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Networks of the media

Media cultures, connectivity and globalization

Andreas Hepp analyses how globalisation, enforced through new technological possibilities, restructures the medialandscape. He argues that despite increased interconnectivity, the concept of "translocalisation" will retain its relevance within media cultures.

1. Networks of the media

We live in the times of globalization. Some academics and critics argue that globalization itself is best understood as a kind of metaprocess affecting everyday life on different levels.¹ Several works on globalization each include references to this phenomenon, as it is seen as an increasing process of complex connectivity. The main argument in my chapter is that this globalization process changes media cultures. Because of this it is necessary to theorize media cultures in a new and different way.

In the following I would like to substantiate that the tendency of traditional theories focusing implicitly on media cultures as territorialized objects makes it impossible to comprehend their change in the time of globalization. In contrast to this, a "translocal perspective" makes it possible to discuss national media cultures as a specific kind of translocal media cultures. Furthermore, this approach allows us to theorize the change of media cultures in current times. It makes it possible to describe present media cultures as thickenings in globally increasing networks of the media.

I intend to prove this thesis in four steps. In the first part of the essay I would like to make some comments on the present discussion about media globalization and its ongoing cultural change of deterritorialization. In the second part I will focus on theoretical concepts that make it possible to comprehend today's media cultures. In the third part I am going to explain why the concept of "translocal media cultures" has to operate beyond the traditional frame of the discussion on media cultures. Finally I want to show why an approach of "translocal media cultures" offers a new view on inequality of the global media.

2. Globalization and Deterritorialization

Taking the work of Néstor García Canclini as a starting point, one can argue that the cultural change caused by globalization is deterritorialization: Mediated by the process of globalization we can see a growing loss of the apparently natural relationship between culture and geographical and social territories.² In spite of its relevance in the globalization discussion, this concept

of deterritorialization needs further classification in order to be a basis for analytical and empirical work on current media cultures and the changes they undergo. The main problem of García Canclini's work is that the different aspects of deterritorialization are mixed. First of all you see something one can call "physical deterritorialization" on which García Canclini's and the arguments of others, focus. In the time of globalization many people are travelling and migrating, and the world as a whole is much more mobile than in previous centuries. García Canclini focuses on this when he speaks about the cultural changes in Latin America or the United States, specifically using the example of migrants. Besides this, there is a second type of deterritorialization; a type that one can name "communicative deterritorialization". The cultural change of globalization does not only refer to an increasing mobility of people and goods, but the ongoing process of media globalization and the cultural change involved that are very important in everyday life: An increasing number of products which are available in different territories are media products.³

It is obvious that physical and communicative deterritorialization cannot be set against each other but are interwoven on different levels. Taking diasporas as an example for physical deterritorialization, it is obvious that they can only be stable "exemplary communities of the transnational moment"⁴, because their members share common cultural representations. These common cultural representations are regulated by the "global media". Nevertheless it is important to draw a distinction between physical and communicative deterritorialization, because of three reasons.

Speed: Communicative deterritorialization seems to take place much faster than its physical counterpart. Media representations can be shifted much more quickly and cheaply than goods or people.

Volatility: Communicative deterritorialization often seems to be much more volatile than physical deterritorialization. Many aspects of the former are difficult to enact, for instance, nationalized formats of soap-operas or quiz shows on television.⁵ A person who is there as a foreigner is therefore much more present.

Degree: In contrast to this, the degree to which communicative deterritorialization is involved in everyday life is paradoxically much higher than the degree to which physical deterritorialization is. While in many regions of the world the mobility is lower than one would expect, the access to media products from many different regions of the world is evident.⁶ Because of its speed and volatility communicative deterritorialization pervades everyday life on many levels.

To bring these three aspects together, one can argue that the concept of communicative deterritorialization makes it possible to understand the change of media cultures in times of globalization, a change which has already taken place. More and more media products are mediated across various territories, for instance international news, as well as Hollywood and Bollywood blockbusters. Media cultures are already much more involved in globalization than many empirical studies imply, because they often work within an analytical frame which makes it impossible to make the changes entirely comprehensible.⁷

3. Connectivity and Translocality

The main argument at this point is that one can only describe media cultures, and their present transformation, if one starts with an analytical frame focused on the concepts of connectivity and translocality.

On an abstract level, one can understand any medium as an instrument of "establishing connectivity". Language, for instance, is a tool people use to communicatively "connect". So one can understand – as Carsten Winter and Werner Faulstich do⁸ – itinerant preachers and mendicant monks as "human media", because these travellers make communicative connections between people in different regions of a country. Furthermore, electronic media, such as films, television, radio and the internet can also be understood as tools for establishing connectivity. Their representations construct symbolic links between different cultures.

These examples can be used to illustrate the following two aspects. Primarily, connectivity is a general avenue of communication. It is not new or specific to electronic media or the internet. This is important since many present theories, for example the network theory of Manuel Castells, tend to neglect this.⁹ Secondly, something has changed in the process of establishing connectivity in the course of media history. The first forms of establishing connectivity were highly based on "physical aspects" as, for example, a person's travels. By contrast, the forms of connectivity becoming important in the course of the past two centuries are forms with reduce "physical aspects". Of course internet connections still have a "physical basis" in electronic cable networks, but the forms of connectivity are more and more "de-linked" from this "base". It is important to emphasize this, because this is the reason why the process of communicative deterritorialization has its own speed, volatility and degree.

But how can we analyze such mediated connections in detail? What must be our focus? The answer is to focus on questions of translocality.¹⁰ First of all, the word "translocal" or "translocality" is an analytical concept to study the connectivity of the media. There are two reasons for this concept that are appropriate and that one can link with the word "locality" and its prefix, "trans-". "Locality" emphasizes that in the time of globalization the local world does not cease to exist. Irrespective of how far the communicative connectivity of a locality goes, this does not prompt questions concerning a person living his or her life primarily locally. As a physical human being he or she must reside somewhere. Surely this place changes its meaning with growing communicative connectivity, especially if this connectivity tends to be global. But the centrality of locality is not minimized in the time of globalization. "Trans-", as a prefix, guides the focus from questions of locality (on which, for example, especially media anthropology focuses) to questions of connectivity. If research is centred on "translocality" this emphasizes, on the one hand, that those questions of all that is local still matter, but that on the other hand today's locales are connected physically and communicatively to a very high degree. And that is the reason why that which is local does not stop to exist, but rather, changes.

At this point, the ongoing communicative deterritorialization can be made comprehensible. Communicative deterritorialization means that one has translocal connections between different "present contexts" and across various territories. This way of thinking allows the theorizing of media cultures in a completely new way. Speaking about media cultures I include all cultures whose primary resources of meaning are accessible by technology-based media. From this point of view, all media cultures have to be theorized as translocal; inasmuch as media make translocal communicative connections

possible. With respect to the frame of a connectivity theory, media cultures in general have to be theorized as "translocal phenomena".

Focusing on this, it will be possible to describe the change of media cultures during the last hundred years in a new and different way. One can take, for instance, the works of Benedict Anderson, Orvar Löfgren or David Morley as examples of this. The rise of national cultures is related to the diffusion of the so-called "mass media". When different locales are very intensively connected, different people can be involved in a communicative process, and the construction of a common "imagined community"¹¹, "cultural thickening"¹² or "home territory"¹³. Such reflections refer to the level on which questions of territory pertain to translocality. One can take German television history as an example. First, television was marketed in the Fifties as "global", when it was called a "window to the world". Secondly, television had to be appropriated locally, that is to say it had to find its place in local life. And thirdly, the horizon of its first representations had the tendency to be nationally territorial, because the first important television events were national football games or national serial productions. Like the print media and the radio before it, television helped to construct the territorialized "imagined community" of a nation.

David Morley's metaphor of the "home territory" is, at this point, important in a dual sense. On the one hand, it shows the specificity of these national media cultures. It is possible to describe "home territories" as media cultures whose translocal communicative connectivity has been territorialized in such a way that national frontiers are the main borders of many communicative thickenings. The process of "thickening" of the national "imagined community" was territorially bound. On the other hand, Morley's metaphor of the "home territory" shows us quite clearly that this territoriality of the media-influenced home no longer exists in a pure form. In the time of globalization communicative connectivity is becoming more and more deterritorialized. With the distribution of media products across different borders global communicative connectivity grows, which puts into relation the thickenings of national media cultures. One must localize them in the different networks of the media. This means that the "borders" of the "imagined communities" we belong to do not necessarily correspond with the territorial borders. The communicative connectivity of translocal media cultures in the time of globalization is much more complex, and it is necessary to theorize them beyond a national frame.

4. Beyond "Containers" and "Territorial Cultures"

If one looks at most of the present studies focusing on media cultures, one can still find something one can call "container thinking", borrowing a term from Ulrich Beck.¹⁴ At the core of such thoughts is the understanding that (national) states are similar to containers and that sociocultural phenomena must be theorized in such containers. The container state is an unquestioned frame to analyse society and culture, also in the field of media studies. Generally speaking, political media systems are theorized as national ones, media markets are also seen as such, as are media cultures. All in all, the container thinking reflects media connectivity only as territorial phenomena. Bound within the container of a national state, each connection of the media has its specific territory. And if one works within an international frame, one can compare such territorially bound media systems, markets and cultures.

What is irritating is that one can also find such container thinking in the field of international communication. If one takes propaganda research as the first example¹⁵, the research perspective can only be understood in a container frame. It is centred on the question of whether or not one state can influence the people in other states in the national interest. The same applies to theories of modernisation¹⁶. They focus on the question of media being an instrument of development within the container of a state. Dependency theories started with the aim of breaking with state-centred thinking as they wanted to focus on the dependence within the world system. But they also construct this as a dependency of container states and focus on the argument of separating "one container" from the others to make a development "of its own" possible. The notion of cultural imperialism implies a container theory, too, as it operates with the image of bridgehead building across territorial cultures, thus making it possible for a "centre culture" to dominate those on the periphery.¹⁷ And finally one can say that theories of intercultural communication are implicitly container theories, as they try to compare cultural patterns constructed for a specific territory¹⁸.

To put it in a nutshell, these different approaches are unable to capture the present change of media cultures because they operate in a container frame which leaves out the connectivity between the containers and their territorial cultures. Globalization must be seen from another perspective, which I would like to call the "transcultural perspective"¹⁹. The basis of this perspective is a communicative connectivity unrestrained by said containers, but which, together with globalization, leaves them increasingly obsolete. One can call this perspective "transcultural", because it is focused on media connectivity, thus going beyond the "territorially bound" national cultures.²⁰

Visualising this perspective one can get a completely different image of the "container perspective". First of all, communicative connectivity is something that cannot be territorialized in a national container. On the production level it is increasingly carried by global media capitalism. Within global media capitalism one can see different states, still primarily territorialized by their political media systems. But as soon as one focuses on culture, one notices that present communicative connectivity increasingly makes it possible to deterritorialize "cultural thickenings". Many cultural phenomena, in their commercial aspects (for example youth cultures or life styles), ethnical aspects (for example cultures of diaspora), or political aspects (for example the Green movement or movement against globalization) are thickenings which exist across different territories and also across different languages. Nevertheless, they are not merged into one global culture, as they still exist as separate thickenings. They are translocal phenomena which are not territorial.

5. Theorizing Global Inequality

At this point the different arguments presented can be tied to the perspective that in current times translocal media cultures should best be viewed as specific cultural thickenings, which are occasionally territorialized, but increasingly not. But is such a theory not hypocritical inasmuch as it tends to overlook those conflicts and inequalities that, for example, the theory of cultural imperialism highlights? Isn't it a kind of harmonising "palliator theory"?

Such arguments are important as a number of theories of connectivity appear to have harmonising tendencies. But the concept of translocal cultures offers a new way of theorizing inequality within the globalization of media, because

"inequality" in global communicative connectivity is best understood as an "inequality in translocal connectivity". This can be seen on the levels of production, representation and appropriation.

Nodes of Production

If one is to ask which media organisations produce the media products constituting communicative connections across different territories, one realizes that the number of these organisations is limited, and that a rather small number of media companies are "acting globally", that is to say they produce products that have access to a wide range of cultural contexts.²¹

Taking a closer look at the specifics of media corporations, such as Sony, AOL Time Warner or Bertelsmann, one realizes that these corporations are not integrated organisations but rather complex networks of subsidiaries and joint ventures. One has to conceptualise their structure translocally and not territorially. The main subsidiaries and joint ventures of these "deterritorial media corporations" can be found in various cities worldwide, no matter which of these deterritorial media organisations one analyses. These cities can be categorized as "global media cities" on two levels²². First, these cities are the central nodes in the networks of "deterritorial media organisations". The global media cities are not only those localities where many "deterritorial media products" are "developed" but also where the power within these deterritorial media organisations is centred. Secondly, global media cities are the central nodes in the networks of infrastructure and distribution of global connectivity.

At this point it is important to note that only a translocal approach can account for such inequalities within global media production. This cannot be culturally territorialized, in the manner of the cultural imperialism paradigm. Is Sony Pictures Japanese or American? Or what is Bertelsmann's Random House? German? The example of global media cities shows why the inequalities of globally orientated media production should be described as deterritorial translocal phenomena. On one side, globally orientated media production takes place in deterritorialized networks. On the other side, these networks are concentrated in specific global media cities which are not necessarily Western or equal in the West. A translocal approach makes it possible to discuss such inequalities, but in a way which does not re-territorialize deterritorialized media organisations or global media cities in regard to the country where they were originally located.

Layers of Representative Thickening

At the beginning of this chapter it was argued that national media cultures can also be viewed as translocal – but with one specification: the media connectivity of these cultures is territorialized and has territorial boundaries. This argument can be formulated more precisely if one says that the media representations within these national media cultures are primarily communicated within specific borders and develop their discourses in an unmarked national frame. But this construction of media representations as territorially specific, and therefore unequal, is only one aspect of the representation of translocal media cultures. In a translocal frame one can see other inequalities.

By viewing media cultures not territorially but translocally, it is possible to separate different layers of agglomeration within the connectivity of media representations. Primarily, there are still regional and national thickenings of

media representations. If one takes television as an example, present studies show that the prime time serial productions in different regions of Europe are national representations in respect of their availability and represented topics.²³ But besides this, further television representations gain relevance as globalization continues. Examples of this are transnational regional representations such as Indian television fictions, which are also available in neighbouring countries.²⁴ At the same time, Indian television productions are also examples of the gaining relevance of what one can call "deterritorial representations". Deterritorial representations are accessible in different territories, but focused on specific cultural communities such as Diasporas or life style communities. Many Indian television productions are accessible through channels like Zee-TV or B4Y and are watched outside of India, in particular by the Indian Diaspora, and therefore one can see them as deterritorial representations.

At this point the argument is again that it is not possible to argue in the time of globalization exclusively within a territorial frame. While one can say, that territorial aspects still have relevance in form of national representations, there are other kinds of media representations which construct connectivity transculturally across territorial borders that are equally relevant. Because of this, it is necessary to understand that representations form a complex landscape. This landscape has different thickenings, which can be territorially bound as, for example, regional or national coagulations. But besides these, there are also increasing numbers of agglutinations which are deterritorial. Inequality gets increasingly complex in this translocal frame of discussion because the crossing of different thickenings comes into focus.

Infrastructure of Appropriation

A further aspect of the inequality of connectivity can be seen on the level of the infrastructure of appropriation. This is the level on which questions of inequality are usually discussed in the so-called "digital divide" discussion.²⁵ It is a discussion which is focused, for example, on the question of how many computers with internet access are diffused in a specific country; how many television sets, dishes or VCRs can be found, and so on.²⁶ The focal point here is that these statistics are often not particularly helpful, because the infrastructure and processes of cultural appropriation are territorialized too early, and too easily, within such statistics. It is obvious that there are differences between countries, but as soon as one focuses exclusively on territorial concepts, one cannot find substantial numbers of further inequalities. One can prove this argument by theorising, e.g., net communication "translocally" which means avoiding the precocious territorialization of differences in connectivity but focusing on locality and its mediated connectivity.

At this point one sees a paradox within the structure. First, differences of the infrastructure of connectivity are local rather than territorial phenomena. Localities with a high infrastructure of connectivity are generally cities in Africa, Latin America, Asia but also include areas in Europe.²⁷ While it is technically possible to get access to the internet everywhere, there is proof that the infrastructure of net communication is more highly concentrated in big cities than in the countryside. This is not surprising in the so-called "Third World" because cities are the area where one finds telephone lines, a working power supply, and sufficient numbers of people who can afford a computer. But one can find, for example, rural-urban-differences in Germany.²⁸ Focusing on translocality makes these inequalities more accessible than

focusing on territoriality.

Secondly, it does not seem to be reasonable for an approach that is focused not on translocality in general but on translocal media cultures to discuss the infrastructure of connectivity only on such a technical level. As any aspect of technology, so the infrastructure of connectivity is culturally embedded. On this level one must have something one can call the appropriation of inequality, which does not eliminate differences in the infrastructure of connectivity, but which makes it possible to understand that a lower infrastructure of connectivity does not necessarily exclude the globalization of media. Ethnographical reports show that the connectivity of net communication in Africa is appropriated in a specific way.²⁹ On the one hand, the internet is used much more frequently in urban net cafés or public points of access than, for example, in Europe. The localities of net communication are public spaces. On the other hand, these possibilities of access are "localized" by a specific set of cultural practices which link the connectivity of net communication to the connectivity of everyday face-to-face-interaction. In countries in Central Africa one can pay taxi drivers to take messages and send them via the internet to a given address. If one lives in a village and does not have access to the internet but want to send a message to a family member abroad, this system is both feasible and useful. The drivers take the message with them, send it and later give you the reply, if there is one. Similar examples can be found for television in rural India where the rate of ownership of television sets is rather low, but the rate of access is high.³⁰ In both cases these circumstances can be interpreted as forms of cultural appropriation of the infrastructure of connectivity. This goes to show that patterns of inequality are much more complex than a territorially constructed perspective suggests. Certainly there are high differences of infrastructure, which probably reflect inequalities that are, in most cases, economic. However, taking public and collective use into account, it is not possible to conclude that the increasingly global connectivity of the media is only a western phenomenon.

6. Transculturality and Translocality as Perspective

This chapter is a rather abrupt insight into what I call a network theory of the media.³¹ I've tried to show that such an approach is appropriate in linking questions of globalization with a historical view on the change of media cultures. For this a change of perspective towards a "transcultural frame" is necessary, a frame in which the concept of translocality has a central meaning. Focusing on questions of translocality makes it possible not only to state that we live in a globalized world of complex media connectivity, but also allows one to analyze this connectivity and, as a consequence, the cultural change of communicative deterritorialization of media cultures on various levels. In addition, such a frame makes it possible to discuss communicative deterritorialization as the cultural change of media globalization without losing "national media cultures" as a point of reference. Because of this, the concept of translocality is an appropriate tool to critically analyse the different networks of the media.

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- ³ See Stuart Hall, "The Centrality of Culture: Notes on the Cultural Revolutions of Our Time," in: *Media and Cultural Regulation*, ed. Kenneth Thompson (London: Sage, 1997).
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- ⁸ See Werner Faulstich, *Medien und Öffentlichkeiten im Mittelalter. Die Geschichte der Medien Band 2 : 800 – 1400* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), and Carsten Winter, *Predigen unter freiem Himmel. Die medienkulturellen Funktionen der Bettelmönche und ihr geschichtlicher Hintergrund* (Bardowick: Wissenschaftler Verlag, 1996).
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