are seen as responsible for the decline of the old ACS dominant in industrial western societies. This system was characterized by being differentiated, universal, highly hierarchical with strong ritual boundaries separating different consumption communities. This older, “mass-elite” regime (Peterson 1997) was undergirded by a status system based on community and locality, which produced relatively strong homologies between local position and lifestyle, evident in the classic community studies of mid-twentieth century American sociology (Holt

1998). However, this arrangement appears to have given way to a more complex relationship between social position and cultural practices in the post-war era (Peterson 1992; Peterson and DiMaggio 1975). This has seen the reconfiguration of upper middle-class elite status around more mobile and diffuse *networks* of recognition and acquaintance. The bases of power and status in industrial societies has moved away from an organization around local elites whose claims to social standing—“symbolic capital” in Bourdieu’s (1989) terms—rested on local recognition by other socially proximate community members. This older system implied a fairly bounded symbolic economy of recognition based on local relationships (Holt 1998), which was very difficult to “reconvert” (Bourdieu 1986) into other forms of capital outside of the local context.

Instead in the contemporary “post-industrial” system in the economically advantaged countries of the Global North the social networks of elites have become *(trans)nationalized* and therefore less attached to spatially fixed communities (Wellman 1979; Wellman, Carrington, and Hall 1988). Networks of solidarity, acquaintance and recognition now extend beyond the bounded social structure of the small town. This transformation has resulted in a decline in both universality and hierarchy of older systems of cultural classification and the increasingly decoupling of lifestyle choices from idiosyncratic local status orders (DiMaggio 1987: 451-452), and their increasing correlation with exposure to institutions of national (and global) reach such as Universities (van Eijck and Bargeman 2004).

DiMaggio (2000) notes that such a framework can explain various empirical puzzles not explainable from other approaches (whether mass culture or more grounded “postmodern” perspectives): 1) the loose relationships between class standing and the types of cultural goods that are consumed (Peterson and DiMaggio 1975), 2) the strong association between socioeconomic status and education and culture consumption *diversity*, as the new elites become cultural generalists rather than specialists with their relational worlds expanding to nationwide scale since “...wide-ranging networks require broad repertoires of taste” (DiMaggio 1987: 444), and 3) the association between *lack* of culture consumption and indicators of *social isolation* (Lizardo 2006).

EMPIRICAL IMPLICATIONS

The sociostructural framework can be adapted to the study of global culture and cultural globalization. In contrast to media imperialism approach, which posits wide general trends that do not appear to conform to observable trends (Straubhaar 1991), and the ethnographic “glocalization” perspective which is unable to provide more generic systemic accounts that can connect processes occurring across different national locales, the socio-structural approach leads to several important empirical implications that are useful in explaining *variation* in cross-

national reception, vitality and relative degree of success of both global and domestic culture. These include:

1. The observation that cultural flows should be denser *within* culturally proximate and socio-economically similar countries and should be weaker *between* culturally distant and socio-economically dissimilar countries. Suggesting that “intra-core” and “intra-periphery” cultural exchange is a much more important facet of the global cultural economy than traditionally considered, asymmetric “core-periphery” flows (Straubhaar 2007; UNESCO 2005).
2. A better elucidation of patterns of *demand* for global cultural goods. The socio-structural approach suggests that the demand for global culture should be stronger in the world’s most economically privileged societies and weaker in developing and poorer countries. This is in contrast to what is usually argued by media-imperialism theories who see demand for global cultural products as an unproblematic epiphenomenon easily manufactured by global media corporate giants and primarily tied to larger projects of political domination. Instead the sociostructural account of cultural globalization leads us to predict that global cultural flows will tend to be stronger *where relationally induced demand for portable cultural capital that can be used to form and sustain transnational and (within national societies) translocal social networks is most salient*. Demand for global symbolic goods—such as American popular culture—will be *weakest* in those regions of the world most *disconnected* from other facets of the globalization process (informational, economic, demographic, etc.), least *urbanized*, *least economically advantaged*, and more *structured* along segmented and localized ethnic, religious and communal boundaries.
3. A better understanding of *patterns of audience segmentation in the global cultural arena*. The socio-structural approach suggests that within all nation-states, but in particular within economically advantaged and less globally connected societies we should observe a *bifurcation* or binary segmentation among audiences with the most privileged and globally connected strata preferring global popular culture, and the least privileged strata showing a more marked preference for local or regional cultural goods (Hannerz 1990; Lemish, Drotner, Liebes, Maigret, and Stald 1998; Straubhaar 1991, 1997, 2007). This claim is supported by recent cross-national

research on patterns demand for Television, Film and Music (Straubhaar (1991: 51; Hannerz (1991: 120) Lemish and collaborators in a comparative study of media consumption among adolescents in Denmark, France and Israel, also find that the consumption of global culture is stratified by class. They conclude that “[g]lobalization relates...to class positioning: in all three countries, mastering the English language, playing computer games, surfing the Internet and preferring English media texts are associated more with the middle and upper classes” (1998 : 552).

4. A clearer depiction of the structural and relational bases of the emergence of global popular “cultures.” The media-imperialism thesis conceives of a global cultural economy primarily dominated by American *popular* culture (as this is the most likely form of culture transmitted and produced in transnational mass media systems). The socio-structural approach on the other hand, conceives of global popular culture (of which that produced in the U.S. is still the most important ideal-typical example, although it is more accurate to now speak of global popular “cultures” with a various different production centers), as simply one—albeit a very important –facet of world cultural flows. American popular culture is seen as distinctive not because of its “brow” level, but because of *its relational reach* (Erickson 1996); that is for clear historical reason it has achieved a status as the “default” form of culture that can establish relationships across national lines (During 2005). Although it is increasingly likely that in certain geographic locations, transnational flows originating outside the U.S. may play similar roles (such as “Bollywood”; or the Mexican and Brazilian “telenovela”).
5. Finally the socio-structural approach brings with it a more serious appreciation for the largely *connective* role that culture industry products play in the global arena. The media imperialism approach assumes that certain sets of values and behaviors (individualism, consumerism, etc.) antithetical to community and relational cohesion are spread by global cultural flows, suggesting that those *with the least capacity and opportunity to form extra-local social connections* would be *more* likely to consume foreign cultural goods (they are the peripheral “masses” in the most vulnerable position, unable to resist foreign cultural penetration). The sociostructural model on the other hand, predicts precisely the opposite: consumption

of global popular culture should be highest among those who reside in the richest and most globally connected regions of the world, and should be weakest among those who reside in the least connected and least socially and economically advantaged regions of the world.

THE GLOBAL CULTURAL ECONOMY: STABLE PATTERNING OR UNPREDICTABLE DISJUNCTURE?

In partitioning the field of approaches to cultural globalization between a “macro-structural” perspective centered on the notion of cultural imperialism and a set of “micro-level” perspectives that focus on the situated uses and interpretations of cultural flows by spatially and culturally bound actors, I have implicitly suggested that there are no other “macro” approaches to the study of cultural globalization in the contemporary marketplace other than those based on the cultural imperialism thesis (Boyd-Barrett 1998). While useful for purposes of organizing the current discussion this claim is of course obviously false (see for instance Inda and Rosaldo 2008; Robertson 2001). In this concluding section I discuss how the approach to cultural globalization developed in this paper contrasts to other approaches that also take a self-conscious “macro-sociological” stance to the same problem. In contemporary globalization studies one of the most influential statements in this regards is Arjun Appadurai’s much cited essay on “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy” (2008[1996]). In the remainder of this essay I outline the critical differences and commonalities between the theoretical framework outlined in this paper and that put forward in that essay.

Appadurai’s approach to understanding the global cultural economy is explicitly fashioned as a response to—and as a way to transcend the limitations of—the cultural imperialism thesis. Thus, he rejects both the attempt to divide the global economy into a simple “core/periphery” dichotomy, in particular when the “core” of this system is reduced to a single nation, usually the United States. Instead, the “crucial” point to keep in mind is that “... the United States is no longer the puppeteer of a world system of images but is only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes” (Appadurai 2008[1996]: 50).

For Appadurai, even if such a simple core-periphery division was empirically adequate any type of homogenization claim has to be carefully qualified. The reason for this is that as pointed out here *patterns of cultural flow* cannot be simply be taken as evidence of increasing homogeneity, since *indigenization* of metropolitan cultural flows on the part of subjects residing in “satellite” regions is a constant feature of world cultural dynamics (Appadurai 2008[1996]: 51). This leads Appadurai to conclude that simply “center-periphery” models are no

longer adequate. Instead, the “new” global cultural economy has to be seen as a “complex, overlapping” and “disjunctive” order.

In addition the existence of “multiple centers and peripheries” has to be acknowledged, such that the prospects of Americanization are much less of a worry for members of certain regions of the globe than the prospects of being culturally colonized by a more geographically proximate regional hegemon (such as China, Russia or India). In this respect Appadurai not only rejects traditional “core-periphery” media imperialism approaches, but also market-oriented (Cowen 2002) models that emphasize “surpluses and deficits.” What has to be acknowledged by all of these approaches is that instead of the factors usually isolated by proponents of these difference views, “[t]he complexity of the current global economy has to do with certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics that we have only begun to theorize” (Appadurai 2008[1996]: 51).

As can already be noted, there are various points of commonality between Appadurai’s “disjuncture-difference” perspective and the approach outline above. Both reject simple models of media imperialism that “read-off” increasing cultural homogeneity from macro-level patterns of cultural flow, as well as rejecting simplistic characterization of the global cultural economy, such as Schiller’s, in which the United States is seen as the center and everybody else is located in the culturally “dependent” periphery. Both approaches also acknowledge the creative capacity of cultural *receivers* with Appadurai emphasizing the ability to “indigenize” metropolitan cultural products, and with the present approach noting instead the selective capacity of audiences to filter relationally useful, contextually relevant and culturally proximate cultural flows from those that cannot be used to sustain local (and for a privileged few, extra-local) relationships.

In addition, the socio-structural model proposed here draws on sociological approaches to the study of culture-production in (now transnational) “culture-industry systems” (DiMaggio 1977; Dowd 2004; Hirsch 1972; Peterson and Berger 1975) that leads us away from simple “mass-culture” models of the relationship between the relative heterogeneity or homogeneity of cultural goods and patterns of industry structure and the organization of culture-producing labor. Further, both approaches construe this “relational usefulness” of cultural goods as primarily keyed to the formation of “imagined communities” of consumers and audiences (Anderson 1991). Although the approach offers here stays away from Appadurai’s reliance on Cornelius Castoriadis’ rather poorly specified idea of the “imaginary” and hews closer to Benedict Anderson’s more explicitly practice-theoretical notion of the relationship between collective identity, social cognition and practices mediated by technology and culture-bearing artifacts (Biernacki 2000; Calhoun 1991).

DIFFERENCE WITHOUT DISJUNCTURE

Nevertheless there are critical differences between the approach recommended by Appadurai and the model of cultural globalization offered here. The most significant of these differences is that related to how each approach conceptualizes the structure and dynamics of the global culture economy. In particular, how the global structure of flows of cultural goods is conceived in its relationship to other (material, technological, cognitive, symbolic) flows in the current global system. For reasons of space it is not possible to go into detail about all of them. Instead I concentrate on what I believe is the most important—and empirically and methodologically consequential—analytical distinction of Appadurai's approach. I do not refer to the famous typology of global flows into ethnoscaples, technoscapes, financescapes, ideoscapes and mediascapes (which appears to be the primary motivation of most of the analysts that turn to Appadurai's framework).

Instead, I believe that the most crucial distinction between Appadurai's disjuncture-difference framework and the socio-structural model proposed here has to do with Appadurai's stronger—and empirically verifiable—proposal that in the current global system, there is an increasing *disconnection* between these different forms of global flow. Summarizing the essence of his approach, Appadurai notes that, in reference to the first three types of global interconnection,

...the *critical point* is that the global relationship among ethnoscaples, technoscapes, and financescapes is deeply disjunctive and profoundly unpredictable because each of these landscapes is subject to its own constraints and incentives (some political, some informational, and some techno-environmental), at the same time as each acts as a constraint and a parameter for movements in the others. Thus, even an elementary model of global political economy must take into account the *deeply disjunctive* relationships among human movement, technological flow, and financial transfers (Appadurai 2008[1996]: 53, italics added).

Thus, Appadurai's most important substantive contribution relates precisely to the hypothesis that the relationship between different types of flow in the global system are increasingly (and sometimes wildly) "disjunctive." He sees this as crucial, for it differentiates his stance from political-economy perspectives (such as the media imperialism thesis) that view these different types of flow as *tightly coupled* and increasingly predictable from one another. Towards the end of the essay, Appadurai goes on to include the more "symbolic" types of global flow (mediascapes and ideoscapes) into the same disjunctive framework. In fact he sees the five-fold typology for which his perspective has become notable as simply *a preamble* to this more substantive "under-determination" thesis. He notes that instead of being an exercise in pure classification "[t]he

extended terminological discussion of the five terms I have coined sets the basis for a tentative formulation about the conditions under which current global flows occur” (55). For Appadurai, there thus exist “growing disjunctures” among these different types of flow. He goes on to underscore that “[t]his formulation *the core of my model of global cultural flow*, needs some explanation ... people, machinery, money, images, and ideas now follow increasingly non-isomorphic paths” (55, italics added).

The socio-structural approach outlined above however, departs from this crucial facet—admittedly “the core”—of Appadurai’s model. Instead of conceiving of different global flows as “wildly disjunctive” or even as “growing” in their mutual (under)determination, it conceives of some of these flows as necessarily coordinated and as strictly connected to patterns of economic and technological stratification in the current global system (of course this is ultimately an empirical question). In this respect the socio-structural conception of the relationship between the structure of the global symbolic economy and other types of technological and economic flows is closer to the “political economy” tradition of the media imperialism thesis. However, the “coupling” of global flows proposed here do not pertain to all facets of Appadurai’s framework. Most specifically, the approach outlined above partitions the global cultural economy into a hierarchical system in which the primary divide is one of connectivity. Thus, the “core” of the system consists of high-consumption, high-production cultural economies that primarily engage in cultural trade with similar cultural economies.

Thus, “intra-core” cultural trade is seen as a much more important (and rather under-researched) facet of global cultural flows than the “asymmetric” core-periphery connections that were the focus of the media imperialism approach. Furthermore, the perspective outlined above predicts that those cultural economies most tightly connected to the financescapes and the technoscapes that undergird the current global order, will also be the more likely recipients (and producers) of the bulk of the global media flow in the current system. This will by necessity produce empirically verifiable—at the cross-national level—correlations between technological, economic and cultural flows in the current system. One of these is the hypothesis, highlighted above, connecting rates of adoption of technologies connected to globalization and rates of consumption of global culture. In this respect the current framework predicts much less “disjuncture” than Appadurai allows, although with just as much “difference.”

NOTES

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1. For instance, Hallin (1998: 164) after rejecting the audience-centered criticism of the media-imperialism approach as “simplistic” goes on to re-state that “[t]he claim of the cultural imperialists is that global cultural industries are pushing human cultures toward the culture of consumer capitalism ... [t]he claim is not that cultural differences are non-existent; the claim is that many different cultures are being moved in the same direction.” Notice that it is impossible to argue that global cultural industries are “pushing” the world’s cultures “in the same direction” without implicitly presuming some version of the “passive” or “overpowered” audience reception model. Recent attempts at reformulation of the media imperialism approach such as Boyd-Barrett’s (1998: 173) also repeat the same complaint, strenuously objecting that “it is not true that the media imperialism theory assumed a hypodermic-needle model of media effects, nor does the theory require such a model to justify its importance.” However, both Hallin’s and Boyd-Barrett’s critique of the critique fails, since instead of providing an alternative model of reception or the “uses” of culture that would actually be consistent with evidence on global cultural flows, global cultural production and situated observations both go on to suggest that what is really needed is more research on “...the production of media messages.”
 2. For a related critique of Schiller’s standpoint, see Tracey (1998: 74-76).

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