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## Introduction: Toward a Transcultural Political Economy of Global Communication

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Let us begin with some snapshots of the “global” in January 2007, both mediated and through our personal transnational experiences. The Bush administration in the United States escalated its four-year occupation and war in Iraq, a nation thrown into yet another civil war in the “Third World,” while Iran’s nuclear aspirations cast a long shadow on the future of Western dominance in the region. Venezuela’s president Hugo Chávez, winning a third popular mandate after famously surviving the April 2002 coup that aimed to oust his left-leaning government, was granted “extended powers” by the national assembly and promises “Socialism or Death,” raising new hopes and fears. Epitomizing its strategy of amassing “asymmetrical power” in the post–Cold War global political economy, China shocked the Western world and scored victory in its determination to contest U.S. military supremacy in space by quietly launching a ballistic antisatellite missile. Bollywood star Shilpa Shetty’s racist encounter on the British hit reality show *Big Brother* became an international diplomatic incident between the UK and India—two nations that speak of renewing a “special relationship” in the new century. Meanwhile, the *Times of India*, one of the major English-language national newspapers, splashed headlines that announced “India’s global takeover” featuring a campaign titled “India Poised: Make 2007 the Year of India.” As an editorial from the Sunday edition on January 21 mused that the “mindset” of India taking on the globe is firmly in place, a middle-class India composed of *lathi*-charging doctors and fasting students waged regularly televised battles against expanding caste-based reservations in universities and the private sector.

We were consuming our daily dose of news and popular culture from our temporary vantage point in Bangalore, as participants of a workshop studying information societies in the South, organized by IT for Change, a progressive

nongovernmental organization (NGO) based in the city.<sup>1</sup> For one of us, this was a first trip to India, an opportunity for a Chinese Canadian scholar to compare experiences across the South without the point of reference always being mediated through the North American or European experiences. For the other, India was home, along with Canada and the United States. Although it is virtually impossible to see the “real” Bangalore, much less India, in a few days, we faced some restriction in our mobility on our one day “off” from the meeting rooms of the workshop when a partial curfew was called because of localized incidents of communal violence in response to protests against Saddam Hussein’s execution in Iraq.

The workshop that we were attending was meant to stimulate a research agenda around the specificities of the fractured information economies *and* societies in the South, with an emphasis on greater “South-South” collaboration. We spent several days discussing the political economy of e-governance; the respective roles of the state and the market in ensuring digital inclusion; and the role of NGOs and social movements, across India’s varied regional information economies, and also between Brazil, China, Ghana, and South Africa. However, the discussions were constantly inflected with the pressing reality of the wider and more urgent political world in which we lived. Our discussions with fellow participants included, among many other tangents, debates about what explained the local demonstration and counterdemonstration nearly three weeks following Saddam Hussein’s execution, how to make sense of new left populism or pragmatism, whether embodied by Chávez in Venezuela or the Communist Party of Indian (Marxist) (CPIM) fending off months of local protest against its plans to establish West Bengal’s first export processing zone (EPZ).

The fact that there was greater direct foreign investment in India through the NGO sector, as opposed to through the manufacturing sector, made us wonder if China’s authoritarian political structure and its continuing suppression of an independent civil society meant that India might maintain a “comparative advantage” in NGO funding. Would exploitative sweatshops remain as part of the “world’s workshop” in China, while civic-minded NGOs with transnational presence flourish in India? Meanwhile, what are the global political economic and cultural implications of China’s increasing economic presence in Africa? Can there be a true “partnership in development” between China and Africa, as China’s official discourse champions? Over dinner conversations, our colleague Amin Alhassan, a Ghanaian Canadian scholar based at York University, Canada, expressed a welcoming attitude toward the flow of Chinese capital into Africa to the extent that Chinese capitalism provides a new option for African countries that have long felt the stranglehold of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) regime. U.S. and British media discourses, perhaps betraying a not-so-subtle double standard

about the political role of global market expansion, point to a new form of Chinese colonialism in Africa. Both Chinese and Western discourses, however, are less likely to pay attention to the fact that along with Chinese capital, the Chinese male workers who help to build the new temples of African modernity—new highways, conference centers, and mobile phone networks have become part of everyday gossip, as related by a Southern African official, about how more “children with Chinese characteristics” are likely to be born to African women. This, perhaps signals a sense of local uneasiness about the profound racial and cultural implications of a continental shift in the transnational flows of capital, labor, and culture.

We use this particular vantage point in January 2007 as a point of entry to help contextualize our specific framing of global communications and its necessary omissions. Any scholarly work on globalization that attempts to provide a transnational or translocal analysis attentive to difference is doomed to fail without some clear recognition of the limited conceit of the global. Here, the proliferation of ethnographic and historically situated studies of everyday people and their relationship to modern state and nonstate actors, communication technologies, and mass-mediated culture (Abu-Lughod 2004; Appadurai 1996; Ferguson 2006, García-Canclini 1995; Ong 2006; Rajagopal 2005; Yúdice 2003), has considerably influenced our understanding of the utility and resonance of an overarching political economic analysis of global communications.

We also locate this volume within an expanding body of literature on global communication and media studies in the following three broad categories: works that attempt to historicize and critically interrogate the shifting boundaries and trajectories between local and global flows of information and culture (Chan and McIntrye 2002; Artz and Kamalipour 2003; Ginsburg et al. 2002; Kraidy 2005; Miller et al. 2005; Sreberny-Mohammadi et al. 1997; Thussu 2006; Wang et al. 2000); works that attempt to decenter the conceptual parameters of global information and media studies (Abu-Lughod 2004; Alhassan 2004; Curran and Park 2000; Downing 1996; Iwabuchi 2002; Martín-Barbero 1993; Mattelart 1994; Semati 2004); and finally works that attempt to address normative debates underpinning global communications in the context of neoliberalism (Bailie and Winseck 1997; Calabrese and Sparks 2004; Chakravartty and Sarikakis 2006; Hackett and Zhao 2005; Herman and McChesney 1997; Hills 2002; Mattelart [1996] 2000; Morris and Waisbord 2001; D. Schiller 1999a, 2007; Schiller and Mosco 2001; Thomas and Nain 2004; Vincent, Nordenstreng, and Traber 1999).

As the first decade of the twenty-first century quickly draws to a close and as neoliberal globalization reaches a critical juncture, we build upon this body of research by offering a theoretically driven and empirically grounded discussion of global communications as understood through key vectors of state, market, and societal power and multiple sites of domination and contestation.

Before introducing the book's overarching transcultural political economy framework and its organizational logic, it is necessary to briefly expand on our understanding of both globalization and neoliberalism.

### **NEOLIBERAL GLOBALIZATION: INCLUSIONS, EXCLUSIONS, CRISES, AND RESPONSES**

Thomas Friedman, “court-philosopher” of information technology (IT) and financial capital-driven globalization (Zizek 2006), has already written “a brief history of the twenty-first century” as early as 2005, with the best-selling book *The World is Flat*. Friedman relied extensively on “techno-gurus” from both China and India as native informants for his technologically deterministic arguments about the leveling effect of IT-led development, reducing differences instantaneously between emerging and advanced economies. Back in Bangalore in January 2007, as we waited to make our way to the workshop from the airport in a spectacular traffic jam that was an everyday part of life, we assumed that Friedman must have been parachuted into the gated IT corridor, therefore avoiding the decidedly “unflat” wait in snarled traffic criss-crossing the unplanned and unorganized spaces of life and work for most of the city’s workforce. As the problem of getting from one part of an emerging “global city” to another makes apparent, we are compelled to understand a globalizing and globalized world as a multifaceted, fractured, and hotly contested political and social spaces. In fact, Held and McGrew have gone so far as to identify no less than six major paradigms on the politics of globalization: neoliberals, liberal internationalists, institutional reformers, global transformers, statist/protectionists, and radicals (Marxists, communitarians, anarchists) (2002, 98–117). Despite the frequency with which the term *globalization* has been invoked in the media and academic literature, Chinese official discourse, for example, continues to refuse to use the all-encompassing term “globalization.” Instead, it prefers to use the more specific term of “economic globalization,” signifying the Chinese state’s attempt to integrate with the global market system on the one hand, and resist political and cultural assimilation into the American-dominated global capitalist order on the other.

This book foregrounds a conception of globalization as not only multifaceted and extremely uneven, but equally importantly, lived and experienced through new modes of both citizenship and exclusion. We identify neoliberalism as a political philosophy rooted in a claim that the market is more rational than the state in the redistribution of public resources and is based on a “return” to individualism animated by the modern notion of consumer sovereignty (Ong 2006, 11). As in the work of Harvey (2005), Ong (2006), and Robison (2006), among others, we argue that the institutional imposition or

adoption of neoliberalism must be understood in the Polanyian tradition of market embeddedness in society. In *The Great Transformation*, Karl Polanyi ([1944] 1957) argued not only that markets were part of the totality of society as a political economy approach would insist, but that “[f]or markets to be sustainable they must also be capable of at least staking a claim to furthering the ethical basis of social life” (Jenkins, 2006, 307). In the post–Washington Consensus era, when the economic architects of neoliberalism like Jeffrey Sachs and Joseph Stiglitz invoke an urgent need to temper the excesses of “free trade,”<sup>2</sup> Polanyi’s attention to the symbolic legitimacy of market transformation seems especially prescient. Throughout this book, we examine how neoliberal transformations of information, communication, and culture industries are embedded within historically specific political cultures, across legacies and ongoing processes of state formation and transformation, and across distinct trajectories of civil society organization/disorganization. Neoliberalism conceived in this framework is thus more dynamic and complicated than the caricatured ideas of market fundamentalism because it not only sustains and creates repressive political economic conditions deepens extant inequalities, but also provides new and often unintended possibilities for negotiation, incorporation, and contestation.

Throughout the book, the authors examine the inherent tensions of neoliberal reform across market societies embedded in shifting local, national and transnational contexts. These include Yuezhi Zhao and Olessia Koltsova’s chapters on China and Russia’s very different trajectories of reintegration with global capitalism, and Katharine Sarikakis’s chapter examining the ideological and cultural configuration of the European Union. In the same section, we have Soek-Fang Sim’s analysis of Singapore’s own quiet negotiation of neoliberal reform as the poster child for globalization, as compared with Robert Duffy and Robert Everton’s chapter on Venezuela’s more dramatic and vocal rejection of neoliberal globalization. The next section features chapters by Koichi Iwabuchi and Marwan Kraidy, who survey the new parameters of liberalized regional media markets in East Asia and the Arab world respectively, while Boatema Boateng traces the gendered transnational production and circulation of “local” *adinkra* cloth and Mari Castañeda considers the possibilities of Spanish-language broadcasting targeting the growing migrant working classes of the United States. In the final section, Sunera Thobani analyzes the challenges of the venerated public service documentary representing the interests of multiple publics in the politically charged post-9/11 discussions of Islam and gender within and beyond Canada, while Helga Tawil Sourì focuses on the expansion of informational capitalism against the shrinking if not absent Palestinian nation-state. Arthur Martins-Aginam critically engages with the “NGO-ization” of the political landscape in sub-Saharan Africa and Paula Chakravartty considers the relationship between

workers and civil society within emerging and deeply unequal information societies like India.

In their studies of the above variegated cases, the book's authors go beyond both alarmist and celebratory approaches by grounding their analyses of communication and globalization in specific spatial and temporal terms and multifaceted realities. We recognize as conventional wisdom that it is no longer adequate to simply invoke the epochal defining terms that have been associated with globalization, that is, "the age/era of globalization," in the delineation of the temporality of our experiences. However, we do not accept at face value the conclusion that reportedly was reached at the 2006 International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) conference in Cairo, that is, globalization is dead.<sup>3</sup> Even if globalization is indeed dead—and some would argue that the 9/11 assault on the symbols of American military and financial power marked the exact moment of this death—capitalism, the socioeconomic system driving the current phrase of globalization, and the related, but not necessary parallel, processes of modernization and modernity are moving ahead if not forward in full speed.

Historical continuities of developments prior to the current era of globalization therefore figure prominently in our work. Locating current global transformations in a longer history of modernity is apparent in Olessia Koltsova's contextualization of the Soviet era of glasnost (1985–1991) in relation to imperial Russia's embrace of Western European modernity under Peter the Great, whose desire to modernize Russia led him to not only to disguise himself as a foreign student in western Europe but also move imperial Russia's capital from Moscow to St. Petersburg, so that Russia could be closer to western Europe both spatially and temporally. Elsewhere in the volume, historical continuities are emphasized in Koichi Iwabuchi's attention to the role of Japanese colonialism in the shaping of popular cultural affinities in East Asia and in Arthur Martins-Aginam's consideration of the legacy of the violence of the colonial state in Nigeria and South Africa in relation to current celebratory discussions of civil society and human rights. Yuezhi Zhao focuses on how the Maoist search for a Chinese socialist alternative to either Western capitalist modernity or Soviet bureaucratic socialism casts a long shadow on the contemporary Chinese program of neoliberal economic development and global reintegration. Similarly, Paula Chakravartty analyzes the historical shifts from the Nehruvian to the neoliberal postcolonial Indian state as the backdrop against which to make sense of the ongoing politics of access to the much-prized information technology sector.

While we draw upon and contribute to a now well-established body of literature that has analyzed the astonishing developments in global communications in the last two decades of the twentieth century, the book's time frame is distinctively set in the post-Washington Consensus period. That is, building

upon existing work that has documented neoliberal developments in a whole range of communication industries and described the formation of “electronic empires” (Thussu 1998), the rise of “global Hollywood” (Miller et al. 2005), “the globalization of corporate media hegemony” (Artz and Kamlipour 2003), or the expansion of informational or digital capitalism both globally (Herman and McChesney 1997; D. Schiller 1999, 2007) and regionally (Mosco and Schiller 2001), we move on to analyze the aftermath of these developments, that is, responses to and revisions of neoliberalism, both in and through the realm of global communications.

Moreover, rather than taking 9/11 in 2001 as the definitive beginning of what might be seen as a “postneoliberal” era, we identify the global economic crises that occurred in Russia, Brazil, Argentina, and most significantly, in a number of East and Southeast Asian “tiger economy” nations and regions—including Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Korea—in 1997 as the beginning of a new phase of globalization. Although this worldwide economic crisis was commonly known as the “Asian Financial Crisis,” it was actually a “global contagion” as even the *New York Times* acknowledged (Kristof et al. 1999, cited in Calabrese 2004, 4). This worldwide economic crisis, and global financial capital’s attempt to overcome it, which ironically contributed to the making of the subsequent telecommunications crisis and the Internet bubble in the United States at the turn of the new century (D. Schiller 2003), marked the beginning of the internal readjustment, if not the unraveling, of the “neoliberal revolution” (Robison 2006).<sup>4</sup>

What is significant is the extent to which many of the authors writing about different parts of the world in our volume recognize the importance of this crisis and discuss the variegated ways in which this global contagion has shaped subsequent developments both nationally and regionally.

In Russia, as Olessia Koltsova describes, the economic crisis of the late 1990s led to a profound disillusionment with the “shock therapy” approach in the transition from communism, with many among the Russian citizenry experiencing a deep sense of betrayal by Western capitalism and a rising nostalgia for the order, security, and national unity of the Soviet era. This led to a new dynamic of state, society, and media interaction and the rapid reconsolidation of state power under Putin’s more authoritarian regime.

In Singapore, through and together with the media, the ruling People’s Action Party (PAP), which Soek-Fang Sim characterizes as the exemplary neoliberal nation with its unique combination of economic liberalism and a strong “soft authoritarian” government, legitimized further neoliberal restructuring of the economy and refashioned its hegemony over Singaporean society by framing economic hardships in terms of “regional crisis, personal solutions.” Marwan Kraidy’s chapter considers the possibilities for hybrid

cultural transformation of a pan-Arab commercial television market in the current context, while Iwabuchi shows how the celebratory discourse around East Asian cultural industries conceals uneven power relations between nations, classes, and communities. Iwabuchi's chapter therefore shows that the dialogic potential of intra-Asian popular cultural flows cannot erase the memory of Japanese colonialism and imperialism in the region, nor can it transcend the real limits of exclusion that are constitutive of neoliberal urban consumer culture.

In contrast, across much of Latin America, where neoliberal governance took hold much earlier than in many other parts of the global South, the crisis of neoliberalism led to the electoral victories of left-leaning governments in many countries and the rise of new forms of popular as well as populist democratic politics. In Brazil, the Workers Party has been pushing for greater South-South collaboration challenging intellectual property rights norms in multilateral arenas and crafting participatory digital inclusion programs based on open-source software (Chakravartty forthcoming). In Venezuela, as Robert Duffy and Robert Everton's chapter demonstrates, Chávez's leftist government has not only been able to hold on to power but also has tried to consolidate new forms of communication politics and media structures despite the dominance of private media conglomerates and their right-wing instrumentalism, which played a key role in staging the April 2002 coup.

In the African context, broader political economic analyses are brought to the forefront in the chapters by Arthur Martins-Aginam and Boatema Boateng, in challenging the racially plagued discourse of "failed" and corrupt African states blamed in a conceptual vacuum for the continent's place in the world. The "good governance" doctrine proposed by the economists and technocrats who designed the now discredited Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) faced a profound crisis of legitimacy across Africa in the last decade,<sup>5</sup> and we would highlight this fact and not solely the mass protests in Seattle and Genoa in offering an explanation for the institutional shift toward the post-Washington Consensus global order. In India, as Paula Chakravartty notes, the mass popular opposition to and discontent with the narrow gains of globalization, has both fueled the resurgence of Maoist Naxalite insurgencies across thirteen of the nation's poorest twenty-nine states and led to a series of unexpected losses for politicians and parties too closely associated with this new development mandate, including the ousting of the chauvinist Bharatiya Janata Party-led (BJP) coalition from national power in 2004.<sup>6</sup> In the aftermath of the discrediting of the BJP government's "India Shining" campaign featuring the beneficiaries of "high-tech" India, the new centrist government under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has tried to define its administration as addressing the growing inequalities of global India.

For its part, China, the fastest-growing economy in the post-Cold War period, not only escaped the 1997 "Asian" financial crisis thanks to its still rel-

actively closed financial system, but also helped to prevent a further running down on other Asian currencies by not devaluating the Chinese currency. This contributed to the containment of the crisis, but hurt Chinese exports and caused further layoffs of Chinese workers, leading some domestic commentators to muse that “only China can save capitalism,” in an ironic reference to the official slogan that “only socialism can save China” (Huang, Yao, and Han 2006). Moreover, the party leadership does not have to subject itself to the test of electoral politics, and its tight grip on the media makes the articulation of oppositional voices and the organization of popular contestations extremely difficult. Nevertheless, as Yuezhi Zhao emphasizes in her chapter, growing inequalities and mounting social unrest resulting from the leadership’s two-decade-long embrace of neoliberal strategies of economic development, coupled with Chinese society’s deeply rooted normative expectations for the long-propagated socialist values of equality and justice for all, have compelled the Hu Jintao leadership, which came to power in late 2002, to foreground the issue of redistributive justice and to strengthen the ideological mantra of socialism under the slogan of “building a harmonious socialist society.”

Finally, in the North, the impact of global economic instability and precarity alongside the “war on terror” has manifested itself most obviously in the ferocious debates over immigration, national identity, and security. Within the European Union (EU), as documented by Katharine Sarikakis, the arrival of postcolonial migrants, as well as more recent economic migrants from the semiperiphery of Europe, has created new tensions between supranational and national governance over cultural policy. Across the Atlantic, Sunera Thobani examines how Canadian liberal feminism and multiculturalism embodied through its public broadcasting and independent documentary film production traditions reproduces Orientalist narratives justifying national security policies. In the United States, Mari Castañeda calls attention to the rapidly expanding Spanish-language media markets and the contradictory consequences of neoliberal developments in the U.S. and Latin American media industries. Her more optimistic assessment of the centrality and use of Spanish language media for the expanding Latino communities is offered against the backdrop of a mounting civil rights movement for undocumented Latino migrants facing a xenophobic English-only backlash across the country.

## **TOWARD A TRANSCULTURAL POLITICAL ECONOMY OF GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS**

As the preceding discussion illustrates, our book deliberately avoids “media centricism” (Downing 1996, xiii) or “communication essentialism” (Mosco

1996), which tend to “decontextualize communication from the social framework” (McChesney 2000, 113). Instead, we follow a long tradition in critical media studies that places communication within broader political economic and cultural processes and treats communication research as an inherently integrative exercise that cuts across disciplinary lines (Garnham 1990; Golding and Murdoch 1978; Hills 2003; Martín-Barbero 1993; Mattelart 1994; D. Schiller 1996). Our expansive definition of “global communications” not only encompasses “old” and “new” media and the related issues of the public sphere, meaning-making, and identity formation, but also includes telecommunication networks and information technologies that are deeply integrated into the processes of economic production, social development, and community formation. Furthermore, we engage with global knowledge systems, intellectual property rights regimes, and forms of material culture that epitomize the inseparability of and interpenetration between the economic and the cultural, or the material and the symbolic. Whether it is community television in Venezuela or *adinkra* cloth in Ghana, public service documentaries from Canada, reality television in the Persian Gulf, or Internet cafés in the Gaza Strip, our focus on a particular medium or dimension of global communications is not arbitrary in relation to our respective research agendas. However, neither are we preoccupied with achieving comprehensiveness in the inclusion of all media across all regions or, for that matter, focusing exclusively on particular moments in the production, circulation, and consumption loop.

Underlying the chapters is a common intellectual engagement with the long-standing theoretical and methodological affinities and tensions between the political economy and cultural studies approaches to communication. Much ink has been spilled over the respective merits and inadequacies of each approach. Numerous calls have been issued for a creative synthesis between the two approaches—the widely used text *Media in Global Context: A Reader* (Sreberny-Mohammadi et al. 1997), for example, articulated an explicit agenda to bring these two traditions together a decade ago. Since then, many more attempts have been made toward just such an objective (e.g., Calabrese and Sparks 2004; Mosco 2004; Meehan and Riordan 2002b; Artz and Kamalipour 2003; Semati 2004). Building on this work, we anchor our attempt at a theoretical and methodological synthesis around what we call a “transcultural political economy” framework. We conceptualize this analytical framework as one that enables us to integrate institutional and cultural analyses and address urgent questions in global communications in the context of economic integration, empire formation, and the tensions associated with adapting new privatized technologies, neoliberalized and globalized institutional structures, and hybrid cultural forms and practices.

In developing this framework, we firmly ground ourselves in the tradition of critical political economy in communication studies. We take as our start-

ing point political economy's overriding concerns with communications and power in a global market economy and the generative insights of this tradition, including the formative role of ownership and regulation of communications industries and processes and the asymmetric structures of power within the world system. Following Mosco, we define political economy broadly as "the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources" (1996, 25).

Consistent with our expansive conceptualization of global communications, we draw from what we can identify as both the North American and European traditions of political economy in communication research—the former with its emphasis on the relative power of capital over contemporary communicative practices and the ascending status of communications industries in "informationalized global capitalism" (D. Schiller 1999b, 90) and the latter with its greater attention to the complex relationship between symbolic and material practices (Bourdieu 1999, 2007; Garnham 1990).

As with previous scholarship that has tried to reformulate what are seen as core tensions between the political economy and cultural studies perspectives within the North American academy (Alhassan 2004; Chakravarty and Sarikakis 2006; Zhao 2003a), this volume deliberately tries to decenter developments in the political economy of North American communication. We therefore refer back to our previous discussion of Polanyi's careful attention to the embeddedness of markets in social practice or the renewed relevance of Pierre Bourdieu's (1999, 2007) framework of symbolic power and social practice, when we consider the negotiation of neoliberal communications reform on the ground. It is perhaps for this reason that critical scholars of global communications studying Latin America like Jesús Martín-Barbero (1993), analyzing some of the earliest experiences in the South with the hegemony of liberalized and commercialized cultural industries, have focused on the fragile connection between the state and the nation and the violence and contradictions of mass cultural modernization. Similarly, Koichi Iwabuchi's (2002, 18–19) innovative analysis of popular culture through Japan's encounter with the rapidly industrializing and modernizing Asia (East and Southeast Asia) of the early 1990s emphasizes the telos of the modernization narrative about the nation's place in the world and historical time.

For many of our authors, political economy at its most basic level is "the study of control of and survival in social life" (Mosco 1995, 26)—a level that is many layers removed from a caricatured understanding of political economy as merely the study of media ownership. Although the emphasis may differ in each chapter, our authors address global communications as both processes of meaning making and identity formation and as means of production and livelihood. As with earlier works, including Martín-Barbero

(1993), Mattelart (1994), Pendakur (1991, 2003), and Sussman and Lent (1991) among others, many chapters in this volume engage directly with the problematic of communication and modernization or the “media’s role in national development” (Golding 1974), an issue that used to be at the center of theoretical debates in the field (e.g., Lerner 1958; Schramm 1964; H. Schiller 1976, 1992; Nordenstreng and Schiller 1979; Smythe 1981) but has become a subfield of communication studies of “developing countries,” disconnected from the Anglo-American and Eurocentric core of media or cultural studies.

In so doing we integrate insights from cultural studies and postcolonial theory to enrich our political economic analysis. We are particularly influenced by the transnational and ethnographic turn in cultural studies (Abbas and Erni 2004; Chen 1998; García-Cañclini 1995; Yúdice 2003), and the unflinching criticism of essentialist theories of cultural formation and “tradition,” offering instead nuanced studies of globalized cultural mediation and practice. Just as we understand political economic analysis to mean much more than ownership studies, we thus locate cultural studies as going well beyond audience reception or consumption studies, especially as the critical tradition is appropriated in the largest field of communication studies within the U.S. academy. As Mosco (1996, 262) points out, “the very term ‘audience’ is not an analytical category, like class, gender, or race, but a product of the media industry itself, which uses the term to identify markets and to define a commodity.” The transnational turn in cultural studies shows an engagement with post-structuralist and postcolonial theories of modernity and national identity as well as gender, racial, and ethnic difference. National identity and modernity, often relegated to the ghetto of “development communication” within the U.S. academy, figure prominently both as categories and focal points of analysis in this volume.

More specifically, we draw from recent postcolonial political and anthropological research in our attempts to make sense of the particulars and multiple realities within the universal of neoliberal capitalist modernity. Against arguments about cultural homogenization, the term “transculturation” has been deployed by media and cultural studies scholars to describe how an unequal encounter between cultures—colonial and colonized, imperial and globalized—creates new social and cultural forms, styles, or practices (Hall 1995; Iwabuchi 2002, 40; Chan and Ma 2002). This then allows us to consider the centrality of gender, race, and national difference in shaping political struggles over globalized information and cultural flows.

For example, in her chapter, Boatema Boateng examines the multifaceted transcultural transformations and multiple sites of power that operate around the commodified production and globalized circulation of *adinkra* cloth as folk cultural artifacts. At the local level, the accelerated pace and increased scale of commodification of *adinkra* cloth has opened a space for women pro-

ducers, leading to a reversal of gender roles in its (re)production, which was traditionally controlled by men. At the global level, while *adinkra* producers are largely marginalized in the globalization of their cloth designs, consumption choices made by African Diasporic communities in North America are bound up with their struggles over symbolic identity, which look to Africa as a source. These struggles not only raise questions about the complicated symbolic and political relationship between Diasporic and continental Africans but also point to the racial politics of consumption in global markets. Meanwhile, Sunera Thobani's powerful critique of Anglo-American liberal feminism and Canadian public service multiculturalism is advanced through the analysis of two independent documentaries about Afghan women produced by Canadian women filmmakers and human rights activists. As Thobani argues, by depicting the lives and images of Afghan women as pitiable and abject victims in need of "saving" by the West, these critically acclaimed and widely circulated documentaries, one of which was produced by an Afghan Canadian woman as a native informant, contributed to the hegemonic construction of Western women as civilized and emancipated subjects, which serves as an ideological trope informing U.S. foreign policy.

Although we find the term transculturation productive, we acknowledge the limits of the concept of hybrid transcultural forms (Kraidy 2005) or "happy hybridity" referencing the celebration of novel forms of globalized niche marketing (Pinney 1998). For us, the value of a transcultural approach to political economy is captured more accurately by the metaphor of friction rather than through the concept of hybridity, as identified by anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing in her astute study of the globalization of Indonesia's rainforests. For Tsing, the metaphor of friction is the process of diverse and conflicting social encounters that make up transnational capitalist integration—challenging the "seamless" and "flexible" logic of globalization. Tsing's discussion of the friction that results from unequal encounters is useful to our project when she writes:

Capitalism only spreads as producers, distributors, and consumers strive to universalize categories of capital, money, and commodity fetishism. Such strivings make possible globe-crossing capital and commodity chains. Yet these chains are made up of uneven and awkward links. The cultural specificity of capitalist forms arises from the necessity of bringing capitalist universals into action through worldly encounters. (2004, 4)

We insist that these "awkward encounters" producing friction are constitutive both for non-Western modernities and for the articulation of dominant Western political economic and cultural power. In our volume, this is clearly underscored across many chapters, from the ways in which China's self-initiated neoliberal-oriented development strategies feed into the maintenance

of global capitalism and American consumer capitalism on the one hand and create anxieties about national identity and a place in the world both in China and in the United States on the other, as discussed in the chapter by Yuezhi Zhao, to the ways in which liberal and highly racialized feminist and human rights discourses might enable challenges to the state's mobilization of public support for the United States-led "War on Terror," as argued in the chapter by Sunera Thobani.

Furthermore, consistent with postcolonial scholars of culture and political transformation from Jesús Martín-Barbero (1993) to Lin Chun (2006), a number of authors in this volume challenge the Eurocentric conflation between capitalism and modernity that allows "no distinction between development and capitalism, or between modernization and capitalist transformation" (C. Lin 2006). As Lin argues, "lost in the conflation" is the reality that "capitalism is not required for a society to be or become modern" and that anticapitalist regimes could foster both social achievements or equally "visible non-capitalist forms of exploitation, repression and destruction" (2006, 22). The historic specificity of modernization and the legitimacy or the lack thereof for the current mode of neoliberal governance within market societies are explored in contexts ranging from the exemplars of globalization like Singapore, China, and the European Union to the "exceptional" cases of Venezuela and Palestine.

Across many of our chapters, the authors examine transcultural encounters through new challenges to national sovereignty and citizenship associated with the redefinition of state power, the strategic mobility of capital, and the often forced dislocation of workers and communities within and across national borders. It is in this broadest of contexts that we would locate current debates about cultural diversity versus homogenization in the context of globalization. "Cultural diversity" has been widely appropriated in corporate speech, as evident in the plenary speeches at the 2005 Tunis phase of the World Summit on the Information Society. Most evidently, it was the CEO of media giant Vivendi Universal, and not the heads of state or, for that matter, civil society representatives, who most passionately championed "cultural diversity" in his plenary address to delegates by celebrating the company's achievements in promoting multicultural talents around the globe in music production.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, many of the academic and policy studies of "cultural globalization" and the cultural industries have centered on a geocultural and mediacentric "reverse flow" argument, which celebrates, affirms, and promotes the ability of non-Western countries and regions to "make it" in the global cultural marketplace and increase their shares in transnationalized multicultural media production (Straubhaar 1984, 1991; Sinclair 1992; Sinclair, Jacka, and Cunningham 1996; Keane 2006).

Political economists have challenged these arguments (H. Schiller 1991; D. Schiller 1996; Sussman 2001), and here we reengage with this debate on the

basis of a non-Eurocentric understanding of the relationship between modernity and capitalism. We would therefore reemphasize that a more radical version of the “cultural imperialism” thesis, initially articulated against the backdrop of international socialist and decolonization movements, was predicated on the possibility of transcending capitalist social relations (D. Schiller 1996). As Zhao (2003a, forthcoming) has argued elsewhere, rather than depoliticize the “cultural” and reduce it to local favors and differences within capitalism, it is necessary to insist on the inseparability of the political and cultural and the possibility of “imagining outsides to a globalized capitalism” (Dirlik 2004, 289), that is, alternatives to, not within the “cultures of capitalism” (Dirlik 2004, 265).

Although political economists have also challenged the structural logic of modernization theories, which substitutes time for place—regions and nations are not exploited by unequal market integration, but are rather “not yet” developed (Chakrabarty 2000)—they have generally failed to recognize the violence associated with these teleological assumptions that place “poor people and poor nations” not only at the “bottom” but also at the “beginning” (Ferguson 2006, 178). Postcolonial and cultural studies scholarship unhinges modernity from telos and therefore opens up the possibility of recognizing cultural difference through multiple modernities. However, as anthropologist James Ferguson has insightfully argued in his recent study of the political economic crisis in globalized Africa, a focus on pluralist cultural difference risks deemphasizing the looming socioeconomic inequality and relative low global rank of the African poor. This is a concern not only in the context of Africa, but also, as Chakravarty (2007) has argued elsewhere, for excluded publics across the variegated neoliberal global order. James Ferguson (2006, 192) contends that for critical scholars,

key questions are no longer temporal ones of social belonging (development, modernization), but spatialized ones of guarding the edges of a status group—hence, the new prominence of walls, borders, and processes of social exclusion in an era that likes to imagine itself as characterized by an ever expanding connection and communication.

Rejecting teleological assumptions, the authors in our volume instead focus on awkward and uneven global encounters, new modes of citizenship and exclusion, and the aspirational logic of modernity, which is so viscerally embodied through the lure and promise of the global information and culture industries. Helga Tawil Souri drives this analysis home in her chapter about the hopes and follies of technocratic development through the Internet in the spatially segregated and violent confines of Palestine’s market society. It is precisely in such an exceptional neoliberal space that the promise of new communications technologies as an integral part of Palestinian state building and

development assumes its fragile mythic power, with its “dreamlike promise of Palestine one day becoming a new Bangalore—the Bangalore of a capitalist’s dreams, where everyone is happily employed behind a computer screen, and cultural, religious, gender, socioeconomic inequalities are nonexistent.” Returning to our initial remarks about the ways in which the “global” is mediated through one’s particular vantage point based on our own recent experiences in the “real” Bangalore, we hope that such a transcultural approach to the political economy of global communication offers perspectives that engage equally with questions of modernity and inequality, and consider with some humility questions of repression and emancipation.

### **REFLECTIONS ON THE TRANSCULTURAL POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ACADEMIC PRODUCTION**

This book is intentionally not organized by geography or medium. Moreover, in contrast to previous works that tend to juxtapose the forces of domination and forces of resistance and treat them in distinctive sections—typically with the last (and often thinner) section being on “resistance and alternatives” anchored in civil society and social movements—the organization of this book underscores a more complex and relational understanding of the state, market and civil society as conventionally conceptualized in media studies. As the chapters demonstrate clearly, the state and the market can both be sites of contestation and empowerment, just as civil society can be a site of governance and exclusion. In this way, we have drawn from the substantive arguments in the chapters to inform our theoretical framework. In doing so, we hoped to avoid the accepted practice of presenting chapter summaries in the last section of the introduction, which in this case would diminish connections between the chapters within each section and across the volume.

As discussed above, this volume attempts to draw from empirical research that decenters the locus of political economic theories of global communications away from the Anglo North American experiences. The first section of the book, “The State and Communication Politics in Multiple Modernities,” reformulates questions about the shifting role of the state in relation to discussions about media and processes of political communication and cultural identity formation across “multiple modernities.” This section features five chapters exploring theories of state power, governance and legitimacy in relation to information and culture institutions, processes and practices in China (Yuezhi Zhao), in Russia (Olessia Koltsova), in Singapore (Soek-Fang Sim), in the European Union (Katharine Sarikakis), and in Venezuela (Robert Duffy and Robert Everton).

The second section, “Embedded Markets and Cultural Transformations,” is made up of four chapters that examine the societal embeddedness of national, transnational, and regional markets and processes of cultural transformation in East Asia (Koichi Iwabuchi), between Ghana and the United States (Boatema Boateng), across the Arab-speaking Middle East (Marwan Kraidy), and in the Spanish-speaking United States (Mari Castañeda). The final section, “Civil Society and Multiple Publics,” closes with four chapters on the formation and limits of civil society in addressing often contradictory claims made by multiple publics: between war-torn Afghanistan and a multiracial Canada (Sunera Thobani), across an increasingly NGO-ized sub-Saharan Africa (Arthur Martins-Aginam), within the confines of a debilitated Palestinian state (Helga Souril Tawil), and across the deeply “uneven information society” in India (Paula Chakravartty).

Instead of soliciting work from senior scholars, or at least a combination of senior and junior scholars, we experimented with an unconventional process of intellectual production by deliberately selecting a group of transnationally located, racially and linguistically diverse junior and midcareer scholars. In a field that has traditionally attracted a much higher proportion of male scholars, we also sought out women colleagues whose research shapes current discussions of global political economy.

As newer voices in the field, our authors have built our scholarship on the contributions of existing conceptual categories, while simultaneously trying to transcend and enrich existing categories and frameworks of analysis. Almost all the chapters draw from either recently completed or ongoing empirical research. The academic backgrounds of this book’s contributors cut across political economy, cultural studies, policy studies, media sociology, feminist studies, and postcolonial scholarship.

Our common first academic home, the Department of Communication at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), hired us one after another in the late 1990s, and gave us the opportunity to know each other and to work together briefly as colleagues. Although familial ties pulled us away from UCSD, we have been privileged to be able to continue our respective academic careers elsewhere in North America. As immigrants from China and India to Canada, and at least temporarily “legal aliens” in the United States, we have both been beneficiaries of scholarly support from the Canadian government as well as from U.S. public institutions and Chinese state education. However, just as unevenness in access to resources and institutional positions is a defining feature in the production, circulation, and consumption of communication goods and services, the same is the case in the academy. In the North American context where we teach, numerous tenure-track professors carry out research with heavy teaching and service loads, while at the same

time balancing personal and familial obligations of various kinds. Still, there are many more individuals who have yet to enter the tenure track and still carry a heavy load in holding up the ivory towers by working on increasingly precarious terms as sessional instructors and permanent teaching research assistants. Many pursue their own academic work with few resources and limited access to academic networks.

Although the lack of funding and organizational resources made it impossible for us to bring together all our authors in a conference setting, which would have promoted more dialogue and allowed various authors to make cross-references to each other's work, we are grateful to all our contributors, who worked diligently on their chapters over a lengthy period of time and generously received our editorial interventions in our attempt to achieve some degree of overall coherence in the volume, despite the fact that a book chapter is often not evaluated as highly as a journal article in a tenure file.

In particular, we want to pay tribute to Robert Everton, coauthor of chapter 6 on Venezuela. Bob Everton was a long-time graduate student and sessional lecturer at the School of Communication, Simon Fraser University, Canada who, very sadly, passed away one year after he received his Ph.D. and while writing his chapter for this volume. Rather than hiding the materiality of intellectual production in the acknowledgements, we have tried through this introduction to set a tone that is both critical and self-reflexive, offering what we hope is grounded (political economic approach to communication and culture in the following chapters.

## NOTES

1. For more details on the ITfC-organized workshop in Bangalore, see [itforchange.net/mambo/content/view/156/1/](http://itforchange.net/mambo/content/view/156/1/)

2. Economist Jeffrey Sachs is now the director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, where he has become a leading critic of neoliberal policies; he was in the 1990s a pivotal economic advisor to the radical liberalization strategies implemented in postsocialist Eastern Europe and Russia. Nobel prize recipient and economist Joseph Stiglitz, who is credited with defining a "post-Washington Consensus" era, is today an outspoken critic of neoliberal economic reforms, but was the senior vice president and chief economist of the World Bank from 1997–2000.

3. The death of globalization was heralded by the media in the West as a result of the failure of the WTO negotiations to progress meaningfully after the Doha Rounds in 2001. More specifically, Yuezhi Zhao acknowledges her colleague, Robert A. Hackett, for relating this point to her upon his return from the IAMCR conference in July 2006.

4. Robison (2006, xiv) similarly notes "dramatic confrontations" against the "market fundamentalism" of the Washington Consensus and its central institutions. However, he remains ambivalent as to "whether such dramatic confrontations represent shifts in power within the neo-liberal camp or whether they reflect a more structural challenge to the neo-liberal order."

5. Ferguson (2006) expands on the crisis of legitimacy of the SAPs in Africa, which have been abandoned by the IMF and World Bank for a new program based on Poverty Reducing Strategy Papers targeting Highly Indebted Poor Countries. There is a growing body of research and debate on the implications of this shift in terms of poverty alleviation and the empowerment (or lack thereof) of poor nations.

6. The violent Maoist insurgency had its roots in an armed peasant revolt in the village of Naxalbari in West Bengal in 1967, but has seen a dramatic resurgence and with it, state-sanctioned violence in retaliation in the last decade across the economically least developed regions in the nation. In 2006, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh referred to the Naxalite movement as the biggest threat to the internal security of India since independence. See *Times of India*, April 13, 2006, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/1489633.cms> (accessed January 29, 2007).

7. The authors were present during the plenary session of the Tunis phase of the WSIS in November 2005. For transcripts of the speech by Jean-Bernard Levy, CEO of Vivendi Universal, see [http://www.itu.int/wsis/tunis/scripts/archive.asp?lang=en&c\\_type=2%7C16&c\\_num=296](http://www.itu.int/wsis/tunis/scripts/archive.asp?lang=en&c_type=2%7C16&c_num=296).