Globalisation, Americanisation and politicisation of media research. Learning from a long tradition of research on the cross-cultural influences of US media

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Abstract

This article starts from the observation that writers on globalisation and the media easily accept the complex interplay of the global versus the national/local (e.g. ‘glocalisation’), while they often seem to overrule the issue of unilateral power and unequal trade, flows and influences. Following Toby Miller in some recent writings (e.g. 1998, or in a 2001 book on the world dominance of Hollywood), the globalisation concept seems to have been attractive because it allows for “incoherent, multi-lateral forms and directions of power, celebrating them as market flexibilities or sites of popular resistance, depending on who is speaking”. In this context it has become highly unfashionable to use concepts such as Americanisation, American dominance or cultural imperialism, even when “Los Angeles culture and New York commerce dominate screen entertainment around the globe”. One of the major flaws of these (now) backward concepts, according to Miller (1998: 375), has been that “a concentration on the inequality of exchange emphasized directions in flow rather than in signs and reception.”

This statement however may be incorrect, given the long tradition of public debate on Americanisation and of the amount of empirical research on the question whether (and how) the huge imports and the world-wide dominance of popular US media products 'affect' local (non-US) cultures.

This article does not intend to restore these concepts, but claims that much can be learned from it in order to understand debates on globalisation. In the article we go into the debate, turning then to a historically oriented review of empirical research on the issue of cross-cultural influences by US media (including the results and the methodological logistics behind it), mainly from the 1960s onwards.

In its conclusion the paper invigorates the idea that one can observe a strong relation between the overall paradigmatic claims about (cross-cultural) media influences, the discursive level (concepts used), the main direction in the results, and specific methodological choices being made. In a broader scope it seems that methodological choice and ideological position were often related (cf. methodological tautology or circular arguments). This all means that not only public discourse on Americanisation, but also (the use of) scientific research on the issue, has been to a certain extent normative, ‘politicised’ or ‘parti-pris’. Finally we come back to recent debates, questioning how we can ever escape similar circular arguments when using the globalisation concept in any attempt to cope with intermediate positions in discussing international media power and influences.

Keywords

globalisation - active audience theory - Americanisation - cultural imperialism - critical research - cultural studies - media effects research - new audience research - politicisation of media research
“The most effective attacks against globalization are usually not those related to economics. Instead, they are social, ethical, and, above all, cultural... Since most of the world is incapable of resisting the invasion of cultural products from developed countries - more to the point, from the superpower, the United States – that inevitably trails the great transnational corporations, North American culture will ultimately impose itself, standardizing the world and annihilating its rich flora of diverse cultures. ... This nightmare of negative utopia ... is not the exclusive domain of left-wing politicians... This delirium of persecution ... is also apparent in developed countries and nations of high culture and is shared among political sectors of the left, center, and right.”

Mario Vargas Llosa (2001)

Introduction: on persistent media power and the nebula of intellectual engagement

In August 1999 a French sheep farmer was arrested for destroying a McDonald’s restaurant in the south of France. The man named José Bové argued that he acted in the name of French ‘culinary sovereignty’ and protested against the American dominated globalisation and liberalisation of world markets. Bové exported his protests to Seattle, where he was recognized by the international media as one of the most colourful leaders of the so-called anti-globalisation movement. In France Bové became an instant media celebrity and a national hero. The French media compared Bové with the popular cartoon figure Astérix, who resisted the Roman coloniser with small acts and clever tactics. In their recent book ‘The French Challenge’, Gordon and Meunier (2001) claim that “Bové came to symbolize a France that felt threatened by globalisation”, hereby “blending culture and agriculture, trade and identity, resistance to American hegemony and the French tradition of popular rebellion.” In the aftermath of Bové’s protests and trial the issue of the cultural threats of globalisation (read also: Americanisation) came high again on the French media and political agenda.

This French case is somewhat extreme in its anti-Americanism and seems in line with a long tradition of French cultural and media wars against the US (e.g. Grantham, 2000, Ulff-Möller, 2001). But it may be illustrative of a wider - although often less sharp - resurrection of critical approaches to the side effects of globalisation and the effects of persistent imbalances. While in academic circles concepts such as ‘homogenisation’, ‘cultural imperialism’, ‘Americanisation’ and so on have become tremendously outmoded since the late 1980s, they seem to pop up again widely on the internet, in the press and the media. A quick browse through the web pages and the literature in the wake of the anti-globalisation (or democratic globalisation) movement (e.g. those of ATTAC or Indymedia) illustrates how the issue of globalisation seems to be intrinsically linked to these critical concepts again. In ‘No Logo’, one of the most engaging bibles (and commercial successes) of this myriad protest movement, we see how Naomi Klein (2000) sprinkles her crusade against globalisation with concepts which at least refer to the critical paradigm in the international communication literature of the 1960s, ’70s and ’80s. In her analysis of global corporate control she explicitly defines her approach as a work of cultural criticism, referring to the “colonisation … of mental space” (p. 66), “cowboy cultural imperialism”, “Coca-Colonization” and “homogenizing effect” (p. 117). Hereby however, Klein is clever in actualising the cultural imperialism and Americanisation discourse, critically incorporating the issue of multiculturalism:

“The formula maintained the one-size-fits all cost benefits of old-style cowboy cultural imperialism, but ran far fewer risks of offending local sensibilities. Instead of urging the
world to taste America, it calls out (...) to “Taste the Rainbow.” This candy-coated multiculturalism has stepped in as a kinder, gentler packaging for the homogenizing effect of what Indian physicist Vandana Shiva calls “the monoculture” – it is, in effect, mono-multiculturalism. Today the buzzword in global marketing isn’t selling America to the world, but bringing a kind of market masala to everyone in the world. (...) This ethnic-food-court approach creates a One World placelessness, a global mall in which corporations are able to sell a single product in numerous countries without triggering the old cries of ‘Coca-Colonization.”’ (p. 117)

The anti-globalisation movement may be a temporary construct of protest from various traditions and ideological perspectives, but it strongly illustrates the visibility of the wider backlash against the benign process of globalisation. Klein’s cultural criticism at least questions post-modern ideas on globalisation and transnationalism in terms of multi-lateral forms and various directions of power with no discernible centre. While Klein’s position includes an acceptance of processes of globalisation as growing interconnectivity, it equally underlines the persistence and the pole position of specific, often US or Western, corporations in the global cultural economy. It maintains that globalisation and transnationalism are inherent to the political economic imperatives of these corporations, as well as they are to their cultural production (e.g. selling the world or promoting multiculturalism in their products instead of ‘selling America’). While Klein tends to argue that concepts in the nebula of the cultural imperialist and Americanisation discourse may be out of fashion and may be somewhat misleading (“old-style cowboy cultural imperialism”, or “without triggering the old cries of ‘Coca-Colonization’”), she underlines their continuing relevance – at least when they are rethought in a contemporary cultural economy. Ultimately she criticizes post-modern views upon globalisation, media and culture, which overrule the issue of unequal power and imbalances in terms of trade, flows and effects.

Klein’s analysis illustrates how still today ‘ready to hand’ the critical discourse of cultural imperialism and Americanisation is in response to globalisation issues. For Tomlinson (1999: 80) this discourse “retains a continuing relevance in that it has become part of the general cultural vocabulary of modern societies.” Klein and Bové are only some examples of how certain assumptions about American (cultural) dominance and its effects are still preserved in public debates, in the press as well as in cultural policy debates. In this article we argue that also in recent academic debates, there seems to be a wider visibility again of arguments claiming the relevance of analyses inspired by cultural imperialist theories – even in its most extreme of arguments about the continuing hegemonic power of Northern American media/cultural corporations. We do not suggest that the pendulum is switching again into a firm, geographically centred reconsideration of American power in global flows of media, information and culture, but we can not ignore the continuing voice of authors (by no surprise often from a political-economic perspective) who argue for the necessity to reinvigorate the critical perspective in debates on the effects of globalisation, media and culture. Claiming that globalisation theories tend to play down the issue of cultural dominance and influence, they argue for a re-conceptualisation of the critical apparatus. Armand Mattelart for instance, often seen as an icon of the critical paradigm, argued that the cultural imperialism idea may look “outmoded” and that it has been extremely simplified in debates between cultural studies and political economy scholars in the 1990s. But he continues that we need to “rethink its territory so as to make culture’s new position in the reorganised world order

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1 See Ricardo Petrella’s (1994) idea of ‘nébuleuse’ (mist or nebula), or the idea that the protest movement is a loose construct of international organizations linking together transnational communities of resistance.
politically intelligible” (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1998: 137-8). In a similar vein Toby Miller (1998: 375) argued that the discourse of cultural imperialism could be seen today rather “as an enabling alliance of intellectual engagement rather than a sustainable theory.”

This “intellectual engagement” may easily be criticized, as it was in the 1980s and ‘90s – arguing again that in these post-national times it is no longer possible to speak about clear centres and peripheries. It is also true that the continuing use of concepts in the nebula of the cultural imperialism thesis may be confusing, especially those referring to ‘America’ (or ‘Hollywood’, the ‘West’ or other derivative terms). At the background of this we see the persistent hegemonic position of the Unites States in the construction of what some critics see as a new unipolar world order - not only in terms of geopolitics, economic, diplomatic or military power, but also in terms of its leadership in cultural, media or communication domains. However, the continuing reference to America as a floating signifier or as a metaphor for power, ideas and values associated with the US or the West, is a highly problematic one. As we will argue in the next part of this paper, the concept has been used from various perspectives and in different traditions in relation to mass culture criticism, international communication debates and empirical research. The use of this metaphor can also be problematic where it may lead again to renewed assumptions about the cross-cultural impact (see Klein’s “colonisation … of mental space”, “Coca-Colonization” and “homogenizing effect … of the monoculture”). The latter deals with a central proposition of the cultural imperialism/Americanisation thesis in terms of certain dominant cultures threatening or overwhelming more vulnerable ones (Tomlinson, 1999: 80).

This critical intellectual engagement in reconsidering power in (media) globalisation debates may be very useful in counter-balancing euphoric voices about globalisation. However, as this article tries to show, we need to be very careful in using concepts and arguments, which refer to previous debates. We also claim that these ‘new’ arguments can learn a lot from previous research on cross-cultural media flows and their influences. In the next parts of this article we will take a firm historical stance. First, we introduce the issue of Americanisation as a complex metaphor in various sorts of debates on popular culture, modernity and international communication. Second, we turn to a critical review of the literature dealing with empirical research on the issue of cross-cultural influences by US media, mainly from the 1960s onwards. Special attention will be paid to the arrival of active audience theories in the 1980s, which have been central in refuting the old cultural imperialism idea and the supposed impact of American or Western media products on foreign receiving cultures. In this overview we invigorate the idea that not only public discourse on Americanisation, but also (the use of) scientific research on the issue, may have been to a certain extent normative, ‘politiciised’ or ‘parti-pris’.

Americanisation as a scattered metaphor

Mass culture criticism: America and the theoretical mapping of modern popular culture

‘Americanisation’ is one of the most complex concepts in the history of modern cultural criticism. The issue of the American media power and its cross-cultural influences has a long history of ideologically inspired debate. For more than one century now it acted as a metaphor for such diverse fears as trivialisation, standardisation, vulgarity, mass mediated and commercialised monoculture, the influence of corporate capitalism and consumer modernity, as well as it referred to fun, pleasure and hope. For the sake of clarity, we will isolate three different traditions or lines of debates with various specific frames. Before going into the use of the term in empirical social science research on the influences of the import and the world-wide dominance of US popular
Within the tradition of *mass culture criticism*, the trope of Americanisation has a long history of highly normative and politicised debate. At least since the end of the 19th century it has been a hot issue in (mainly European) debates on modernity, media and popular culture. An interesting body of literature (e.g. Webster, 1988; Schou, 1992; Strinati, 1992; Kroes, 1996; Pells, 1997) has been reflecting upon this tradition, indicating how ‘America’ has been mobilized as the (threat) paradigm of the traditionless, anarchy, superficial materialism and as an agent of ‘levelling down’ processes of cultural homogenisation (Storey, 1997). Webster (1988: 183) indicated how ‘America-as-threat’ goes back to the mid-nineteenth century, and how ideologically different currents of cultural criticism were using anti-Americanism. On the left, America and its mass cultural products were used as a metaphor for capitalism, the homogenisation and commodification of culture, and as the undermining force behind the disintegration of traditional working-class solidarity and consciousness. On the right, an elitist conservative notion of it was often related to a Leavisite position, referring to ‘industrial barbarism’ as a threat to authentic, varied and distinctive cultural forms and practices.

The literature indicates how in many European countries quite similar positions on the American cultural industry were part of a wider intellectual debate. Especially in the pre-Second World War period it was strange how quite different ideological fractions and views were unanimous in their negative consensus around the influence of American mass culture. Similar positions on modernity, popular and American culture were siphoned over in the post-war period and the 1950s, and it may be seen in some sense as a continuing debate, still resulting into cultural criticism and policy measures (e.g. the anti-American discourse in French film policy; Grantham, 2000). However, in the post-war cultural debate on Americanisation, dissenting voices were raised. The latter strongly denounced the pejorative and ideologically inflected character of the traditional elitist (left and conservative) views on the influences of American culture, while for many young working class people (and critics) American culture represented a “force of liberation against the grey certainties of (British) cultural life” (Storey, 1997: 12). Ever since, the issue of Americanisation has played a major role in the theoretical mapping of popular culture, including the blurring of the intellectually policed boundaries between high and mass culture.

Since the arrival of post-modern and globalisation theories, it seems that ‘Americanisation’ has lost its critical force, mainly through the recognition that we live in a post-national and post-colonial era where national frontiers play a minor role. The post-modern notion of decentredness of the subject, text and space ran across ideas on a geographically located power in media flows, values and influences. The notion underscored the importance of an internationalised popular culture, mainly in terms of consumption (ideas of bricolage in the use of various sorts of media products), but also production (Hollywood as the centre of transnational media culture). However, as Strinati (1992) tends to argue, this does not mean that the basic fears behind the metaphor are gone. He claims that “many of those who think we are entering postmodernity are merely echoing the moral and political pessimism, and cultural elitism, which resonated through the mass culture debate” (p. 50). He argues that especially the work of Baudrillard and Jameson represents a continuation of the fears and controversies over the decline of culture similar to those expressed in earlier debate on the impact of American mass culture (p. 51). Finally, it seems that the complex mass culture criticism debate on Americanisation turned out to be more about the intellectual distrust of emerging forms of commercial popular culture in modernity, as well as more about the old continent than about America itself.
International communication: America and the aura of critical propositions on global media power

A second area where different notions and tropes around Americanism/Americanisation have been used, is the field of international communication. Especially in the 1960s and along with the growing world-wide expansion of American media products, there was an increasing interest in mapping the political-economic power of US communication activities. This interest in the issue of Americanisation was often labelled as ‘American cultural imperialism’ defined within the critical dependency or the cultural imperialism paradigm. The latter became a complex, multi-layered conceptual tool for analysing global cultural exchanges in terms of centre and periphery (Fortner, 1993; Frederick, 1993; McAnany & Wilkinson, 1992; Mowlana, 1994; Schiller, 1991). Following Tomlinson (1999: 79) cultural imperialism may be seen as the “earliest theories of cultural globalization”.

The literature within this critical, often neo-Marxist paradigm used the concepts of Americanisation, American, media and cultural imperialism more or less as synonyms. However, the first may be seen a sharper version of the latter. Although this position feigns a state-centrist position, it is clear that Americanisation became a metaphor with a wider aura of critical propositions on global media power and effects. It referred to the conflation of Western and capitalist values; of corporate capitalism and consumerism (Skilair, 1991); or of capitalism, the spread of mass production, mass consumption and the role of mass media (Taylor, 1999). Within this discourse, the issue of Americanisation became a battle concept which in its turn was interchangeable with other, more contemporary concepts with loose theoretical underpinnings (e.g. Coca-colonization, Dallasification).

The conceptual confusion was even increased by the multiple layers at which Americanisation was supposed to act. Besides structural analyses on the control over the global media flows, other layers were included. This went from the adoption of capitalist, Western/US values in terms of organisation, media systems, management styles, media formats and styles, to propositions about audience effects of American cultural exports to the rest of the world. In the margin of political-economic analyses also textual and audience research was organized in order to underscore these critical propositions about US/Western/capitalist media power (Biltereyst, 1995; see further).

In the wake of the globalisation debates and the changes in the global cultural economy, the issue lost force since the second half of the 1980s. Within the field of international communication, the cultural imperialism paradigm and the Americanisation concept were challenged at every layer. The refutation took place at the layer of the Western/US financial control (e.g. the growing internationalisation of media capital, globalisation at the level of production), the idea of the centre and periphery (e.g. the coming at age of local non-Western media producers), the control over global media flows (e.g. the issue of contra-flows from the ‘periphery’ to the West, ‘reverse colonization’), as well as at the layer of Western/US media influences on foreign audiences and cultures (cf. the growing academic interest in audience interpretations, practices of everyday consumption and local audience resistance to foreign imports). In academic terms these tendencies have been translated into a strong re-examination and revision of former analytical frameworks, resulting into the emergence of new concepts such as hybridisation, creolisation, multiplicity (against imperialism) and interdependency (against dependency) (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1991). In a wider sense, globalisation and post-national paradigms complicated the issue of national influence and power, going from a model of domination to one of dynamic interchange where space and territory play a minor role. These conceptual shifts on non-territorial influence, sovereignty and cultural flow made all assumptions based on clear oppositions tremendously
outmoded. This was more than ever the case for America as a metaphor for cultural power within the world system, as well as for cultural imperialism theories. Cultural interconnection and interdependency clearly went against the grain of ideas about subordination, domination and purposeful power in global media flows (Tomlinson, 1999).

Rethinking and maintaining ‘America’ as an antidote?

From this perspective it may be curious that in recent years, the more euphoric versions of globalisation theories encountered head winds. We already referred to the re-emergence of concepts such as Americanisation, American dominance or cultural imperialism within public debates or in the literature in the wake of the anti-globalisation movement. But also in academic writings there is a wider acknowledgement that the ambiguities of globalisation include the persistence of Western/US power, especially in the field of media and communication.

In his discussion of globalisation, Giddens (1999) for instance claimed that it is a complex set of processes which may operate in contradictory or oppositional ways:

“Globalisation, of course, isn't developing in an even-handed way, and is by no means wholly benign in its consequences. To many living outside Europe and North America, it looks uncomfortably like Westernisation - or, perhaps, Americanisation, since the US is now the sole superpower, with a dominant economic, cultural and military position in the global order. Many of the most visible cultural expressions of globalisation are American - Coca-Cola, McDonald's. Most of giant multinational companies are based in the US too. Those that aren't all come from the rich countries, not the poorer areas of the world. A pessimistic view of globalisation would consider it largely an affair of the industrial North.”

In a similar vein, Mike Featherstone (1995: 6) argued that the process of globalization suggests simultaneously two images of cultures. Besides the compression of cultures where “everyone becomes assimilated into a common culture”, he refers to an extension outwards of a particular culture. Hereby he means that “heterogeneous cultures become incorporated and integrated into a dominant culture which eventually covers the whole world.”

Other scholars were firmer in retaining clear references to the renewed status of the US as the leader in the current neo-liberal and capitalist process of globalisation, including its hegemonic position in the field of communication and media culture. A case in point is Peter J. Taylor, who has been working on modernity and the concept of Americanisation from a world system perspective. In the recent reader ‘The American Century’, Taylor (1999) describes how in the post-war period the world system went from a period of “capacious” to “resonant Americanization”. The first, roughly referring to the period after the Second World War to 1971, deals with an era in which the US political and economic hegemony was at its highest. As a world hegemonic power, the US also exported the American way of life as the hallmark of consumer modernity. Its cultural influence was mediated through mass production, consumption and mediation. Since the 1970s, this model was contested. In a world which turned out to be more complex than ever before, the US hegemony also struggled with its moral authority, while its military (Vietnam) and economic leadership (Oil Crisis) were brought into difficulties. This ‘resonant Americanization’ refers to a dominant, although not uncontested position, where its cultural influence is no longer all-pervasive and lost its broad hegemonic legitimacy.

The idea of resonant Americanisation is interesting in that it tries to integrate this concept into theories on post-modernity, post-nationalism and globalisation, without conflating globalisation
with American power and influence. Compared to previous theories on Americanisation and similar battle concepts with a clear reference to the US, it seems necessary to incorporate the idea of the adaptation of (by origin American) multinational conglomerates and their products to the changed world economies.

Concentrating on the global media economy, the continuing hegemony of huge US firms has been well described (e.g. Herman & McChesney, 1997), including its strategies of internationalisation, delocalisation and glocalisation. In the introduction we already referred to Armand Mattelart, who argued for the continuing relevance of the critical apparatus within the dependency paradigm. Hereby he recognises the necessity to adapt the critical analytical toolkit to the new ambiguities of the contemporary global media context. In a reflexive piece Mattelart (1994: 26) acknowledges that notions of Americanisation and dependency may not have been sensitive enough in seeing more subtle tendencies of creolisation and hybridity:

"Métissage, créolisation sont désormais des termes qui traduisent ces nouvelles approches que les notions d'"américanisation" et de "dépendance" ont souvent empêché de voir."

But this does not mean that the latter concepts lost their critical edge and any empirical ground. In a similar vein and concentrating on Hollywood, Toby Miller claims that it has become highly unfashionable to use concepts such as Americanisation, American dominance or cultural imperialism, even when “Los Angeles culture and New York commerce dominate screen entertainment around the globe.” Miller reveals himself as a tough proponent of the durability of the cultural-imperialist analysis, but is interesting in how he tries to renew the critical analytical vocabulary. In his recent book, ‘Global Hollywood’ (Miller et al., 2001: 18), he argues that it became “fashionable to think (…) in terms of globalisation,” which is “a maddeningly euphemistic term laden with desire, fantasy, fear, attraction – and intellectual imprecision.” According to Miller (1998: 376) globalisation has been attractive because it allows for “incoherent, multi-lateral forms and directions of power, celebrating them as market flexibilities or sites of popular resistance, depending on who is speaking.” Miller illustrates how the American film industry continuously adapts itself to changing world economic contexts in order to expand its dominance. In this perspective he developed the concept of the new international division of cultural labour. This primarily refers to a relocation of film production around the world, using cost-effective strategies under the Hollywood umbrella so that “Hollywood has internationalized, while its large midsection remains provincial” (1998: 378). But the concept also retains a critical edge, including the idea of the continuing exploitation of labour in the periphery. This means that “globalisation does not offer an end to centre-periphery inequalities, competition between states or macro-decision-making by corporations” (Miller et al., 2001: 23).

Empirical studies on cross-cultural influences of US media

In the wake of this complex set of mass culture criticism and international communication traditions, also empirical social science research was organised, mainly on the question of the cross-cultural effects of US media material. Especially since the end of the 1960s, when the threat around the US hegemony in terms of communication and media culture reached a momentum, various sorts of research were conducted. In the following review of research we indicate how ever since this period, a wide range of audience research traditions have been dealing with the issue of US television abroad and the vulnerability of local cultures (Hur, 1982; Salwen, 1991; Ware & Dupagne, 1994). After nearly four decades of research and concentrating on US television abroad, it might be good to ask what have been the most important research directions and their findings.
Popularity, exposure and the implied effect

The threat of the negative influences of US television programming goes back to late 1960s and became well-informed since the UNESCO-sponsored studies on international television flows in the 1970s (Nordenstreng & Varis, 1974, Varis, 1974) and later on in the 1980s (Varis, 1984). These were the high days of literature on the Americanisation of global television and the conflation of ideas on US structural dominance, abundant exports, and the implied cross-cultural effects on the receiving audience (Beltran, 1978).

A first group of research relates to different indicators for the (mere) exposure to US material. Perhaps the first empirical evidence of the potential influence of US television has been reported by Ron Browne (1968: 308-9), a former USIA cultural affairs officer, who summarized USIA research on the impact of American television programs in other countries. Based on Nielsen audience ratings and popularity lists in various countries of the world, Browne indicated that "it is unwise to assume a dominant role for American programs in the popularity charts of television in other countries" (p. 311). This indicator has been used in many other publications nuancing the cross-cultural effects (e.g. Antola & Rogers, 1984 for Latin America; see in this context Roach, 1990).

A more subtle indicator on the exposure to imported/US material was used by Joseph Straubhaar (1984) who tried to assess the impact of US material in Brazil. The impact was estimated by comparing "the proportion of audience hours spent watching imported versus national programming" (p. 34). Relating to this measure of exposure he claimed that "in Brazil, the probable impact of imported programs, in terms of audience hours, has stabilized and apparently declined somewhat" (p. 44). In later research more indicators were used to precise the exposure to US/imported material (e.g. surveys in Straubhaar, 1991: 51) indicating that the "preference for US material ... tends to be stronger among the better educated", while national programming was filling prime time, pushing US imports into off hours.

This first set of empirical studies (see also Ogan, 1988; Silj, 1988) reflects upon the exposure to US programming, mostly resulting into a more relativist account about its impact. In general it is claimed that US programming may dominate the general offer, while national programming is more successful and 'effective' given the closer cultural proximity (Straubhaar, 1991). These assumptions about exposure may be interesting, but are not intrinsically related to effects, as far as we conceive effects in terms of correlations between levels of exposure and variations in behaviour or beliefs (Livingstone, 1996: 307). Following Durkin (1985: 203) it is evident that "frequency of message has yet to be demonstrated to be isomorphic with viewers' receptive processes".

Field studies

Another set of important early studies on cross-cultural effects of US television tried to link exposure to changes in audience value systems, often starting from the situation where viewers and non-viewers were compared. Probably one of the earliest studies of interest here goes back to the mid-1960s in Taiwan, where Tsai (1970) hypothesized about the impact of US television on viewers (children in the capital Taipei) and non-viewers (children from rural areas). One of the main results from this field study was that exposure to television did not influence the viewers' outlook on their own culture, although it changed their attitudes towards US culture. Tsai firmly framed his results into the 'limited effects' model of the time, referring to the audience selective perception and the importance of other mediating factors.
Another early experimental field study went into the same direction, comparing the influence of the exposure to US television among Icelanders who had and others who did not have access to US television. Following David Payne and Christy Peake (1977: 530-1) "US TV has had a minimal effect" and they argued that "Icelandic TV in its short and limited amount of programming had a more pronounced effect than American TV." The authors claimed that "the tenacity with which people hold on their own cultures" limits the effects on them, so that the "cultural imperialism hypothesis receives no substantively important support" (p. 523).

These and other field studies tend to show limited or weak effects again, and they warn against an easy assumption of cross-cultural effects. They underline a strong attachment of the receiving audience to local cultural and social values, while Western/US media messages were often seen as supplementary fare. This type of research however failed to take into account more subtle effects among different types of receivers, while it conceptualises foreign television as a uniform block of messages. Another crucial problem relates to the diminishing number of settings where groups of people have not been exposed to television.

Correlation, cultivation and changing cultural values

At the end of the 1970s more subtle approaches dealt with the issue. Inspired by the cultivation analysis tradition (Gerbner et al., 1980), a new group of studies tried to relate the amount of watching foreign/US material on the one hand, and changing values and attitudes (e.g., consumption patterns) on the other hand. An interesting author, especially for its explicit alliance with the dependency frame, has been Omar Souki Oliveira. In a first study Oliveira (1986: 130) tried to relate the exposure to US television (as the amount of time watching it) and consumption patterns in Belize. The findings supported the hypothesis that "exposure to US television correlates positively with preferences for US products, and negatively with preference for Central American goods" (p. 143). Oliveira concluded that "although the methodology of this survey differs from the macroanalysis normally used in dependency studies, the results provide compelling empirical evidence in support of the theory" (p. 144). In another, more sophisticated research Oliveira (1988) also included the issue of increased income levels next to media exposure, which was important in understanding actual consumption patterns.

The most important research in the cultivation tradition has been conducted by Robert Hawkins and Suzanne Pingree (1980; Pingree & Hawkins, 1981), who concentrated on the viewing patterns among schoolchildren in Australia and their perceptions of violence and meanness of society. This wide-scale cultivation analysis indicated that "US television content seems to be more important to their conceptions of social reality than locally originated programs or imports from countries other than the US" (Pingree & Hawkins, 1981: 103-4). Heavy viewers were more likely in cultivating mean world views, as those depicted in American crime programs. Their alarming conclusion was that "there is reason to believe that the international trade in US television programs has effects both for the exporting and the importing societies" (p. 105).

Later cultivation studies in other settings were less supporting the critical thesis (e.g. Weimann, 1984), although Alexis Tan and his collaborators (1987: 144) indicated that "frequent viewing of American television is related to some erosion of traditional Filipino values." Other cultivation studies by Tan during the second half of the 1980s were mixed, but indicated that US import may

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Sparkes (1977) e.g. found that Americans watching Canadian television did alter their vision on Canadian society, while the exposure to US television did not change Canadians' view on US society. So he noted very little attitudinal effect associated with watching foreign television.
be a major source of stereotypes about Americans (Tan & Suarchavarat, 1988) and that it even cultivated a negative image about the USA (Tan, Li & Simpson, 1986).

A final interesting research in this direction dealt with the impact of American television in Korea. Jong Geun Kang and Michael Morgan (1988) offered mixed results, and suggested that heavy exposure to Western/US programming may have unintended effects. Among the different results, they stressed the fact that "exposure to Western images and values can have a backlash effect by engendering opposition to the imported culture and raising nationalistic cultural consciousness" (p. 438). They referred to "increased nationalism and anti-Americanism - which are quite contrary to the usual assumptions about cultural imperialism" (p. 438).

Summarizing these and other correlation/cultivation studies (see Barnett & McPhail, 1980; Snyder et al., 1991) it is evident that no clear conclusion can be drawn. While many of them offer some ammunition for the cultivation and the cultural erosion thesis, other studies indicate that other factors than exposure to foreign/US material play a significant part (e.g. income). Along with other methodological criticism towards cultivation analysis in general (e.g. the serious doubts about the direction of causality) questions were raised about the basic measure of the amount of viewing, which, as Barrie Gunter (1988: 27) indicated, "may not be valid and sufficient indicators of TV effects, because TV content and viewer's preferences for that content vary considerably". Gunter continued to claim that more research had to be done "on how viewers perceive TV's images".

Uses and gratifications

A fourth set of social science research on Americanisation-as-audience—effects was inspired by the uses and gratifications approach, which saw "audience requirements as intervening variables in the study of traditional communication effects" (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974: 28). In this perspective the media user is seen as active and selective, implying that media can have an influence only when they respond to the receiver's needs. An interesting case study on the influence of US television in this vein has been conducted by Eugene Tate and Stuart Surlin (1976). Concentrating on the controversial "All in the Family", they were looking for differences between (comparable groups of) Canadian and American viewers. Although Americans were more perceptive to humour and realism in the show, it was evident that "the effects of the show lie in reinforcing existing beliefs" among Canadians, even in different cultural settings (p. 203).

Similar weak claims about effects resulted from a second uses and gratifications-inspired study on the experience of consuming the American series 'Roots' in Britain. In this study Hur and Robinson (1981: 588) found that "a majority of its viewers were likely to experience positive aspects of the program's content", especially in terms of their "positive reactions towards the black race and American blacks in particular". The openness of British viewers for this type of "serious entertainment" was enough for Hur and Robinson to conclude that this program "did have significant impact on foreign viewers" (p. 588). 'Roots' succeeded better than many other imported programs to gain credibility or "believability/significance" (p. 587).

Although the uses and gratifications perspective has been widely practiced in the 1970s and '80s, there were only few cases dealing with our issue. Most of them tend to support a relativist account on the cultural imperialism thesis given the audience activity, selectivity and overall difficulty of foreign programming to be fully understood. Among the many criticisms against this audience-directed research tradition, we can take up the issue of the self-declared uses and gratifications, where the approach overestimates the rationality and activity of the audience (McQuail, 1997: 73).
The perspective has also been seen as stressing individualistic behaviour, omitting the more subtle (sub-) cultural and sociological settings into which receivers act.

**Ethnographic work**

This fifth group of case studies tries to solve the problem of the contextual subtleties into which (foreign) television operates. From an ethnographic perspective the researcher tries not to impose its categories and questionnaires, but starts from a bottom-up perspective in order to understand the interaction between medium and audience, using participant observation techniques and interviews. The number of studies concentrating on cross-cultural influences from US/western television from this perspective is small, and mostly they deal with the consequences of the introduction of television in general (not just US programming) in remote areas and/or in a Third World country.

An interesting case study observed the effects of the introduction of television among Algonkian Indians of Central Canada. In its study Gary Granzberg (1982) stressed the fact that television was quickly woven into the Indians' lives by being placed into the familiar role of conjuring and storytelling device. As such it disrupted traditional life among the Indians and it changed their values. At the same time Granzberg acknowledged that "the picture is not totally negative" because "some critical viewing skills have been developed" in relation to television (p. 50). He stressed "the role of cultural, especially ideological, components in the development of critical viewing" so that the "exacerbated vulnerabilities to television (is) conditioned by very tenacious and deep-seated cultural traditions" (p. 51).

Other ethnographic work (e.g. Stolz, 1983, Kottak, 1990, Davis, 1990) has been done, hereby suggesting ways by which global (television) values slip into the local social life of receiving cultures. In an overview of such anthropological/ethnographic work, Sreberny-Mohammadi (1991) stressed "the complex (re)negotiation of identity(ies) vis-à-vis the 'dominant' and the 'foreign' cultures." In stressing the receiver's negotiation and adaptation of foreign/Western television, such work usually rejected generalized views on cross-cultural influences:

"This work reveals again the post-modern 'bricolage' of assorted cultural icons ... which circulate inside the non-industrialized world, yet invites no simple reading of the effects of these encounters. ... (It) shows the complexity and range of reactions to and uses of contemporary global encounters. They warn us against generalized assumptions about media/cultural effects." (p. 133)

**Reception analysis, active audiences, and politicisation**

This leads us to a final strain of audience research since the 1980s, recently labelled as a tradition of active audience theories. The rapid development of reception analysis and ‘new’ qualitative audience research in this period must be seen against the background of the inconclusiveness and criticism upon effects research, the uses and gratifications perspective and other audience-oriented research traditions (Morley, 1989). New audience research covered various forms of qualitative empirical audience research, seeking to integrate social-scientific and more humanistic perspectives (Jensen & Rosengren, 1990). As such, different questions were asked, rejecting notions of overall effects and replacing them by a more 'limited' model on the meaningful 'text'; the
encoding of the text; the relation between meaning in encoding, text, decoding and context; the variations in the modes of viewing and decoding (Hall, 1980; Morley, 1980, 1989; Corner, 1996). Concentrating on the Americanisation/globalisation debate these detailed audience studies on a micro-level were seen as capable in "most effectively grasp(ing) the significance of the processes of globalisation and localization", and Morley (1991) continued:

"... any analysis of these macro-processes which is not grounded in an adequately understanding of the complexities of the process of (principally domestic) consumption run... the risk of being so over-schematic as to hide all the differences that matter."

The issue of the cross-cultural reception of US television material has been a grateful research topic for a long strain of new audience studies from the mid-1980s onwards (e.g. Katz & Liebes, 1984; Hjört, 1986; Liebes & Katz, 1986; O'Connor, 1990; Liebes & Katz, 1990; Biltereyst, 1991; Morris, 1995; Lee & Siu, 1997). The new perspective opened up a virulent methodological and ideological debate about the implied effects of the cultural imperialism thesis, and wider about power in the international cultural economy. The key reference in this debate was/is the Liebes and Katz research on the cross-cultural meanings and appeal of Dallas – the serial which in this period was often seen as the ultimate metaphor for Americanisation in terms of US, vulgar, capitalist and consumerist material. Along with the other studies that it inspired, Liebes and Katz stressed the high polysemic value and openness of this program on the one hand, and the active process of negotiation between the text and the receivers, situated in their specific social and (sub-) cultural context.

Because this now classical research quickly became a landmark in debates on media globalisation, we would like to concentrate on its critical reception. Along with a handful of other key studies such as those by David Morley (1980), Ien Ang (1982/1985), Janice Radway (1984) and Klaus Jensen (1986), Liebes’ and Katz’ Dallas project quickly entered into the canon of those works responsible for inspiring the new audience research tradition, and challenging the field of communication and media studies in many different ways. In the meantime this audience-centred and bottom-up perspective was seen as a new promising field within the British cultural studies tradition (Livingstone, 1998: 194), and as such mostly considered as growing out of the critical tradition (Curran, 1996: 136).

In the same period a vigorous external critique was organised, especially by those who saw themselves as the true defenders of the radical heritage (for a discussion see Curran, 1990; Schlesinger, 1991; Schiller, 1991; Seaman, 1992; Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1991; Ferguson & Golding, 1997). Especially scholars working within the political economy perspective saw the success of new audience research and their relativist account on the societal distribution of power as the ultimate proof of 'cultural studies' failure to deal empirically with the deep structural changes in national and global political, economic and media systems through its eschewing of economic, social or policy analysis' (Ferguson & Golding, 1997: xiii; see also McGuigan, 1992: 128). Reception studies and other forms of new audience research were accused of over-stressing the dispersion of power and the media consumers’ potential to choose and manipulate media.

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3 For a summary and discussion, see Biltereyst (1991, 1995).
4 Liebes’ and Katz’ ‘Decoding Dallas’-project has been published in e.g. Katz & Liebes (1984), Liebes & Katz (1986, 1988, 1990) and has been the object of a wider criticism and discussion (e.g. in Roach, 1990, 1997; Schiller, 1991; Tomlinson, 1991; Gripsrud, 1995; Barker, 1999; Miller et al., 2001).
products actively. Their 'romanticisation' of audience activity and resistance strangely coincided with the celebration of consumer choice and sovereignty, which had been the main (rhetorical) guideline in liberal communications policies under Reagan, Thatcher and many other conservative governments in Europe and elsewhere (Curran, 1996). In his sharp 'New Revisionism' article, James Curran (1990) argued that new audience studies seemed to be unaware of the fact that many of their research methods (e.g. lengthy individual interviews) and key concepts (e.g. the active and creative role of the audiences, the multiple meanings generated by texts, the relative audience autonomy) were not so innovative at all. Curran indicated that many of these studies were only miming specific lines of inquiry within the traditional effects research tradition. As such, he noted a steady advance of pluralist themes and models of media influence within the radical tradition:

"Reception studies documenting audience autonomy are being invoked to challenge the view of the media as the means by which dominant discourses are reproduced. ... By implication, the power to map and make sense of society in a form that serves and universalizes collective interests is widely diffused in society. There are no dominant discourses, merely a semiotic democracy of pluralist voices. But this new version of the pluralist argument overstates its case not least because it exaggerates the impermeability of audiences to media influences." (Curran, 1990: 151)

No other single research was more capable of inspiring such a severe debate over the validity and ideological implications of new audience research than Katz' and Liebes's Dallas studies. For some (e.g. Barker, 1999: 113-4; Richardson & Meinhof, 1999: 6) this research still is the key reference in rejecting claims about equating homogenisation, globalisation and Americanization. But for others, it was the nec plus ultra of the reassessment of the critical research agenda, especially in its claims about the influences of structural international communication inequalities. For the proponents of a hard political economy perspective such as Herbert Schiller (1991: 13; see also Seaman, 1992) it was clear that this audience-centred approach was a primary effort "to minimize or discredit the idea of cultural domination,” while Colleen Roach (1990: 296) was even more explicit in its ideological workings:

"To summarize, the challenges to the media imperialism school are themselves subject to serious criticism. The writings of authors such as Katz and Liebes have an essentially political agenda: to undermine the very idea of ideology and its connection to capitalist expansion."

This severe critical reception of the Dallas study had much to do with the fact that this wide-scale qualitative audience research, co-authored by one of the founding fathers of mass communication research (Curran & Liebes, 1998; Livingstone, 1993), treated such a topical issue. It came at a moment when the USA (1984) and UK (1985) withdrew from UNESCO; when UNESCO increasingly lost its role as the main forum for debates about international communication inequalities; when the movement for a new order in international communication (indicated as NWICO/New World Information and Communication Order) had been flawed; and when, partly as a result, the academic fractions supporting this movement, went through a severe crisis for legitimacy (Roach, 1990: 296; 1997: 48-9). From an academic perspective, it is clear that the cultural imperialism thesis was being questioned, not only by audience studies such as Katz' and Liebes's which seemed to indicate that 'Dallas', its rival 'Dynasty' and other symbols of American cultural imperialism did not seem to create cross-cultural synchronization, alienate the viewer, or could not simply impose their hegemonic value system. In the second half of the 1980s there were many other significant international communication developments, which challenged the agenda of the critical cultural imperialism school (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1991; Tomlinson, 1991; McAnany
& Wilkinson, 1992; Mowlana, 1994). The Latin-American case indicated for instance that the creation of a strong local media industry in a non-first world region (e.g. Brazilian television companies) could not only reduce or stop huge imports from the North, but eventually lead to reverse flows. Or as John Sinclair, Elizabeth Jacka and Stuart Cunningham (1996: 7) summarized:

"... by the mid-1980s it became evident that the cultural imperialism discourse had serious inadequacies, both as theory and in terms of the reality which the theory purported to explain. Actual transformation of the world television system made it less and less sustainable on the empirical level, and shifting theoretical paradigms, including postmodernism, postcolonialism, and theories of the 'active' audience, made it conceptual foundations less secure."

Katz' and Liebes's research was topical in still other fields of international communication policy and research. In the second half of the 1980s and in the years to follow, one saw a new spiralling European public debate on media, identity and American cultural influences. This debate was fuelled mainly by the Europeans' despair over the severe crisis in the local television industry, the moribund state of the national film sectors and the huge, still increasing dominance of US audio-visual products (Wasko, 1994). The European Commission's policy to create a common audio-visual space (Schlesinger, 1994, 1998) went hand in hand with a public debate on the appeal and the threat of American cultural influences. At very regular moments since the second half of the 1980s, the EC/EU policy initiatives to stimulate and protect local (audio-visual) culture brought the old issue of Americanisation on the public (news) agenda again, with high flaming marks in 1984, 1989, 1991 and 1993. At all these occasions European political and cultural spokesmen openly expressed their Angst by referring to the défi américain, Cocacolonisation and other ways of describing possible negative American cultural influences.

It was in this (by now historical) international political and academic context that the Katz and Liebes research came across, with its implicit refutation of strong negative cross-cultural influences of global/American media products. Although it was certainly not the first empirical study to question the Americanisation issue, as we have seen earlier on, it is interesting to consider its stormy public and academic reception. Unlike most other studies on this topic, it received a wide coverage, even in international and mainly American newspapers:

"The best indication of the utility of this research to incorporate America is provided in an extensive article published in the New York Times detailing Liebes's doctoral dissertation... Like the authors themselves, the Times zeroes in on the study's ideological mission: '... it relates to a larger debate about the question of so-called American cultural imperialism' (New York Times, 1 April 1986)." (Roach, 1990: 294)

This clear politicisation of the original Dallas research may have had to do with Katz' reputation and the highly topical issue. But even today it is capable to serve as a catalyst in the construction of a confrontation between different academic fractions. In ‘Global Hollywood’ (2001: 174-5) Toby Miller at al. refer to Liebes and Katz as “conservative functionalists”, locating them within an ideological counter-critique against the cultural imperialism thesis.

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Looking back at the whole fuss about the Katz and Liebes study, it seems that the confrontation was part of a highly politicised reconstruction for political academic and ideological purposes. And that, on the basis of the different analytical levels, such a confrontation had not to take place, if more attention would have been given to what the research of the different fractions really refers. What new audience research such as Katz and Liebes did in relation to theories of cultural imperialism was to empirically go into the implicit notions on (cross-) cultural effects of global/American cultural products. But they did not, as Hallin (1998: 164) rightly claimed, refute the key notions of structural international power.

With hindsight it is evident that Katz’ and Liebes’ research has been among the most widely discussed studies in the recent history of cultural and media studies. More than a decade after Liebes and Katz began to publish their papers on Dallas however, there seems to be a growing awareness that post-modern views on power need also an integration of different levels of analysis and theories, both on a micro/macro and a global/local level (e.g. Morley, 1991). An interesting case is Armand Mattelart, one of the main protagonists of the cultural imperialism thesis in the 1970s and '80s. While in 1987 he still referred to Katz and Liebes as an example of neo-liberal research to denounce international dominance and promote the free flow doctrine (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1987: 134), he later on acknowledged the importance of forms of interpretive audience resistance. This is in line with what we described as Mattelart’s view upon the ambiguities in globalisation, without refuting the usefulness of concepts of dependency and cultural imperialism which “could still be used to apprehend the imbalance in worldwide flows of information and communication” (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1998: 138). The mutual recognition of the usefulness of the different streams of research was also stressed by Sonia Livingstone (1998: 201), who referring to Hallin (1998), claims that “the link to political economy is crucial if ... we are to understand the differing significance of active audiences in democratic and totalitarian regimes.” Or, as David Morley (1997: 127) put it:

"From my own perspective, our objective must not be to substitute one (micro or macro) level of analysis for the other, but rather to attempt to integrate the analysis of the broader questions of ideology, power and politics (... the vertical dimension of communication) with the analysis of the consumption, uses and functions of television in everyday life (the horizontal dimension...)."

Discussion

"My limited reflections are based upon a truism...: all research is political. When the production and circulation of a particular body of research meets with wide acclaim in the academic world, one should always ask 'why'?"  
Colleen Roach (1990: 293)

"Historically, the hidden agenda of audience research, even when it presents itself pure and objective, has all too often been its commercial or political usefulness. In other words, what we should reflect upon is the political interventions we make when studying audiences."

7 Liebes and Katz even continued to repeat that they did not want to study content, structural dominance or even not effects, "because proving effects is so difficult" (1990: 8). They explicitly and consistently noted that it was "about the ways in which people are engaged" or "involved", although they more implicitly indicated that it deals with "the processes that might lead to effects" (1986: 152; also e.g. Katz & Liebes, 1986; my italics).
About Americanisation, scientific research and political agendas

This critical reappraisal of empirical studies on the cross-cultural influences of US television programming argued that these must essentially be grasped in the light of broader (normatively and ideologically inflected) frames of interpretation for Americanisation and US cultural dominance. In this short overview we could not pay justice to the complexities of all the different case studies, but it allows us to draw some main conclusions.

At first sight, we are confronted by the paradox of the apparent inconclusiveness, the continuous contradictions in effects sizes and directions, as well as by a fear for broad generalizations. This is mainly a result of the changing conditions of mediated communication on an international scale, as well as of changing research designs. As such, the question of the US media influences seems to remain unresolved given the sheer variety of the different research approaches, terminology and agenda. Similar to audience and effects research in general (e.g. McLeod et al., 1991; McQuail, 1997), it is difficult to compare and review the available studies on this question, given the numerous dimensions in geography (the origin of the receiving community), media type (television, film,...), empirical design and research tradition (uses and gratifications, correlation studies,...), as well as the type of effects (attitudinal vs. cognitive vs. behavioural; micro vs. macro; long-term vs. short term;...), the audience studied (specified vs. general audience) or the size and directions of effects (strong vs. limited vs. no effects; positive vs. negative vs. undefined). Even the basic terminology ('effects', 'impact', 'reception', ...) may cause serious difficulties, given the various specific research agendas, ethics and vocabulary of the different directions. This makes that, similar to the overall effects debate (Livingstone, 1996: 306), many questions on the US media influences remain unresolved.

Secondly and from a meta-methodological position, the review invigorates the idea that there seems a strong relation between specific methodological choices made by empirical studies on the one hand, and the direction in the results and claims about cross-cultural effects on the other hand. Concentrating on the results, we see that one should be aware of the fact that there seems to be a clear linkage between methodological choices, research designs, and the resulting effect size. Although there are many different effects directions and sizes (from views about marginal and positive influences to claims about strong negative effects on the receiving culture), one has to acknowledge such an association. In this context it appears that qualitative, context-oriented research designs (ethnographic studies, new audience research) tend to take a relativist account on media power, stressing resistance and negotiations, and the empowerment of the audience. This conjures up the idea, as Sonia Livingstone wrote (1996: 313), that "the more ecologically valid the study the smaller the effect size". Other perspectives such as correlation and cultivation analysis tend to isolate different variables out of an everyday life context, and are likely to result into arguments about strong effects. This claim on methodological tautology or circular argument means, in a simplified version, that the choice of a certain method and design will probably lead to specific results about effects. This is not new of course, but it is important to be aware of and reflect upon it given the highly politicised topic which still is the debate about Americanisation. Especially in relation to audience/effects research into moral panic and other highly politicised issues, one should acknowledge that research design and methodological choice may include in its basic choice a 'political' act on its own.
Thirdly, the review finally clearly indicated that Katz and Liebes were certainly not the first to put question marks behind the (mostly implicit) assumptions of cross-cultural effects of structural media dominance. The critical reception of their Dallas-study indicated that it is important to acknowledge the historical context, altogether with the international political and academic agenda against which specific research topics are treated. This agenda may have had a politicising effect on the interpretation of the research results. The fuss about this study also underlined the apparent lack of knowledge about earlier empirical studies on the issue. Only few scholars referred to older research pieces and, when they did, it was often inspired by a strategy to serve a particular position in the overall debate. Again, similar to what happens with effects studies on social issues in general (Livingstone, 1996), it is evident that also academic research on cross-cultural effects of US media products has often been assessed against a political rather than a scientific agenda. This is certainly the case in relation to debates about Americanisation – which is, as we have tried to indicate, an extremely, multi-layered and ideologically loaded concept.

**About globalisation and a new critical vocabulary**

But what does this all mean in terms of studying power and its effects in global cultural flows? This article does not want to draw clear lines or avenues to follow for future research – even on the contrary given the inconclusiveness of the scattered results. Rather we would like to sharpen the awareness about the inherent politicised nature of debates and research on globalisation.

First, there is the awareness of the ever changing historical context of global cultural flow, with on the one hand tendencies of growing interdependency (along with creolisation, hybridity, glocalisation), but on the other hand the continuing relevance of (re)considering and investigating the power issue. In this context it is not only important to acknowledge the broader political-economic and media context, but also the international political and academic agenda against which this research topic is treated. Here we referred to the resurrection of concepts in the sphere of Americanisation in the wake of the anti-globalisation movement as well as in academic writings. In these post-national times it may be more than ever misleading to refer to these concepts, while as the Mattelarts (1998) suggest it will be necessary to refine the critical vocabulary in any attempt to cope with intermediate positions in discussing international media power and influences.

Second, there is the awareness about the strong relation between the overall paradigmatic claims about (cross-cultural) media influences, the discursive level (concepts used), the main direction in the results, and specific methodological choices being made. In a broader scope it seems that methodological choices and ideological position were often related. This all means that not only public discourse on Americanisation/globalisation, but also (the use of) scientific research on the issue, will ever be to a certain extent normative and ‘politicised’. This may not be a problem, but coming back to recent debates, the difficult question will be how we can ever escape similar circular arguments.

Besides this self-reflexive methodological awareness, it seems necessary and be aware of the different layers of research. This means that we will have to distinguish between forms of power in terms of structural and financial control, the international division of labour, up to the work of audiences. After all, as we indicated in the Katz and Liebes case, it seems that their critical reception may have had a beneficial effect in the wider acceptance of the need to use a multiperspectivist approach to global media power.

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