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Abstract

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Disciplines
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Shifting Geertz: Toward a Theory of Translocalism in Global Communication Studies

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Though the anthropologist Clifford Geertz has been tremendously influential across the humanities and social sciences, his impact on media and communication scholarship remains unclear. Geertzian theory, this article argues, can rejuvenate global communication studies by providing a foundation to build a theory of translocalism. The article first highlights the theoretical affinities between Geertz's interpretive anthropology and communication studies. The following sections explicate Geertz's perspectives on the local and on meaning. Then, we explore how Geertz's notion of the local can serve as a context for a new understanding of power in global communication studies. In light of this, the article then turns to an analysis of the notion of translocalism as it transpires in Geertz's work. The final section elaborates the implications of translocalism for global communication studies through a discussion of global television formats and foreign news correspondents.

''Wisdom,'' as an African proverb has it, ''comes out of an ant heap.''
Clifford Geertz, Local Knowledge, 1983, p. 167

Geertz's (1983) assertion that ''the shapes of knowledge are always ineluctably local, indivisible from their instruments and encasements'' (p. 4) was for many years a taken-for-granted maxim in anthropological circles. Anthropological knowledge was always radically local, always bound up in a locale best expressed by the village, a relatively small unit of human organization, usually disconnected from major metropolitan areas. Geertz (1983) himself, as a chief architect of the culture-as-text branch of cultural anthropology, challenged the materialism of anthropological conceptions of culture and often expressed skepticism toward ''general principles'' (p. 5). In his influential essays, he juxtaposed particular settings to cross-cultural comparisons, focusing on cultural overlaps rather than structural universalisms. The tension between the local and the global inherent in this approach allowed Geertz to ''expand his readers' sense of human possibilities'' while demonstrating that ''the similarities and differences that occur in actual human lifeways range beyond what a person could imagine without studying the human record'' (Rosaldo, 1999, p. 33).

That Geertz has wielded tremendous influence over the development of interpretive and ethnographic research in the social sciences and humanities is beyond argument. In his home discipline of anthropology, Geertz's interpretive turn was an epistemological revolution, which made him the target of critiques from all sides— positivists for abandoning science, materialists for neglecting power, and postmodernists for not being sufficiently interpretive (see Ortner, 1999; Sewell, 1999; see also Berreby, 1995)—and still serves as testimony to the provocative

nature, scope, and impact of his work. Summing up Geertz's importance, the anthropologist Adam Kuper (1999) writes that ''[r]eading his books and essays, one may trace the trajectory of the anthropological idea of culture in the second half of the 20th century'' (p. 76).

What is less clear is Geertz's place in communication studies. On the one hand, his work resonates in our field in two ways. First, his consistent advocacy of interdisciplinary research intuitively resonates with communication scholars, and he could have been describing communication studies when he wrote that ''of all the human sciences, anthropology is perhaps the most given to questioning itself as to what it is and coming up with answers that sound more like overall world views or declarations of faith than they do like descriptions of a 'branch of knowledge''' (Geertz, 1995, p. 97). Anthropology, like communication studies, is an ''indisciplined discipline'' inside of which ''there may be but so many vocations trying to define themselves'' (Geertz, 1995, p. 98). As a result of this fluidity, an interdisciplinary outlook flowed rather naturally from anthropology.1 Second, and more fundamentally, Geertz's scholarship is relevant to our field because his theory of culture is *quintessentially communicative*. That communication is central to the Geertzian approach is evident in Geertz's definition of culture as ''an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life'' (Geertz, 1973, p. 89). Indeed, as Kuper wrote, Geertz's writings ''offer a coherent notion of 'culture,' defined as a domain of symbolic communication'' (Kuper, 1999, p. 118, emphasis added). It is precisely along these lines that traces of Geertz's thinking can be found in the work of some communication scholars, such as Carbaugh (1988), who defined culture as ''patterns of symbolic action and meaning'' (p. 38), and Carey (1997), whose essays consistently blurred disciplinary genres to assert that communication is a symbolic, ritualized cultural process.[2]

On the other hand, in spite of what appears to be a strong ''fit'' between Geertz's interpretive anthropology and communication studies and the scholarship of Carey, Carbaugh, and some others notwithstanding, the impact of his work on our field is fragmented, uneven, and therefore difficult to grasp. For instance, his interpretive approach has been endorsed by media scholars (see Hall, 1974; Moores, 1993; Murphy & Kraidy, 2003; Schrøder, 1994), and his scholarship on the problems of ethnographic authorship and the benefits of ''thick description'' has received ample attention (Ang, 1996; Darling-Wolf, 2003; Gillespie, 1995; Morley, 1992, 1996; Press, 1996). But even where communication scholars assert the value of Geertz's work, his ideas seem to float above rather than dwell within research in our field. This is especially the case for scholarship in global communication studies, the subfield that this article is concerned with, where the ''local''—a notion that Geertz has woven over 4 decades of writing—is frequently invoked as a taken for granted counterpoint to the global but rarely analyzed as a dynamic site of experience, struggle, and meaning. We find this neglect all the more puzzling because we believe that—and hope to demonstrate how in the rest of this article—Geertz's notion of the local could serve as a linchpin to reinvigorate theory construction and empirical research in global communication studies.

After explicating Geertz's conceptualization of the local, we highlight how his approach lays foundations for a renewed understanding of the local–global connection, a central issue of research and theory in global communication studies. We emphasize that in contradistinction to the overwhelmingly theoretical writings on the local–global question, Geertz provides a theoretically grounded and empirically based approach to this knotty issue. Specifically, we explain how Geertz's analytical distinction between ''culture'' and ''social structure'' and his

emphasis on overlapping patterns of cultural meaning and social action in various local settings form a basis for a new, and we hope, productive, approach to global communication studies— one that we elaborate as translocalism. Before the conclusion, we explore research on (a) global television formats and (b) foreign news correspondents concretely to illustrate the benefits of a translocal epistemology and a multisited methodology for global communication studies.

The local and the interpretation of meaning

Central to Geertz's work is the idea that meaning is articulated through publicly available cultural symbols and presented in concrete social events. For him, culture is ontologically defined directly in relation to systems of meaning, which are encoded in symbolic forms and tied together in what he famously called, after Weber, ''webs of significance'' (Geertz, 1973, p. 4). Epistemologically, however, such cultural symbols are not necessarily transparent in form or practice; that is, they are not ''there'' waiting to be extracted by the ethnographer by simply tapping into the ''native'' mind and later reported. Indeed, as Geertz (1983) notes, the publication of Malinowski's *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* ''fairly well exploded the notion that anthropologists obtained their results through some special ability, usually called 'empathy,' to 'get inside the skins' of savages'' (p. 9). Rather, Geertz's approach to the cultural construction of meaning is interpretively semiotic but nonetheless grounded in the close empirical observation of events, behaviors, and common sense utterances *in situ*.

In many ways, this approach to understanding culture is an extension of anthropology's age-old struggle over making sense of the acquisition and transmission of behavioral and symbolic inheritances in culturally defined communities. But unlike the tradition of anthropology that preceded his own work, Geertz invited researchers to look at such expressions through an interpretive lens, rejecting the previously prevalent ethnographic premium on matching the hard data requirements and replicable observations of scientific inquiry so foundational to functionalist theory (e.g., Malinowski, 1922/1964). In Geertz's (1973) playful words, ''it is not worth it, as Thoreau said, to go round the world to count cats in Zanzibar'' (p. 15). Significantly, this interpretive move not only shook the positivist moorings of ethnographic research but also represented a decisive shift away from the approaches of leading anthropological figures, such as Benedict, Radcliffe-Brown, and Lévi-Strauss, who espoused various degrees of cultural determinism grounded in assumptions of individual subordination to social structures that were implicitly understood to be immutable.

Placing emphasis on *systems in the particular* and eschewing determinism, Geertz (1983) argued that ''culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be casually attributed; it is a context'' (p. 14). Accordingly, he stressed that the job of the ethnographer is to clarify ''what goes on'' in culture, to ''reduce the puzzlement'' (Geertz, 1973, p. 15). To do so, he readily admits, is an imaginative act: ''We begin with our own interpretations of what our informants are up to, or think they are up to, and then systematize those'' (p. 15). Meaning appears through the stylistic features of local culture, and we ''gain empirical access to them by inspecting events'' (Geertz, 1973, p. 17). In short, Geertz sees human behavior, and therefore culture, as symbolic action, which the researcher must witness directly in order to grapple with its nuances, its tensions, and its discontinuities.

One of the aims of this interpretive approach is to focus ethnography's gaze on the ordinary within the local more fully and subsequently to produce descriptions that reveal the

''normalness'' of people's culture without reducing its ''particularity'' (p. 14). The value of this objective, Geertz (1973) asserted, is to ''draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts; to support broad assertions about the role of culture in the construction of collective life by engaging them exactly with complex specifics'' (p. 28). The ethnographic task, then, is to delve into the common rituals and expressions of local life not in order to escape larger issues but rather to take these rituals and expressions seriously amidst their existential dilemmas. But this search for meaning is arduous because it must be sufficiently concrete to carry conviction while also being sufficiently conceptual to engender theory. The ensuing double bind can be summarized as follows: *To load the interpretation with every local peculiarity would mean tipping it toward contextual relevance only; to empty the interpretations of local detail would mean to lose touch with the very fabric of everyday life that ethnography brings to the table.* Through almost all of his essays, Geertz's mission was to negotiate this tension through thick descriptions that penetrated deeply to provide a rich understanding of locality and at the same time related to broader comparative concerns, thus contributing to a discussion beyond the scope of a particular ritual, locale, or community.

This commitment to the details of the ordinary and the local as an analytical means to reach larger conclusions about the social world emerges as a running theme—indeed, perhaps the running theme—in Geertz's work. His approach provides a blueprint for the examination of symbolic actions and their connection to issues of local meaning without losing track of broader contexts of social life. Such an approach demands, to suggest a useful illustration, juxtaposing the intimacy of biography with the horizon of history. It is here, in Geertz's light-handed maneuvering of the relation between local knowledge and supralocal relevance, that the potential resides for a better understanding of the increasingly complex entanglements of the local and the global. This enables us to refocus on the local, which is after all the site where meaning emerges, without disengaging from issues involving global forces. In fact, the Geertz-inspired approach to global communication studies that we elaborate in this article rests on the principle that it is through the comparative study of local life in various locations that a living, breathing sense of global communication flows, processes, and outcomes can be comprehensively grasped.

This point of engagement shapes an understanding of the local as something inherently dynamic and dialogical, but nevertheless an empirically accessible ''place'' where the elaboration of meaning can be witnessed as it is enacted and negotiated by contextually situated social agents. In other words, we are advocating an approach to the local that *ventures beyond* prevalent conceptualizations of ''the local'' as something that exists in suspended opposition with ''the global,'' where the local acts as the global's presumptive victim, its cultural nemesis, or its coerced subordinate. A richer notion of the local should enable the exploration of power relations *within* the local and not focus exclusively on power as exercised by the global on the local (see Kraidy, 2005). Rather than seeing power as exclusively structural *and monolithic*, following a Geertzian approach entails looking at the various ways in which power, understood as pervasive and yet contextually differentiated, is intricately reproduced in daily life.

Power, the local, and global communication studies

In this context, the local cannot be understood as a locus of study that is detached from the larger forces of history, politics, economics, or military conflict. Rather, the local needs to be understood as the space where global forces become recognizable in form and practice as they

are enmeshed in local human subjectivity and social agency. This entanglement is always multifaceted, part accommodation and part resistance, sometimes overt and other times latent, and therefore can only be understood through an ethnographic thick description focused on an intricate understanding of the encounter between local life and global forces. To that end, we need to go beyond Appadurai's (1991) claim that ''the task of ethnography is the unraveling of a conundrum: What is the nature of locality, as a lived experience, in a globalized, deterritorialized world?'' (p. 196) and ask: How can ethnography enable us to understand the ways in which various aspects of globalization take concrete forms in different local settings?

This is precisely where global communication studies can benefit from a Geertzian approach that focuses on patterns of overlapping social and cultural practices and conflicts in various localities. Implicit in Appadurai's aforementioned prescription for ethnography is the recognition that contemporary experiences of locality can no longer be presumed to be strongly distinct, just as conversely, all localities cannot be presumed to have been homogenized and standardized by global forces. The question of whether external forces radically transform local culture or whether local actors creatively appropriate the global has animated scholarship on global communication for several decades. The early development communication literature viewed the local as the locus of beliefs and traditions that stood in the way of socioeconomic development (Lerner, 1958; Rogers, 1969; Schramm, 1964). Communication campaigns were thus harnessed to change these beliefs and traditions and thereby to cultivate the ''right'' kind of development. In particular, Rogers's (1962) theory of diffusion of innovations became a central doctrine of media use for development projects. Some writers, however, were quick to point at the diffusionists' oversight of regional and local complexities and the ties that development projects had with transnational corporate interests. Thus, the modernization paradigm was challenged by the dependency paradigm, which in our field found its expression in the media imperialism thesis (e.g., Mattelart, 1977, 1978; Schiller, 1971/1992; Wells, 1972), whose grounding in the radical political economy tradition led it to assume the local to be solely or mostly a victim of global power structures.

Later, under the influence of theorists such as Gramsci and Althusser and, later, Bourdieu, cultural studies scholars such as Stuart Hall left their imprint on communication theory by elaborating versions of a ''limited structuralism,'' which questions structuralism's tendency to construct ''social agents as bearers of social structure'' (Grossberg & Slack, 1985, pp. 88–89), at the same time treating cautiously issues of cultural autonomy and resistance. For instance, although Hall's (1985, 1995, 1996) emphasis on the practices of everyday life and common sense moved away from the cultural determinism of classical Marxism, it remained grounded in the notion that subject formation (e.g., race, class, gender, age) is elaborated within the material and economic forces on the ''terrain of ideology'' (Hall, 1985, p. 104). Hall's (1996) encoding/decoding model was an attempt to register the power of hegemonic culture while also accounting for the situational negotiations of ideology by individuals and communities. This model, however, was instrumental in the generation of active audience scholarship (e.g., Ang, 1985; Grossberg, 1984; Liebes & Katz, 1990; Radway, 1984) that emphasized subjectivity and specificity, and thus audiences' abilities to produce meaning (Murphy, 2005). A more recent offshoot of this focus on the productive nature of cultural consumption has been a celebratory approach to cultural globalization and hybridity (Cowen, 2002; Olson, 1999). As Murdock (2004) asserts, too much of this research casts cultural creativity as a positive sign of identity and expression, creating the impression of a ''flat landscape of multiple difference'' by assuming that the remaking of culture is freely chosen rather than the ''outcome of *material* and cultural

dispossession'' (p. 28, emphasis added). Taken together, these various theoretical points of analysis, although quite distinct in scope and in purpose, take the local for granted as a site of audience activity and creativity. Even in some empirically driven research such as Morley's (1980) pioneering studies, the specificity of local contexts at times appears to be *diluted* in theory.

Scholarship in global communication studies that focused on the vexing local– global relations by departing at once from political economy's overemphasis on the global and the active audience approach's excessive focus on the local suffered from the same lack of, or limited, empirical grounding. These include Braman's (1996) notion of ''interpenetrated globalization,'' Grossberg's (1933) exploration of the ''new worlds'' of cultural studies, Kraidy's (2003) work on ''glocalization,'' Straubhaar's (1991) advocacy of the concept of ''asymmetrical interdependence,'' and Tomlinson's (1999) elaboration of the notion of ''complex connectivity.'' This literature reflects global communication studies' engagement in the broad theoretical debates about the nature of international and intercultural relations in the post–Cold War world, perhaps best captured by the notion of ''distant proximities,'' the title of a theoretical treatise by an eminent international relations theorist (Rosenau, 2003).

Geertz brings to the table precisely what is missing from these theoretical approaches: Field-driven analysis that engages the particularities of the local in its broader structural and comparative context. Contra the charge that Geertz ignores the issue of power altogether,[3] we agree with scholars who have suggested otherwise by probing deeper into some of the openings that Geertz's work left ajar. Ortner (1999), for instance, asserts that although Geertz's scholarship may not contain ''nineties-style feminist or Foucauldian or postcolonial analysis,'' within his essays does reside the makings ''for a culturally and philosophically rich theory of agency'' (pp. 4–5). Though it is true that Geertz rarely engaged power in an ostensible and deliberate way, his interpretive positions helped carve out a space for better considering questions of agency and contested meaning within communities, by challenging what at the time was the ascendant cultural determinism and structuralism of anthropology. Following Ortner, we suggest ways that Geertz's work can be applied to tease out a more engaged and ethnographically informed elaboration of power as it impacts the local–global relation in global communication studies.

As we go about doing this, however, it is important to reiterate that Geertz's empirical commitment is not guided by functionalist explanation but rather by interpretation. For Geertz, the empirical component of fieldwork is subsumed under ethnography, ''making it a secondary, unquestionably enabling but less important, moment in the ethnographic process'' (Berger, 1993, p. 175). In short, ethnography, not fieldwork, is what anthropologists do—an assertion that allowed Geertz to develop his idea that ethnography was contingent upon thick, not thin, description and therefore upon a narrative performance of the field experience, rather than a strict attempt to adhere to the data requirements of the sciences. As Geertz (1973) has argued, this emphasis requires constant attention to the deciphering of cultural texts, whether one is trying to tease out the possible meanings of a wink or make sense of social conventions or grasp linguistic double entendre in the context of a Balinese cockfight. As such, context is not studied, but rather studied in—''the locus of study is not the object of study'' (Geertz, 1973, p. 22).

We can begin to understand how Geertz's (1973) work can concretely rejuvenate global communication studies by revisiting his essay ''Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example,'' published as a chapter in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. The essay's examination of

the relationship between culture and social structure offers a useful theoretical framework for interpreting local sociocultural change and media power within the context of globalization. Previous anthropological research on social change, Geertz notes in the essay, suffered at times from an overemphasis on social integration (e.g., the ability of ritual or customs to stabilize the social system) and at other times from a privileging of ''progressive disintegration'' (p. 143). To craft a more nuanced approach, Geertz advocates placing sociological and cultural processes on ''equal terms'' (p. 143), so that one does not simply become engulfed by, or unequivocally driven by, the other. This is an important distinction because as Geertz (1973) underscores: ''In most societies, where change is a characteristic rather than an abnormal occurrence, we shall expect to find more or less radical discontinuities between the two'' (p. 144). Geertz asserts that it was precisely such discontinuities that make the forces of change salient and therefore offer the possibility of an ethnographic understanding of these forces. Elaborating this line of inquiry, Geertz argues in favor of seeing culture as ''an ordered system of meaning and of symbols, in terms of which social interaction takes place'' and the social system as ''the pattern of social interaction itself'' (p. 144). To further clarify this difference, it is worth quoting him at length:

> On the one level there is a framework of beliefs, expressive symbols, and values in terms of which individuals define their world, express their feelings, and make their judgments; on the other level there is the ongoing process of interactive behavior, whose persistent form we call social structure. Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action; social structure is the form that action takes, the actually existing network of social relations. Culture and social structure are then but different abstractions from the same phenomena. The one considers social action in respect to its meaning for those who carry it out, the other considers it in terms of its contribution to the functioning of some social system. (1973, pp. 144–145)

Geertz's insistence on the analytical distinction between social system and culture is significant because it enables, even requires, the researcher to consider modes of societal integration and at the same time to take into account patterns of discontinuity and change. This is a heuristic approach to local–global communication processes because it captures moments of social disjuncture and cultural anxiety, where the integrative connection between local cultural practices and beliefs (i.e., religion, ritual, common sense) and the social registers of identity (e.g., social status, political participation, conspicuous consumption) becomes compromised. Locating such disruptions not only makes for ethnographically dense moments for data collection and interpretation but more importantly helps us focus on ''events'' pivotal to understanding, among other things, how globalization is negotiated in local contexts.

This approach is of central importance for scholars of global communication because it enables a theoretically and empirically grounded understanding of pervasive global–historical dynamics in which communication plays an important role, such as ''democratization,'' the adoption of neoliberal economic policies that expand private control over resources, the rise of transnational media corporations, the proliferation of consumer capitalism, and global patterns of migration. Though these economic, political, and social processes have increased homogenization, standardization, individualization, and commodity hunger, they have also fostered a series of profound disruptions and reformations, from new forms of democratic

participation, cultural creativity (e.g., ''cultural reconversion''), and local citizen activism to increased poverty, the return of various fundamentalisms, tribalisms, and nationalisms, and the growth of political violence and social conflict (see Blankson & Murphy, 2007). To understand the role that media and communication play in globalization's dual fragmentary and integrative effects requires an approach that accounts for the forces of what Rosenau (2003) called ''fragmegration.'' Translocalism, the next section argues, is such an approach.

Geertz's translocalism Avant La Lettre

A central challenge facing global communication studies is an understanding of the local–global dynamic that helps us make sense of one member of the pair without diminishing the relevance of the other or glossing over the complexity of the relation between the two. The first step in meeting this challenge resides, in our opinion, in asking how one local can help us understand another local. Geertz's work shows an early commitment to such an endeavor, anticipating an approach to the local that we previously described as ''translocalism'' (see, e.g., Kraidy & Murphy, 2003). To Geertz (1983): ''The question is not whether art (or anything else) is universal; it is whether one can talk about West African carving, New Guinea palm-leaf painting, quattrocento picture making, and Moroccan versifying in such a way as to cause them to shed some sort of light on one another'' (p. 11). His comparative analysis of Indic, Islamic, and Malaysian law (Geertz, 1983), for example, not only attempts to unpack the different terms that orient and culturally animate adjudication, it also digs into the normative elements and ontological assumptions that guide and differentiate the application of law. The truth, Geertz seems to be saying, is in the vernacular even if institutions shape the discourse. But by drawing our attention to the differences within the legal sensibilities of these three world views, Geertz nevertheless provides us with a highly textured and complex sense of, more broadly, law.[4]

Because of such paradoxically ambitious yet cautious renderings of ethnographic exemplification and application, Rosaldo (1999) asserts that Geertz took ''cultural difference more seriously than most observers'' (p. 33) while at the same time enlarging the conceptual range of central concepts of social theory (ideology, ritual, fact, and law) (p. 32), which was informed by Ludwig Wittgenstein's illustration of family resemblances:

> Wittgenstein's idea is that two cousins, for example, may resemble each other in their hair, eyes, and ears, and two other cousins may resemble each other in their lips, teeth, and noses. As a total group of cousins, they probably do not have any single feature in common; there is no lowest common denominator that unites all family members. Instead, the strength of their connection resides in the significant, if incomplete, overlap of such features. (Rosaldo, 1999, p. 33)

Wittgenstein's metaphor of variegated, overlapping, but nonetheless scattered resemblances provides what is perhaps the best prism to understand how a Geertz-inspired approach can contribute to a field of global communication studies attuned to the complexity of our global era.

Geertz's interest in local-to-local connections provides an alternative to the center–periphery model that Galtung's (1971) famously formulated in terms of ''hub-and-spokes'' in his structural theory of imperialism. Like other approaches emanating from the radical political economy tradition, Galtung's theory sees the global as a sine qua non intermediary between

various locals. In contrast, Geertz's translocal orientation reflects a web-like network with sensitivity to periphery-toperiphery contact, suggesting that power issues are present, even if not centrally, in his work. More importantly, and as usual with Geertz, theoretical insight comes from methodological principles he developed as a result of his fieldwork. For example, the towns of Sefrou in Morocco and Pare in Indonesia, both in the sphere of ''Islam'' but nonetheless offering multiple differences, functioned as Geertz's counterpoints, for as he writes (Geertz, 1995):

> there is a difference between a difference and a dichotomy. The first is
> a comparison and it relates; the second is a severance and it isolates. Tacking
> back and forth, between societies, histories, cultures, states, looking first one
> way, then the other, is how I formed my view of what these countries, as
> countries, come to. It seems only natural, and therefore candid, thus to present
> them. Countercases, counterposed. (p. 28)

Counterposing two locales with common features but many more uncommon characteristics is for Geertz (1995) an interpretive strategy, what he himself called a ''language of significative contrast'' (p. 20) that makes possible an understanding of two sites in the field.

This approach's methodological sensitivity and its counterhegemonic inclusion of local-to-local, South-to-South relations makes it attractive for global communication studies, particularly in terms of helping to craft a more rigorous, deliberate, and productive dialogue between the details of local culture and the political economy of commercial communication structures, thus facilitating a more integrated approach to media products, media audiences, and media institutions. If pursuing such a dialogue is worthwhile—and this article has been arguing that it is—then we need to harness Geertz's insights and adapt them to the contemporary global era. Is it enough, for instance, to supply only comparative interpretations of the particularities of this or that community within the global sphere? Certainly, this presents global communication researchers with a good starting point, but anticipating a more truly global approach, how can the research of one media ethnographer enable that of another to help expand the possibilities of comparative work? For example, how can we be sure that the ethnographic inquiry performed by one researcher in the Middle East has any sort of conceptual fodder to share with the field studies of a researcher in Latin America? To put it differently, when the overriding subject of inquiry is global communication, and the locus of the research is the local, how can we be sure that what comparative research offers is not merely ''different sorts of minds taking hold of different parts of the elephant?'' (Geertz, 1989, p. 4).

The answer to the question is, of course: We cannot, at least not definitively. The nature of ethnographic research is too contingent and fluid and field interactions and conversations too emergent to imagine a simple and final answer. But that does not mean it is not worth pursuing. As Geertz and other interpretive researchers taught us a long time ago, this is not about replication or anything that pretends to be a poetic echo of such a charge. Instead, we argue that it is precisely Geertz's emphasis on overlapping particularities and discontinuities that enable a model in which global communication processes can be understood by ethnographies of the local that nonetheless maintain the global as a counterpoint. More concretely, we heed Ortner's (1993) call that ethnographers move away from total enmeshment in one culture so to explain its entirety, embracing instead a move toward examining how ''large-scale forces work themselves out in everyday life'' (p. 413). Applying Ortner's invitation to probe macroforces (such as the

impact of economic liberalization and the role of commercial media in changing local patterns of consumption), we see a way in which Geertz's work can be shifted toward an exciting and ethnographically manageable vision of what Marcus (1998) called ''multisited ethnography.''

Taken as a whole, Geertz's oeuvre provides heuristic exemplars of multisited ethnography even though he did not explicitly identify them as such. Like Wittgenstein's family metaphor, multisited media ethnography has the ability to bring into focus various shades and variations on a theme, social force, or event that is local (as articulated in Appadurai's notion of ''mediascapes,'' 1996) and at the same time that transcends the local. As Marcus (1998) defines it:

> In multisited ethnography, comparison emerges from putting questions to an emergent object of study whose contours, sites, and relationships are not known beforehand, but are themselves a contribution of making an account that has different, complexly connected real-world sites of investigation. (p. 86)

The problem with that, of course, is that it is easier said than done. A review of the literature in global communication studies indicates a paucity of studies that embody this approach. Nonetheless, some of the currently central areas of research in global communication could benefit from multisited methodologies grounded in a translocal epistemology. We will conclude by examining ways in which a translocal epistemology could be implemented in global communication studies. To achieve that goal, we specifically consider two research areas (a) global television formats and (b) foreign news correspondents as promising starting points.

Multisitedness, translocalism, and global communication studies

This article has so far reached the following conclusion: A multisited, translocal approach deserves active consideration by scholars in global communication studies because it enables an understanding of the local–global dialectic through the comparative study of multiple locales. Such a commitment not only draws the local into a more meaningful interaction with broader social forces but promotes the development of epistemologically rich possibilities, such as the examination of how ''activities and local sites of knowledge blind to each other might through the analyst's effort be brought into engagement with one another to produce new insights'' (Marcus, 1998, pp. 52–53). The article will now focus on specific examples in order to clarify the concrete applications of translocal, multisited research.

The worldwide proliferation of television formats and the politicoeconomic and sociocultural dynamics that the widespread adoption of these formats has triggered have preoccupied many global communication studies scholars (Lee, 1991; Mathijis & Jones, 2004; Moran, 1998; Moran & Keane, 2003; Waisbord, 2004). As Kraidy (2005, chapter 4) and Waisbord (2004) have argued, the advent of format television is more than a mere trend because it reflects a global business model for television production and a conscious strategy to overcome local audience resistance to global programs. Contemporary television clearly has to contend with economic and cultural forces at the local, national, regional–transnational, and global levels (see Straubhaar, 2007). As a result, researchers analyzing television formats have to wrestle with an increasingly complex and multilayered local–global connection.

Nonetheless, the way in which the local–global relation has been engaged in scholarship on global television formats reflects a reliance on a concentric model in which local media

institutions adapt global formats, sometimes mediated by national laws and regulations on television content or ownership. At first glance, this broadly shared assumption is justified by the fact that most formats originate from a few companies in a few Western countries—Endemol in the Netherlands and Freemantle in Britain come to mind—and are in turn adapted in various parts of the world. So research on Big Brother, for example, has tended to examine national variations on the main format, and devoted very little, if any, attention, to interactions between various local contexts where the program was adapted (Hill & Palmer, 2002; Mathijis & Jones, 2004). Because this research recreates a center–periphery model with the global conceptually located at the center and the local at the periphery, it fails to take into account how, for example, the experiences of Loft

Story in France or Al-Ra'is in Bahrain may have informed the production and reception of Big Brother formats in Australia or Turkey. The a priori assumption that various format adaptations are linked to the original format (global) but not to each other (locals) is difficult to sustain in the globally connected contemporary world.

This article poses a challenge to television format studies by advocating a translocal approach that pays more attention to local-to-local connections in the global context. For example, if we look at the Endemol format of Fame Academy, a reality based, singing and dancing competition show, we see that its Arabic-language format adaptation by the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC) was mediated by the French adaptation, both called Star Academy. Although France, a large industrialized country with vibrant creative industries and a transnational sphere of influence in the Francophone world, is not usually considered a ''local,'' in this case, the French broadcaster TF1 was just another local adapter of a global format created in the Netherlands. However, in the current global geopolitical and cultural context, France cannot be considered strictly local in its relationship to Lebanon, where it previously was the colonial power. We therefore have several levels of mediation that complicate the simple local–global dyad. Because of Lebanon's postcolonial cultural and economic ties to France, which exposed a segment of the Lebanese audience to the French format adaptation of Star Academy, the LBC in turn acquired the Arabic rights from Endemol and produced the Arabic format, broadcasting it via satellite to two dozen Arab countries (Kraidy, 2006b). A translocal approach enables a better understanding of Star Academy's cultural nuances than a strictly local-to-global approach. Indeed, the show included singing and dancing performances that borrowed heavily from Bollywood, in addition to various Arab, French, and Italian repertoires, weaving a rich cultural tapestry, what could be described as a translocal aesthetic. The reception of the program was as textured and variegated as its production, simultaneously triggering rallies of adoring fans and demonstrations of scornful opponents, while newspaper columns deciphered the layers of meaning embedded in the show (Kraidy, 2006a, 2006b). As such, it bears more resemblance to Wittgenstein's metaphor of family resemblances defined as overlapping features than to an approach grounded in a dichotomy of local versus global.

In addition to highlighting the benefits of a translocal approach, the global television formats research area showcases the applicability to global communication studies of the Geertzian relation between culture and social structure outlined earlier in this article. Format adaptation reflects a new relationship between ''culture'' on one hand and ''social structure'' on the other hand. In order to overcome local cultural specificity, format adapters have to include into their work cultural elements that appeal to local audiences. Culture, to reiterate Geertz's definition, is the texture of meaning through which people interpret their experience, whereas social structure is the network of social relations in a given context. In the example of Star

Academy, the show's transnational broadcast via satellite meant that the cultural codes inserted during production made it appealing to specific segments of the Arabic-speaking audience while making it appalling to the pan-Arab audience at large. For example, the two accents of spoken Arabic dominating popular culture—the Egyptian and Levantine accents—are always well represented on the show. However, because of the economic importance of the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates), the Gulf Arabic accent was also heavily featured on the program. Saudi Arabia, which has the largest Arab media market, is especially coveted by advertisers. As a result, Star Academy's Lebanese producers made sure the show included numerous elements that would be attractive to Saudi audiences, including Saudi contestants, Saudi songs, stage design, and colors such as blue and gold that resonate with Saudi viewers.

This cultural coding was highly successful, as the show attracted record audiences in Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, the show triggered intense controversies precisely because it subverted the Saudi social structure, specifically the prohibition on the mixing of unmarried males and females. LBC programmers scheduled the show's most important broadcasts on Friday evenings, at the end of the Muslim holy day and the peak viewing time in Saudi Arabia: This ensured broad viewership. More importantly, by putting men and women on the same stage where they sang, danced, and touched each other physically and by promoting informal and flirtatious interactions between its contestants, Star Academy violated a basic tenet of the Saudi social structure (Kraidy, 2007). By encouraging viewers to vote via mobile phones, the Internet, and text messaging, Star Academy encouraged young people to communicate using mobile, interactive, and concealable technologies, which allowed them to elude social and parental control, again undermining the prevalent social structure (Kraidy, 2006a). As a result, the controversy fueled a culture war about gender roles and public life between liberals and conservatives in Saudi Arabia.

By making differences between various social groups visible, the case of Star Academy illustrates that reactions to popular culture are not shaped exclusively by membership in nation-states. Indeed, these reactions are oftentimes not a matter of national preferences but rather cut across national boundaries; hence, the importance of a translocal approach. In contrast to the furor in Saudi Arabia, in other countries such as Lebanon, Star Academy broadcasts consolidated patriotic mobilization in support of the national candidate or in political struggles against Syrian interference in Lebanese affairs (Kraidy, 2007). In Saudi Arabia, there was a disjuncture between culture and social structure, leading to moments of social division and illustrating radical differences within a nation-state; in Lebanon, the convergence between the show's cultural code and a politically sensitive situation promoted social and national integration—albeit temporarily, which is ironic considering that Lebanon is a poster child for national fragmentation. The Geertzian approach enables the understanding of various permutations of meaning, power, and structure, one where production and reception issues inherent in the global television format industry lead to an examination, through a multisited methodology based on a translocal epistemology, of local or national discontinuities and overlaps between culture and social structure on the backdrop of a global structure—in this case, the format industry and the reception of its cultural artifacts as an ethnographically accessible ''event.''

Another fruitful illustration of the possibilities of multisited research for global communication studies can be found in noted Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz's study of foreign news correspondents (Hannerz, 2003b). This study is of special relevance because it illustrates not only the potential of the Geertzian approach advocated in this article, it also

reveals some of the pitfalls involved in multisited research that we think the advocated approach can help to overcome. As such, Hannerz's study of foreign news correspondents provides global communication scholars with a heuristic, multisited empirical example that dovetails with the arguments put forth in this article.

Foreign News (Hannerz, 2003b) is based on approximately 70 interviews with foreign correspondents, in Jerusalem, Tokyo, and Cape Town for the most part. Most correspondents are Westerners working for elite European and North American media institutions; a few are Japanese or South Asian. Hannerz's informants clearly belong to a global cosmopolitan elite, not unlike leading academics and anthropologists such as Hannerz, who describes his research with people in professions similar to his as ''studying sideways'' (pp. 3–4) as he artfully weaves biographical information with anthropological analysis. Nonetheless, Hannerz's portrait of foreign correspondents focuses on personalities at the expense of institutions and structural forces. Comparing himself to other media researchers, Hannerz admits to focusing on ''a bit less structure perhaps, and some more agency'' (p. 9), seeing in the foreign news correspondents more than ''mere puppets in the world information order'' (p. 9). Overall, the study lacks a serious accounting of structural power issues as ''[t]he lives and experiences recounted in such compelling detail seem to occur independently of the larger institutional tensions and structures within which journalists work'' (Zelizer, 2007).

Although it is true that, like Geertz, Hannerz does not directly focus on structural power, he does not altogether ignore it either. His analysis of the process of ''domestication,'' whereby journalists are periodically brought back to their institution's headquarters to be reintegrated fully into institutional structures and goals, reflects some concern with structural issues. But the value of Hannerz's book resides in its theoretical contribution, which Hannerz clearly articulated in an article that he published shortly before the book appeared. Reflecting on what it means to connect several local sites involved in global knowledge production, Hannerz (2003a) writes that ''[t]he sites are connected with one another in such ways that the relationships between them are as important for this formulation as the relationships within them; the fields are not some mere collection of local units'' (p. 206). As a result, he argues:

> One must establish the translocal linkages, and the interconnections between
> those and whatever local bundles of relationships which are also part of the study
> . a major such linkage was obviously between the correspondents abroad and
> the editors at home. But then there was also the fact that correspondents looked
> sideways, toward other news sites and postings, and sometimes moved on to
> these. They often knew colleagues in some number of other such sites, having
> been stationed in the same place some time earlier, or by meeting somewhere on
> one or more of those ''fireman'' excursions which are a celebrated part of the
> public imagery of foreign correspondence, or by working for some organization.
> In some loose sense, there is a worldwide ''community'' of foreign correspondents,
> connected through local and long-distance ties. (2003a, p. 206)

What Hannerz proposes, then, is a spectrum of local–global linkages that amounts to more than a direct, dyadic local–global relation.

Nonetheless, although Hannerz's conclusion that ''these linkages make the multisite study something different from a mere comparative study of localities'' (Hannerz, 2003a, p. 206), illustrates the multisited, translocal approach advocated in this article, it could benefit from

acknowledging other existent elements of complexity. As already mentioned, most of the respondents in his study are Western journalists working for elite news outlets: This belies the explicitly translocalist orientation of Foreign News because it surreptitiously replicates a center–periphery model in which correspondents working for Western institutions have the resources and power to represent the non-West. To remedy this lacuna, it would be productive to replicate Foreign News but in a South-to-South context, exploring, for example, the lives and work of foreign correspondents between China and Latin America or South Asia and the Middle East. Such studies would reassert the value of multisited research grounded in a theory of translocalism by revealing some of the institutional overlaps and divergences within the global sphere of news production.

Conclusion

As the subfield of global communication studies continues to grow, scholars will continue to grapple with the local–global connection, which is poised to become even more theoretically complex and empirically slippery as what is commonly defined as ''the local'' undergoes profound changes due to the interactivity, mobility, and multimedia capabilities of information and media technologies—existing and forthcoming. It is clearly more arduous to understand cellular phone or iPod use than it has been to study the already complicated situation of a family watching a soap opera in their living room. We no longer have the luxury of assuming ''the durability of fields'' (Hannerz, 2003a, p. 209). Geertz himself seems to have foreshadowed these developments when he wrote of the challenges facing the ethnographer who shows up in a field ''where all the really critical things seem just to have happened yesterday and just about to happen tomorrow, [which] induces an uncomfortable sense of having come too late and arrived too early, a sense which in my case never afterward left me'' (Geertz, 1995, p. 4).

The growing complexity of the local contexts of media reception can be addressed only by fine-tuning our theoretical and methodological tools. Inspired by Geertz's work, this article has advocated what we believe is a new approach to global communication processes grounded in a translocal epistemology and a multisited methodology. We believe that such an approach should have the following features.

First, global communication studies needs to recommit to empirical work. The field's significant theoretical developments need to be put under empirical scrutiny to develop solid epistemological and ontological bases for what remains an emerging field riddled with fragmentation. Empirical research inevitably must begin with a local context, but if we are to build a truly global subfield of global communication studies, then a doubly comparative research approach is needed, working comparatively between and within various locals, on the backdrop of global processes that are often mediated by national institutions. Multisited research thus must go hand in hand with translocal theorization.

Second, it must be reiterated that such an approach would not neglect power issues inherent to global communication dynamics. Rather, an alternative perspective on power is advocated, one that anchors manifestations of power in concrete contexts, cultural codes, and social relations. In this, we avoid what Geertz (1995) called the ''obscuring mistake'' involved in ''the disconnection of power from the conditions of its generation and the immediacies of its application, until it becomes a unitary, abstract force, defined, like glamour, magic, or the popular idea of electricity, solely by its effects'' (p. xx). The identification of structures of power

by political-economic media research is necessary, but not sufficient, for an understanding of the local–global dynamic. Grasping how power works in concrete local settings is crucial.

Third, the analytical distinction between ''culture'' and ''social structure,'' though it may sound antiquated to theoretically sophisticated scholars, remains a practical if often overlooked instrument to comprehend how local life engages, endures, resists, appropriates, or celebrates global forces. As the examples employed in this article have hopefully shown, how people make meanings and how people and institutions relate to each other remain critical axes for social analysis, ones that global communication studies would benefit from considering actively and systematically. Social practice—the ways in which various rituals, ideologies, and structures are reproduced by social actors in concrete local situations—is located at the intersection of culture and social structure, and it is in that direction that theoretically and empirically meaningful global communication research should forge ahead.

Notes

1 Interdisciplinarity for Geertz was not merely an intellectual predilection or an analytical approach; it was also a function of having been at key institutional locations when interdisciplinary social science was being shaped in the United States. Geertz's career is a series of stints between radically interdisciplinary institutions, from his formative years in 1946–1950 at the ''countercultural'' Antioch College (Geertz, 2000, p. 5) and the Department of Social Relations at Harvard in the 1950s to the Committee for the Comparative Study of New Nations at the University of Chicago from 1962 to 1970, and thereafter at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, NJ.

2 Carey (1973) even published a review of Geertz's Interpretation of Cultures in Communication Review.

3 The charge that Geertz neglects questions of power has been a criticism levied by both anthropology's materialists and antifoundationalists (Asad, 1982; Crapanzano, 1986; Fox, 1991; Moore, 1994; Roseberry, 1982).

4 For a full elaboration, see the recent Law as Culture by the Princeton anthropologist Rosen (2006), formerly a Geertz student and co-author.

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