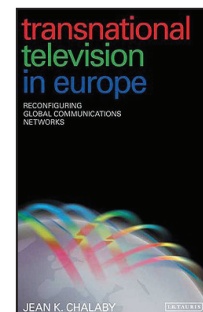


CHALABY, J. K. *Transnational Television in Europe: Reconfiguring Global Communications Networks*. London, New York: IB Tauris, 2009, 278 p.  
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### From the national *playground* in Europe to the global outreach: an empirical reading of Transnational Television

Dr. Jean Chalaby is the Director of the MA Transnational Media & Globalization and lecturer of Media History, Comparative Media Systems and International Communication at the City University, London. The present book represents his latest contribution to the subject of Transnational Television, which he initiated in a previous book on Transnational Television Worldwide (2005).

This book addresses the origins of transnational television from 1980 until 2008, starting with the emergence of Cable News Network (CNN) and with the spark of inspiration from a pioneering man like Ted Turner. An extensive list of 150 interviews builds an image of the developments and insight strategies of transnational televisions in Europe.

Transnational televisions represent the essence of the book and through their narrative we learn how this phenomenon influenced and changed the global media industry, the European market, the local European networks and additionally emerged the need of a new theoretical framework to explain the new phenomenology.

Chalaby delimitates the book in four parts that resemble a marketing plan for the development of transnational television. The first part, the awareness stage, is planting the beginnings of satellite television from America to Europe in a rather dry empirical form, while the second part, the knowledge stage, introduces the reader almost in the same tone to the specifics of European television market including regulation, advertising and the situation of public broadcasters. These introductory parts can arguably be considered more attractive and involving for the academics. The last two parts, the growth and consolidation stage, represent the bulk of the transnational television expansion at the European level and taking up the global changes while also being the most interesting and gratifying parts of the book.

The factual recount of an empirical reading predominates along all the chapters and especially for the presentation of key

genres and the corresponding successful channels in Europe (Chapter 7). The easiness of the reading is compensated by clear notes and references separated for each chapter.

The above-mentioned comparison with a marketing strategy resembles a lot to the lessons foreign televisions had to learn in adventuring into the European market. Starting with *Localization*, MTV represents the *foreigner*, marking a valuable change for the forerunners and newborns: know the market. MTV played the role of innovator in being the first to learn that: “viewers were not connecting with the channel at an emotional level because it was not their music, their language and culture” (p. 209) and alongside with CNN in being the first channels to introduce “local advertising windows” (p. 209). This lesson “brought many international broadcasters to conclude that their expansion goals will only be met by a responsive approach to local realities” (p. 206). Lesson learned for MTV, the children channels followed and also new European channels like *Euro-news* which started to transmit in eight languages.

Consistent with this strategy, the transnational news channels, whose *raison d'être* became: “to project a nation onto the international stage and give it a voice in the global news arena” (p. 186), took localization to a whole new level by “offering minimum audience wastage to advertisers” (p. 91-92). Chalaby, quoted later by Davis (2010), marks these success factors of these channels by underlying the adaptation to the foreign cultures and also the ability to attract advertisers by talking to “the high income of their viewers” (Davis 2010:124). “The big three report the world to the world”: CNN, BBC and Al Jazeera English (p. 173). The same point is reinforced by Brüggemann and Schulz-Forberg (2009: 707): “European transnational communication space is growing and attracting influential elite audiences”, however, “European public remains very modest”.

Once introduced to the experiences of the American television channels that adventured over the Atlantic, “the early birds” (p. 27): CNN, MTV and Discovery, the adaptation of the European market is examined. Technological developments of the satellite technology bring a renewed European legal framework,

the Television without Frontiers Directives, the 'SatCab' Directive. The European public broadcasters learn about innovation, competition and increased choice brought by the transnational television on their own European cultural grounds.

Regarding the conflict that usually appears between global and local, it is not seen as a conflict at all in this book since Chalaby is basing his thesis on the decline of the *cultural imperialism* of Schiller (1992) and on the mutual influence and transformation of the global and local. Initially depicted as "a 'threat' to 'integrity of national cultures' (p. 2), since it "ascribed an irresistible omnipotence to external powers and their cultural influence" [and] "assumed that media audiences would absorb the same ideological meaning in the same way" (Sinclair 2004:74), cultural imperialism has been replaced by a global culture (Sinclair 2004).

Furthermore, the impact and redefinition of the relations between place, space and time (Chalaby:229) is a clear transformation through *deterritorialization* that Chalaby adopts from García Canclini (1989) and Tomlinson (1999). He points out that "international TV channels are not simply deterritorializing but deterritorialized cultural artifacts" (Chalaby:228). Deterritorialization centers on the loss of the connection of culture and its ancestral territory which propagated with reference mostly to the "American cultural imperialism".

The last effect of globalization is represented by the *hybrid cultures*, introduced by Chalaby when he indicates that "global trends hybridize local creations as styles and genres are circulated worldwide" (p. 231). An idea previously introduced by Tomlinson: "hybrid culture has a strong, intuitive appeal which follows directly from the notion of deterritorialization" (Tomlinson 1999:141).

As a result, the globalizing factor brought by the transnational television is not suffocating the local networks; on the contrary, it "contributes to an opening of the national communications systems" and "makes media systems more open and diverse" (p. 3). Chalaby is consequentially in accord with Sinclair (2004), which notes that it was an "apparent domination of television content that inspired much of the cultural imperialism debate" (p. 76). Nevertheless, we have to point out that this position of Chalaby is not sustained in the book by an analysis of content and formats from the American televisions to the European market.

In this new environment, Chalaby claims that a need for a new theoretical framework emerges. While adopting the theory of Beck (2002) of moving from *methodological nationalism* towards *methodological cosmopolitanism*, Chalaby affirms that transnational channels "belong to the age of cosmopolitan capitalism" (p. 229). A valuable point here is brought along with the cosmopolitanism view which cannot be opposed to the local since according to Beck (2002: 36) "cosmopolitan forms of life and identities are ones that are ethically and culturally simultaneously global and local". The cosmopolitan concept has therefore the potential to advance the understanding of the new realities of a transnational television since it "helps to overcome

methodological nationalism and to build a frame of reference to analyze the new social conflicts, dynamics" (Beck 2002).

The findings are representing "an evidence" (p. 241) of a transnational paradigm shift from a complicated situation to one when the '*constellations*' of digitalization, expanded reception, growth of supply, fairly liberal legislative framework for the audiovisual, restructuring of advertising sector '*came into alignment*' with the growth of global trade. This history built the reality of communications systems' ability to evolve nowadays at four connecting levels: local, national, regional and global.

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