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News flow in the age of Globalization: the interrelation of local,
national and global

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1. Introduction

Globalization is the word that many understand but few can define; it not only that is difficult to define, but in most cases, the multiplicity of valid definitions allows many interpretations, various focused definitions that leave a lot of space not only for misunderstanding but also ambiguity. This introduction will look into the more solid definitions of globalization, categorize the various schools of thought with the ultimate goal of this introduction it to show the path that links globalization with communications and media. A definition is imperative at this early point: this paper refers to mass media when it talks about “media” and to media communication when it talks about communication/s. Therefore the focus is on the role of the mass media and how they influence – if at all do so- the process of globalization.

To achieve such a goal it is important to go through the various definitions and see whether they include any element that proves the link between globalization, communication and media. What is globalization? A first, working hypothesis would be that globalization is the current state of the world; defined by the international, global, movement of capital, services and people; the outcome of less barriers between the society of nation-states; a prevailing inability to stay solely local through the over exposure of the network of media both local and international

For Shirato and Webb (2003) “globalization is a “name that is used to designate the power relations, practices, and technologies that characterize...what it means is less than precise” (1). They quote Matellart who define globalization as “one these tricky words, one of those instrumental notions that, under the effect of market logics and without citizens being aware from it , have been naturalized to the point of becoming indispensable for establishing communication between people of different cultures (2000) (1). Taking as a starting point the “hegemonic role of globalization in both organization and decoding the reality” they continue by attaching globalization to “process of modernization” and to the politics of naming, “naming the establishment of reality” ; in other words, globalization re-names various processes, creating new names for established practices in order to create a new understanding (2) In this process media play the important role as the they introduce, circulate and familiarize – through repetition- the “naming process”. An example of that can be the media responses after 9/11 tragedy Although is too early to get into the details of this example, it is important to clarify that the outcome of the tragic events shaped what we refer as 9/11 is a proof of the politics of naming; the war against terror, the need for a “global reaction” and the almost automatic co-relation between events as Afghanistan, Iraq and Islam and its approach to the “West” uses globalization as a pretext to rename issues and procedures in order to promote a certain discourse across platform.

Malcolm (2001) starts exploring the roots of globalization as a term by looking into its historical evolution. He states that there are so many controversies surrounding the term per se and therefore people “don’t know whether the old Marxist or functionalist theories can be adapted to explain globalization or whether we need to construct novel

arguments” (1). The first use of word global he continues can be traces in the 50s and the first thinker to offer a comprehensive definition was Giddens in 1990 and Robertson in 1992. Comparing the two definitions, Malcolm believes that the best approach is to examine where globalization as a process will lead, how the world would like at the end of those processes. Is globalization going to be a harmonizing force, or will it lead to a world where culture will look homogenized but will not be? Will territoriality cease to be the main concern, and therefore the importance of nation state will be less important than today? Incorporating the questions and knowledge stemming from the historical approach of the term Malcolm offers his definition of globalization:

“A social process in which the constraints of geography on economic, political, social and cultural arrangement recede, in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding and in which people act accordingly” (Malcolm, 2001:5)

Going a step further he sees globalization as a highly Europeanized term, “a direct consequence of European culture across the Planet through settlement, colonization and cultural replication” and also “ a deterritorialization of social and especially of political arrangements that has proceeded most rapidly in the Western part of the continent – borders are becoming de-emphasized and varieties of supra and infra-nationalism are proliferating.” (6). I tend to disagree with the above due to the fact, that, if globalization is highly Europeanized why it did not succeed to unite Europe within a Federal apparatus? EU is an international, multi state organization that still faces problems with any attempt to transcend from an international organization of economic synergies and legal harmonization. Therefore, maybe globalization perceived in this part of the world but still remains effective through the American economic model of

capitalism; to put simply and bluntly, Mc Donald is closer to globalization than Vivendi or BBC and thus someone can claim that globalization started as a European concept but developed and spread to the world with an American dynamic.

Still in all the above, the link between globalization and communication and media is not even fully traceable. Marx believes that through globalization among other things "...the intellectual creations of individual nations become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature (Marx:1977 quoted in Malcolm 2001:9) and Malcolm refers to Mc Luhan idea of the "Global Village" in which he says that "industrial media, transportation and money are being displaced by electronic media that can restore the collective culture of tribalism but on expansive global scale". From the above, one can draw the conclusion that the communication/media element can be traced in the cultural side of globalization; of course, from culture it transcends to politics and international relations, as culture is over and beyond artistic artifacts and expression, culture involves an inherited pattern of systematic approach to all social processes. Culture is not the basic element of this paper's argument but still no one can deny that culture in its broader terms is equally important for globalization per se, but also for communication.

In Rantanen's , *The Media and Globalization*,(2005) there are various definitions of globalization along with the attempt to connect the notion with the media. She opens the introduction of her book saying that media and globalization "go together like horse and carriage" (1) as Mc Luhan (1967) made the connection of his "media is the message" with the Global village Further on she states that more theorists "agree that "there is practically no globalization without media and communications, as many of the

definitions at least indirectly acknowledge...but, although this role is obvious in theories, is not necessarily visible. ...role of media and globalization remains vague and specified....as media studies missed the big picture of globalization”(4). . Malcolm seems to agree by saying that in the region of culture globalization can be traced in “social arrangements for the production, exchange and expression of symbols (signs) that represent facts, affects, meanings, beliefs, commitments, preferences, tastes and values.” (17) and leads to “universalization, the abstraction of values and standards to a very high level of generality that will permit extreme levels of cultural differentiation” (22)

Rantanen believes that all above theorists are extremely pessimistic about globalization although they accept that “it changes people lives”. Moreover, the “mediated elements generates the idea that globalization’s experience in not real but second hand experience that is filtered by the media. This mediation according to Rantanen need a new approach (11).

Rantanen believes that three fields are important for examination to highlight the –special – relationship between globalization and the media: Communication Studies, Media and cultural studies and globalization. It is inevitable all the above to be checked from the western perspective. US communication studies have in general preferred the term “international communication’ rather than global media and therefore again both the label of media and globalization is different.

As in the USA, British media studies have concentrated mainly on the role of the media as institutions in the process of globalization meaning the factors of technology, ownership patterns and news gathering and how all these interrelate with economy, communication and global. Moreover, she notes that for Boyd-Barrett (98:2) and Sparks

(98:122) “globalization is a flawed conceptual tool or the global public sphere should be replaced by the term imperialist, private sphere. The level of analysis again emphasizes communications structures rather than individual experience and repeats earlier conceptualizations about international relations. (3) and Sarvaes (2000:314) notes “ the whole process of communication as a cultural process” along with “heterogenizing consequences of globalization” (p)

This is a central point to clarify: globalization, whatever it may be, a process, a condition, a tool or a fact, it involves people, interpersonal interaction and social relationships. Running through from the basic – for example face-to-face communication- to more complex – media consumption or cultural exchange- the communication is the main, the basic element through which globalization is both understood and visualized through a communicative action: a transaction, an interpersonal exchange or at least a two points circuit of information. Still, this does not put the media into the central core of globalization, and it is imperative to show the connection of media and globalization.

1.2 Defining globalization

How the various schools of thought define globalization and which are these groups? Rantanen (2005) tries to describe the three groups of school of thought along with giving the major definitions.

Rantanen believes that the three phases have been embedded in almost every conceptualization of globalization either explicitly or implicitly. (5) and she quotes

Held et al (1999) who has distinguished the three broad different schools among globalization theorists:

- Hyperglobalizers, with leading figure in this group is Ohmae (1995) who predicts the end of the traditional nation-state)
- The skeptics with leading figure Hirst and Thompson (1996) claim that globalization is a myth and that is only heightened level of national economies
- and the transformationalists with leading figures Giddens 1990 and Castels (1996) who argue that globalization is “a central driving force behind the social, political, and economic changes that are reshaping modern societies and world order.

Moreover, Waters (1995) and Held (1999) divide globalization in different sectors/spheres: the political, economic and cultural and then define each sphere accordingly; but such classification, still, leaves media in limited/subordinated role especially within culture sphere. In all the above, both the different schools and Waters and Held, as Rantanen also notes, media are absent in clear relation or inter-connection. In other words, although global is existent only or mostly when communicated, still the media role need to be clearly put within the description of globalization.

Shirato and Webb (2003) quote Held and Mc Crew to include two other “schools of thought” for globalization:

- The Globalists – the believers, those who think globalization is real and
- The skeptics- those who think that globalization is “simply a continuation of trends that developed in the period of European Colonial expansion and interrupted from the two World Wars. (Shirato and Webb,7)

Busch distinguishes the schools to liberals – sharing almost the same views with globalists – and skeptics. Another working classification is those that talks for Marxists (including thinkers like Hardt, Negri who focus on the relationship between history, ideology and globalization) and Neomarxists (including thinkers like Mattelart, Castells, Baudrillard and Appadurai among others who focus to the extent to which technological developments have brought about a change in societies, cultures and individuals concerning their function and understanding) (8). The writers, examining the various definitions and aspects of globalization, among them “the informationalism”, time/space, they explore the notion of “global public sphere” (pp11, 20). A clarification at this point is that what the informational side of globalization is in question here, not globalization of politics or economics.

Checking the various definitions as presented by Rantanen might help. For Lull (2000:150) globalization is :... ”*is best considered a complex set of interacting and often countervailing human, material and symbolic flows that lead to diverse, heterogeneous cultural positionings and practices, which persistently and variously modify established sectors of social, political and cultural power*”... Symbolic flows that modify established sectors but how? How this modification occurs and which are the basic tools for the action of modification?

Giddens (1990) sees globalization materializing in three phases:

- a. The first phase discuss whether globalization ever existed
- b. The second phase shift the focus from if it indeed existed to the real consequences of globalization and

c. the third phase – which we enter now- looks into ways of dealing with the negative consequences of globalization. For him “*Globalization is the interaction of world wide social relations, which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa*” Again, the notion of change, modification prevails but still no clear sign on really how this becomes possible.

For Thompson (1995) “*Globalization refers to growing interconnectedness of different parts of the world, a process which gives rise to complex forms of interaction and interdependency*” And in reference to the globalization of communication, he mentions

“*Globalization is the process in which worldwide economic, political culture and social relations have become increasingly mediated across time and space...The development of the new media consist simply in the establishment of new networks for the transmission of information between individuals whose basic relationship remains intact. Rather, the development of media and communications creates new forms of action and interaction and new kinds of social relationships- forms that are different from the kind of face-to-face interaction which has prevailed for most of human history (1995).* The types of interaction face-to-face, mediated, mediated quasi interaction and especially the third, applies to media initiated social interaction. (9)

The key word in the above is the term “mediated” which allows to take a step further the exploration of the link between globalization and communications: Since it is a mediated process, through the “new networks for the transmission” that create new form of action and interaction, it means that globalization indeed is mainly communicated and basically is visible when communicated, when it uses existent social structures to transfer and

change them. A good example of that could be global exposure of risk: terrorism is a global risk that affects not only the occurring locality but almost all places through the domino, inter-related chain of events justified or unjustified. At this point any further explanation might seem irrelevant and therefore risk is used as an example that applies to many individuals and various countries.

Away from communication and close to vague definition Robertson (1992) sees “

Globalization as a concept refers both to of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole. In a more societal approach (1990) believes that *globalization refers to all those processes by which the people of the world are incorporated into a single world society, global society.* What defines a global society, what is the unifying factor of such society? Is there a prevailing culture in a “single world society”? The definition is not clear on that issue but allows us to understand that Robertson sees globalization as unifying process.

1.3 The role of Media as agents of the globalization

Media have a central role, especially in the “current drive for globalization of production, markets and trade as Siochru of ILO believes. For him the issue of ownership is very important as it transferred from national public ownership to global private ownership. The role of the media is this of an enabler of the globalization as they facilitate the whole process through the sophisticated telecommunication networking and, the creative industries – cinema, television, books etc- through consumerism and individualism, work as “an essential precondition and accompaniment to the opening of new markets”. In sense “*directly in their role as enablers of globalization, the social consequences of the*

media and communication sector are primarily mediated through the sectors that they facilitate. For instance, the social consequences of facilitating the emergence of globalized financial transactions and manufacturing industries are ultimately a function of the globalization of these sectors, while the social consequences of the opening of markets for “lifestyle products”, such as fast food and cosmetics, are a result of the growth of these sectors.(1).

Again the word mediated is the vital here; the media work as the available network, assisted linking apparatus to communicate both in time and space the elements of globalization, creating a new impact and, even unintentionally, in some cases the media itself are promoted from facilitators to true agents of change- and at this point change is not necessarily negative or positive “The second special characteristic of the globalization of the media and communication sector is as a *powerful agent* in the transformation of social, cultural and political structures. “ And therefore can influence “*the globalization of media that have the most impact of all, namely the evolving cumulative impact of the gradual commercialization of media and communications on critical social functions, such as the formation of individual and community identity, cultural and language diversity, the capacity to participate in the political process and the integrity of the public sphere, the availability of information and knowledge in the public domain, and the use of media for development, educational and human rights purposes.*”(2).

The answer to the negative trend of the powerful of the media is, according to Siochru, the tentative emergence of the influence of civil society and the rise of “people’s” media: *“Although civil society, in the form of NGOs, has long been recognized within the United Nations system, it was only at the Earth Summit in 1991 that it began to take on a more organized and collective role, moving on from individual consultations with ECOSOC and the specialized agencies. But it was because of NGO activity outside the United Nations system, at least formally, that the other players began to sit up and take notice. The success achieved in opposing the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) initiative and the street demonstrations against the WTO, G8 and others, converted civil society into a new category of actor on the global scene, the implications of which are still being played out. In media and communications, however, there has been little direct action, and only slightly more in formal intergovernmental structures. (9-10)*

Unable to agree with the above, I would say that the people’s media are often hijacked by the reality television facet – the commercialized version of “people’s media” for some – and the pseudo dilemmas of those who want to demonize communication that evolves both media and media professionals. Media are indeed facilitators of globalization, are indeed the Trojan horse for consumerism, but ANY mediated message, from hard news to big Brother, carry a “truth value”. As a “truth value” I mean the amount of information, the ability to learn something you did not know before. A good example of the true value can be Al Jazeera Arabic news Channel: The CNN of the arab world, put together in liberal Qatar by ex BBC trained media professionals, showed the altera parce of War on Iraq and War against terrorism. No matter that I mostly disagree with its angle of brutal coverage, and choice of sides, a fair observer has to admit that it offered a

balanced act in the western dominance of global coverage of global events. It created a point of reference that one could disagree with but could not stop considering caring its own “truth value”.

The next step is to understand how the media act as “facilitators of globalization”, in what way they communicate the mediated message. A special role is given to news agencies and their evolution that coincides with the special role attached to media overall. Barrett and Rantanen, in *The Globalization of News* (1998) enforce the case for media being the facilitators by focusing in the role of news agencies, the starting point in the nexus of news dispatch across the globe. A story is gathered by a news agency and then beamed to other national and international media. They believe that the role of news agencies has been recognized by UNESCO, and are in a sense the first global media organizations, among the first of the world’s transnational or multinational corporations. Accepting the status of news as “a process that lies the heart of modern capitalism and globalization, the co modification of news for pleasure, business and market formulation, they show that “news” as an entity became integral element of globalized capitalism.

“the news agencies were among the world’s first organizations to operate, not only globally, but to operate globally in the production and distribution of ‘consciousness’, through the commodification of news, in ways had very significant implications for our understanding or appreciation of time and space” (5)

The evolution of news agencies showed that they had to transform from an organization attached to the nation-state, to an organization that could be powerful enough to promote the image of this given nation-state in the world; “ mass media reporting of foreign affairs very often governs what kind of image of a country or a culture predominates”

(Kunczik, 2001:4). Since news agencies was part of the established process to be a nation (Barrett and Rantanen, 8) and later created the two layer system – the global agencies pex Reuters and their national partners pex ANA (Athens News Agency) – it is obvious that such system was crucial for the process of globalization itself: To get informed one needs the wholesale of information from the periphery (national and international media) to the center (the global agencies at start and digital media later) and through the center to the whole network of media channels. Simplistic but obvious pattern of the ‘mediated’, or the route of information which spreads the message by perception: decoding by consumption the information from different space in small time frame is one of the most notable signs of globalization. Live TV, Internet and foreign correspondents from the war stage anywhere in the world is an obvious proof that the international expands to become global

Technology enhances the role of media as facilitator; Waisbord and Morris in *Media and Globalization* (2001) believe among other writers that “the coming of digital technologies and system that transcends geographical limitations, coupled with the unfettered worldwide expansion of media and telecommunications companies represent the latest assault against the state sovereignty (viii). Part of that sovereignty includes, among other things, the communication sovereignty, meaning the ability for a state to monopolize the inflow of ideas, cultural discourse. State loses the autonomy, and therefore for some globalization utilizing the media agents or facilitators manages to move the homogeneity from the national level to the cross-national; this becomes possible through the interlinking apparatus of homogenized fragments. The above, for optimist of media’s role, is the “opening of new possibilities and faster access to information” and for the

pessimists this is “a kind of information utopias as myth rather than real prospects (Ferguson 1992 in Waisbord and Morris, xi)...the process by which media corporations gain power and untrammled market forces consolidate their hegemony...”. In both approaches, one fact remains: State or inter-state apparatus (like the EU) continues to set the framework of media systems through regulation and licensing and therefore the can control the overall performance of media as facilitators of globalization

“Globalization has made it more difficult for all states to monopolize the information that citizens consume.....” (xvi)

The future of nation state is not of main focus here; the main focus lies in the role of media in the process of globalization. Media systems are vital to disseminate information for both perceiving global and communicating national in the international level; Media can be called the Trojan horse of globalization and as the only effective vehicle for the national to be communicated. Globalization is not mainly a media process but mainly through the mediated message the global is perceived and visualized. Mediated in economy, culture, socio-structural, or simply as unit of information, what is clear is that without the media systems networks global becomes virtual, fantasy, non existent. Within the media systems we include all mass media that can be state or privately owned and cover both politics or financial issues.

Moreover, through the interrelation of global media with the national counterparts, the mediated is occurring from the global to the national level meaning that the message is packaged centrally, dispatched globally and the re-packaged nationally to feed the national audiences. The filters, procedures, and role of the media professionals during

that continuous process are both important but still unclear, meaning when and if, the media professionals are in a position to influence the raw material of their trade: footage, or text.

1.4 The Greek Media case study

Greece is a European country, member of the EU and EBU. Its media market is developed but saturated. The dawn of 21st century witnessed the end of state monopoly in both Radio and Television (1989) the collapse of two from the three digital pay-tv platforms (2001-2002) and the introduction of the Internet. At the moment Greek media landscape offers all the services and option of an average western country with a balance between American and European/Greek content.

News industry follow the prevailing pattern of extensive news bulletins that focus in the national agenda giving limited space for the foreign news. Still, the last five years show the major media outlets to invest in foreign correspondents and footage from abroad. The crisis in Afghanistan, 9/11 terrorist attacks and the war on Iraq forced Greek media to dispatch journalists to the crisis area and main global centers – such as London, Paris and Berlin- to follow in a localized but also global outlook the major events.

The crisis in the former Yugoslavia was a testing time: Greek media due to geography and history had the opportunity to play a different role. From a small part of the peripheral apparatus of global media, Greek media could become a primary source for footage and coverage of the crisis. Whether they succeeded in that respect or not, is too early to say, but the fact that even at present time Greece doesn't have a 24/7 news channel proves the Greek market is developing but yet cannot be labeled as developed.

Being a media professional for the last 12 years and a London based foreign correspondent for the last 5 years, allows me to try to decode the flow of the same information through different “mediated” channels: the Greek with the Greek audience, the international with the Greek audience and the Global with Greek focus. Moreover, I will examine the concept of trilateral juxtaposition of a foreign correspondent functioning from a global center: coming from a different country, living and briefing from another country and at the same time developing an attachment with the country of residence.

The case of Greek television will allow to compare and contrast how the issues of size (of media market, country and media output), influence and evolution follow the pattern of global role of the media. Beyond that, the Greek market can give vital information into how* :

- a. A peripheral national media apparatus perform when for any reason can play the role of global one and
- b. The journalists operating from a global centre to the periphery contribute into the filtering and distribution of a given unit of information

* The basic tools for the above would be content analysis, personal interviews and comparative presentation of statistics.

1.5 Conclusion

Globalization is a process that involves the change of patterns in society; it entails the interaction of various actors within the framework of capitalism. Although many define globalization, there is not yet a commonly accepted, authoritative definition; many thinkers, like Robertson, Giddens, Rantanen, Malcolm, and even Marx approach the term through various angles.

The majority of thinkers agree to the fact that globalization carries along power structures changing existing realities for new ones; a European invention for some, a western for others, globalization remains the focal point of post modernism. The focus of my analysis is not globalization per se but how globalization is communicated and which is the role –

and the changes involved in their role- of media within that procedure. Incorporated to globalization and vital to its existence and perception are the media. Some like McLuhan, Malcolm and Rantanen and Marx show see the role of the media as the “facilitators” which are part of the “cultural side” of globalization. In other words, media and communication system are the apparatus that can, not only give life to what we call globalization, but also visualize the its effects.

Still, having established the special role of media, the question is to define the changes that media impose and equally the changes imposed to media; the new global landscape from news agencies to the totality of media seek to have some powerful center(s) and many multi-focal peripheral points of deeper distribution . Globalization affects nation-states but doesn't nullify their importance completely. Media outlets have a role to that too, as media professionals have also. The exact role is still to be found, explained and analyzed; but the fact remains that media are not only facilitators but also actor insofar as are operated by professionals who, indeed, have a role in micro and macro level social processes .

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