Professions of faith: Hindu nationalism, television and the avatars of capital.

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The history locked in the object can only be delivered by a knowledge mindful of the historic positional value of the object in its relation to other objects – by the actualization and concentration of something which is already known and is transformed by that knowledge. Cognition of the object in its constellation is cognition of the process stored in the object.¹

The ongoing construction of Hindu Nationalism in India is inextricably linked with shifts in the global economy and changes in the field of media and technology. How one approaches this relationship determines the kinds of conclusions one arrives at. Part of the burden of the project has been to reframe the terms around which both Hindu Nationalism and global television are approached. This re-orientation, in the context of capitalist globalization, results in a rethinking of both “cultural difference” and “global media culture.” Thinking these two aspects together, and in their relationality results in a recognition that holistic analyses, that result in simplified and dichotomous conclusions about these elements are fraught with many conceptual, historical and empirical problems. Thinking relationally, in gradations, through the temporality of uneven histories calls attention to both the relational and necessarily fragmented character of the nexus of media-capital-culture. Neither of these three terms can be understood separately without the other two, and their consequent reformulation calls attention to the necessarily intersecting, historically-specific character of all three.

The relationship between media, economic change and nationalism was most powerfully invoked by Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities.² Anderson further highlighted the importance of the imagination in the consolidation of nationalism. That is, he shifted the focus in much political science from its reliance on parties, organisations and movements to that of the emotional or imaginative aspects of nationalism, and articulated the question of sentiment to that of concrete practices and political mobilisation through which nationalism concretizes itself into the nation-state. Appadurai has not only updated this relationship between media, community and economic change but highlighted the need to rethink the terms of the relationship itself.³ That is, given that in an increasingly global and fragmentary socio-cultural and economic space, the absence of face-to-face interaction (which Anderson highlighted as one of the central changes that lead to the importance of imagination) has led to much greater significance of the media. However, the media under present global conditions cannot be circumscribed to either certain loci of control (such as the state), to specific spatial dimensions (such as the physical boundaries of the nation-state) or particular pedagogical concerns (the cultivation of citizenship as the ideal figure of the media consumer).

This project has highlighted; one, that under contemporary globalization, media like television are largely controlled by major transnational private corporations.

² Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.
³ Appadurai, Modernity at Large.
which operate as capitalist industries in search of profit across the globe. The role of the nation-state in harnessing the potential of the media has thus been seriously diluted; second, the changes in technology, in particular satellite television enable a crossing of the borders of the nation-state, such that the footprint of any one network does not obey the law of territorial integrity. This is crucially linked to the shifts and movements of geographically dispersed populations that have some sort of link to their home countries, including Indians in the U.S. (Zee TV and STAR for example) and within India, as well as those situated in south-east Asian countries; thirdly, the mode of address of global television is less interested in harnessing the affective dimensions of their audiences to a particular state or political party. Rather, television is strongly consumerist in its focus, fuelled largely by advertising revenue, while simultaneously the marketing of ideas, aspirations and commodities is often couched in cultural terms, in terms of notions of belonging and “home”.

The question of “home”, the invention of terms of belonging and modes of affective affiliation with “home culture” is a crucial theoretical and political question. Empirically, as important critiques in the field of anthropology have highlighted, the idea of a physically-bounded entity, the “local”, is an enabling fiction that has allowed much intellectual work to continue under unexamined ethnocentric assumptions, themselves underwritten by exoticism. Further, empirical analysis and historical understandings of the “production of the local” disallow any static understanding of the “local” as the place of irreducible alterity. Put succinctly, the “Other” bears an uneasily proximate relationship to the Self. The degree of proximity, while varying in degree, points to a more-or-less permeable boundary between cultures. Thus, if the term “culture”, while speaking of other nation-states has to be used, it must simultaneously be put under erasure. How would one sustain, for example, an absolute distinction between the “otherness” of Indian “culture” and the West, given the complex history of colonialism, the present neo-colonial conjuncture with the crossings and movements of people, money, media, knowledge? Any discourse of difference, of locality and the like must thus attend to the theoretical and empirical problems which ensue when the Other is fetishized, the local is over-valued and difference is uncritically celebrated. The question of difference, of the valuation of “other” cultures as well as the possibilities for resisting power-relations through the invocation of difference have marked the field of media studies in interesting ways.

As signalled in the introduction, the debates around culture, capitalism and difference were most strongly articulated within global mass communication research and audience ethnography. In the case of the former, a common (though not universal) tendency was to attack global media like television for eroding the cultural specificity of other cultures. This argument posited a certain substantive link between capitalism and culture such that if television networks were controlled by western corporations they spread western ideologies through their programming and destroyed the values and belief-systems of other cultures. While this approach has undergone some reformulation, such as Hamelink’s recognition of the tailoring of programming to specific audiences, it nevertheless broaches the question of the status of the “local.” That is, even if television in its global avatar targets and negotiates with the local, one must

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4 Meyer and Geschiere (1999) provide a recent example of work that is critical of this tendency.


6 Hamelink, “New Information and Communication Technologies.”
seriously interrogate the precise character of the “local.” As argued above, the “local” is not essentially different, static or bounded in character and is itself the historically-specific product of conflictual processes at different levels of the social formation. The analysis of Hindu Nationalism above has insisted that it would be an empirical and historical mistake to understand Hinduism as either subsuming the entire population of India, and most importantly, to understand Hinduism in terms of a static tradition, a unified coherent body of thought or practices, in other words, as an absolute Other. The discourse of Hinduism is internally-fissured, historically-evolving and the effects of its *énoncés* and practices are uncertain. At certain conjunctures, it does, however tenuously solidify, into forming a hegemonic ideology yet this stability is itself temporary, as we have seen in the shifting and contradictory appeals through which the BJP addresses the “people.”

**THE PRODUCTION OF DIFFERENCE**

This particular attention to the production of the local as an imaginary space of identification requires much greater work than has been characterised by global approaches to the media. The project then, has called attention to the very malleable, historically-shifting character of the Other, in order to deepen some of the recent tendencies in global media studies towards recognizing the complexity of the relationship between capitalism, media and cultural politics. While global analyses of media have now come to recognize that media do not simply eradicate difference and specificity, this recognition has tended to leave unexamined the status of “difference” and the “local” itself. Inspite of this relative lack of attention to the politics of culture within non-western countries, global media studies has contributed and continues to highlight the capitalistic character of the increasingly fragmented landscape of television broadcasting. This continual focus is not without its merits particularly given that most contemporary discourses of resistance, oppositional readings, pleasure and politics tend to elide this crucial element of global media. The discussions of difference throw up their own particular problems, which include for our present purposes, at least two important questions: At what level does the production of difference obtain in those analyses which argue against the cultural imperialism theses? Further what relationship exists between the proliferation of difference as a counter-strategy to macro-level power relations and the broader economic context of capitalist globalization?

To address the latter question first: Slavoj Žižek has argued in a recent dialogue with Judith Butler that the fetishization of difference tends to leave unexamined the question of capitalism and the systemic character of capitalist globalization. It is worth signalling here, that by “system” one is not assuming a homogenous understanding of either the effects of capitalism or its modality of expansion. Both of these conclusions would go against Marx’s understanding of capitalism as a historically-specific and socio-cultural complex that seeks to overcome its own contradictions. Thus, global capital at present does not operate according to an evolutionary logic where industrial and mercantile capital has been eclipsed *tout court* by finance/speculative capital. (It is here that Jacques Derrida both misunderstands the uneven nature of capital and thus

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unwittingly undermines his argument for Marxism or the “New International” as a viable socialist project of emancipation). For example, in India, bonded labour, industrial capitalism, mercantile and financial capital and increasingly speculative capital all co-exist in uneasy relationships. The systemic nature of capital can be minimally understood as the primacy of the profit motive in determining the contours of globalization. This is a familiar but nevertheless important point, since it restricts the kinds of programming on global television, as we have seen, and addresses its audience as potential consumers. However, to add complexity to this recognition, it must simultaneously be pointed out that consumerist ideologies do not flourish purely on western ideals and values, but speak through the language of the “local.” Hence, the problematic character of Butler’s valuation of a politics of difference.

Further, here lies the bite in Žižek’s critique. The turn to radical democracy, while in itself hardly objectionable, leaves unexamined the ideology of democratic participation, of bargaining with the state and the relationship between the state, civil society and capitalism. It takes no great intelligence to recognize that the channels through which democracy is deepened are obstructed by the importance of economic considerations such as lobby groups of industries and the interests of the market. As we have seen, the few modest proposals for granting access to the air-waves by grassroots organizations in India have been summarily dismissed— “not profitable enough.” Butler’s response is particularly telling in this regard. Rather, than defend or interrogate the reliance on “difference” and radical democracy, she casts aspersions on Žižek’s own politics and offers his critique as a return to Stalinism. The response is less important as a drama of intellectual squabbles, but highlights the dead-end which arguments that range around capitalism and culture lead to. The classic binary that still remains and underwrites much work on cultural politics is that of postmodern culturalism on the one hand and the accusation of Stalinist economism on the other.

This project has been subtended by the necessity of rethinking the dominance of economism in understanding the relationship between Hindu nationalism, television and media, while critically interrogating the necessarily resistant potential of a politics of difference. While formulations around the “politics of difference” are ranged across a variety of intellectual fields, within mass media, it is the reading practices of specific audiences, in particular their ability to read differently, against the grain that were most influential in cultural studies— our first question. Such studies did rightly highlight the concrete practice of reading media texts and situated them in the context of empirical analyses of social subjects, rather than portray media consumers as passive. However, such analyses have also had their blindspots. For example, important work still needs to be done on how oppositional reading practices translate into effective, or at least substantial political struggle. While there is indeed a politics to reading, how does this politics articulate itself to broader political practices such as organising and structural change? Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, for example, has

10 For example, see John Fiske, Television Culture and Mimi White, “Ideological Analysis and Television,” in Robert C. Allen, ed., Channels of Discourse, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1987, pp. 134-171. White’s argument in particular emphasizes that meaning-making in the consumption of media texts is not necessarily politically oppositional but caught up in a dialectic with other ideologies and practices, and thus provides a more subdued account of active audiences than Fiske’s more celebratory argument.
rightly argued that even if one recognizes that global media tailor their programming to specific audiences, must not be seen as solely western-directed in their flows, and that audiences do indeed make their own meanings at times, the consumerist character of programming and the capitalist character of media organizations remain unchanged. One would thus have to recognize firstly, how the profit motive in mass media work to set the limits and exert pressure (in however mediated form) on the democratic and pluralistic possibilities of the expansion of global media.

The numerous examples of the gate-keeping function of Indian satellite television, in terms of plurality of programming and diversification of voices bear witness to the limitations of the free-market, multiple-choice rhetoric of global television. As we saw, Rupert Murdoch justified the entrance of STAR TV in India as a deepening of democracy. Simultaneously, we also saw how the discourse of programmers characterised the market as the temple and the consumer as god. The contradictions between stated goals and actual practice speak for themselves. This discourse of plurality, escape from state control and democracy however, was not just located at post-colonial nation-states like India. In other words, it is not only when “difference” is encountered, that the discourse of democracy gets used by media corporations. Murdoch, for example made the same appeal in Britain, positing free-market capitalist media as the solvent that would dissolve the entrenched, encrusted power of the state. Thus, here the discourse of difference has different modalities – “freedom” in the U.K., while “cultural difference” as the dominant motif in India. At the same time, it is worth emphasizing as the analysis of television has shown, to rely on the state as the guarantor of the rights of a pluralist citizenry is equally erroneous. The crucial question that one would need to ask in media studies is how the “people” are constructed, by whom and toward what ends.

CULTURE IN THE MAKING

As already emphasized above, media studies whether it fixes its glance at the level of global shifts or audience readings, must acknowledge that culture is always a process, integrally linked to the imagination and the latter’s articulation to material social relations. Further, analyses must move beyond locating the reader of media texts as the locus for meaning-making and understand the relationship between the individual, singular reader and his/her social context. This recognition would involve not just the familiar invocation of race, class, gender, ethnicity and the like but interrogate these dimensions themselves as embedded in conflictual and historically-specific discourses of power. One would thus have to locate and specify the materialization of identity and their relationship to discourses and institutions. This is precisely why the discursive and material production of Hindu Nationalism occupies an important role in this project. “Difference” must be analyzed in all its complexity, and not merely posited in terms of “active readers and their specific social contexts” or “cultural specificity of Third World countries.”

In the present study, the production of locality through the discourse of Hindu nationalism exhibits precisely this dimension of identity as process, as a perspectival

shift in analysis from identity to identification. Part of the reason for this shift is because the power of discourse is not based on its ability to saturate the field of identity, to extend a homogenous account of identity and its essential characteristics, particularly given that the subjects of discourse (in our case, "Indians" or "Hindus") are differentially located in relation to power-relations. Rather, Hindu nationalist discourse like most discursive regimes derives its power precisely from its flexibility. As Foucault argues "we must conceive of discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform or stable." As we saw earlier, the function of Hindu Nationalist discourse shifted in different historical periods, at times relying on scriptural authority (the Vedas), at others on a flexible notion of jati or race, that posited an expansive notion of what it meant to be Hindu. These strategies related to the distribution of power in the political field as well as the targets of address. Further, “we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies.”

Foucault's insistence on eschewing the logic of Inside/Out and Self/Other is particularly relevant for our understanding of cultural politics, especially under contemporary globalisation. As argued above, media theorists who fetishize difference without asking how the local and global are mutually dependent and parasitical must ignore the empirical and historical fact that discourses of culture are the products of processes of cross-fertilization, of the promiscuous crossing of boundaries whose transgression call into question the notion of well-bounded identities. Particularly given the relationship between nationalism, media and capitalism, to hold onto such an understanding remains erroneous. Simultaneously, to cast the expansion of global media like television as a juggernaut that encounters, then erases cultural difference, remains caught up in a Self/Other distinction that does not hold empirically or historically.

It is here that Walter Benjamin's argument for a constellative critique finds its relevance, for a constellation is precisely the identification of particular elements arranged in a particular configurations of relations. A constellative critique explicitly rejects uni-directional, cause-effect relationships between elements in an analysis – rather, it locates their meanings as a consequence of their relational character with other elements in the constellation. The meanings attached to any one element (such as Hindu Nationalism in the present case) cannot be understood outside the particular constellation of which it is a part. Further, as in a constellation, the perspective from which one perceives a configuration affects the distances that separate the elements and the overall form of the constellation. Thus, while the link between economic liberalisation and global television looks much more direct in one perspective, that link is attenuated when perceived from the angle of Hindu Nationalism and its own imbrication with changes in the cultural landscape. The different chapters of the project perform such a focalization of the issue, holding the constellation (understood as both Konstellation and Zusammenhänge) together, yet perceiving it from different angles in each chapter. This multi-focal approach to the question at hand thus illuminates in

13 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p.100.
14 *ibid.*, p.100.
dialectical fashion one face of the research question while having to distance itself from other aspects, and set in motion the same visuality from another perspective and in another section later. Theodor Adorno succinctly puts this mode of “intellectual visuality”, in the opening quote to this chapter, as one which locates the object of inquiry in its historical positional value. Only when thus located, at a particular historical moment, and in relation to the other elements with which it is constellated, can the relationship between Hindu Nationalism, global television and contemporary capitalism be approached, without succumbing to simplistic or purely fragmentary analyses. It is also here that the importance of historical understandings, not couched in the terms of a linear universal history is of signal importance for my analysis. As stated in the Introduction, the historically sedimented character of ideologies of reason and revelation are crucial for the analysis, yet such an analysis proceeds by identifying the discontinuous temporalities of the different elements of the focus of inquiry, and constellates their “hanging together” at a particular moment—a freezing of the dialectic, as it were. The empirical analyses of Hindu Nationalism, television and economic liberalisation make no universalist claims of comprehensiveness and the unfolding of “essential characteristics.” Rather, they are based on a construction of a constellative configuration of the three elements at a particular historical moment—“Universal history has no theoretical armature. Its method is additive; it musters data to fill the homogenous empty time. Materialistic historiography, on the other hand, is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well.”

**THE TIME OF IMAGINATION**

How does the cultural politics of “home” articulate itself under contemporary globalization in India and abroad? Through what discursive modalities and temporal dimensions can the power of imagination be harnessed toward the consolidation of community and nation? What role does technology play in this ongoing making of “culture”? Under contemporary globalization, what is the relationship between the imagination and the temporal dimensions of the mass media? These questions may point the way forward toward understanding the complex imbrication of mass media like television, capitalist globalization and the imagination of community and the nation.

Joan W. Scott has recently made a convincing argument for the role of fantasy in the fabrication of identity. Scott argues that “fantasy is the means by which real relations of identity between past and present are discovered and/or forged.” Her understanding highlights that identity is understood in the relational proximity between past and present. As we have seen, with regard to Hindu Nationalism, the continual harking back to the past constitutes one (thought not the only) modality through which identity as difference is constructed. Further, she argues that “fantasy is more or less synonymous with imagination..one directs one’s imagination purposively to achieve a coherent aim, that of writing oneself or one’s group into history...” When read in the light of Anderson’s insistence on the power of imagination, Scott’s argument develops it further in the direction of the construction of coherence, of identity.

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16 Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, p. 262.
18 Ibid., p. 287.
19 Ibid.
as comprehensible and uniform. However, it is worth cautioning at this point, that discursive regimes such as Hindu Nationalism are engaged in the ongoing construction of identity precisely because coherence remains a practical impossibility. If a uniform, seamless and comprehensible notion of Hindutva could be created, then the need for historically-changing discourses would not arise. Hence, the restless repetition with difference, where Hindutva provides the common anchoring point for shifting discourses of identity depending on a different set of elements – sometimes high caste supremacy, sometimes, inclusive notions of culture for example.

This unstable character of imagination, that harnesses resources from the past (while projecting a utopic future) is a central feature of most cultural politics and the reason they must continually rearticulate themselves in changed circumstances. Part of the reason for this re-articulation is precisely because under changed circumstances the structure of Inside/Outside keeps changing. That is, the domain of discourse cannot be fundamentally understood as having set notions of what constitutes the peculiarities of particular identities or groups. Imagination, identification and fantasy thus entail a holding strategy – of keeping contradictions at bay in the making of coherent identities and the simultaneous failure of doing so, given that the Other either provides the grounds for a recognition of the Self, or the Other is too intimately connected with the Self – “[fantasy] extracts coherence from confusion, reduces multiplicity to singularity, and reconciles illicit desire with the law.”

The media are central to this ongoing imagination of identity as identification, where the fantasmatic projection of coherency is mirrored in the projected images and words of media texts. At the present conjuncture, the importance of fantasy and identification needs to be rethought given the changing media landscape and the spread of capitalist globalization. It is worth recalling that for Anderson, the realist novel was crucial to the imagining of the nation, since the traditional narrative was structured along a linear temporality that mimicked the temporality of the nation. Anderson had argued that the time of the nation was that of “empty, homogenous time.” Such a temporality assigned everyone within the nation to a uniform place and on a similar historical trajectory. The homologous structure of linear temporality between the novel and the nation shifts dramatically when viewed from the perspective of global media such as television. For example, how could one understand the temporality of TV as linear at present? Besides the question of contemporary aesthetic shifts that highlight fragmentation in programming and camera style (the MTV aesthetic for example), programmes are continually interrupted by commercials. Outside the text proper, satellite television has fragmented the notion of a “national audience” (for example, National Doordarshan) where the audience watched the same program at the same time. This temporal simultaneity has disappeared to a large extent at present. Now, specific channels target specific groups in terms of content, while different networks are directed at different geographical areas. While the above two textual and extra-textual dimensions of global television in India do not exhaust the difference between the novel and television in relation to nationalism, they do point out that the structure of temporality has changed. Not only is linearity not the dominant temporality of television production or reception, but the audiences for television are themselves fragmented, and well aware that, unlike the newspaper for Anderson, different groups are watching different television networks and programmes.

20 Ibid., p. 289.
21 Anderson, Imagined Communities, p. 20.
From the question of temporality in fantasy and identity-construction, which for Scott has more of a historical dimension (past and future) we are now discussing the temporality of the medium itself which is crucial to the imagining of community. The homogenous, linear empty time of the nation cannot be sustained under the contemporary mass-mediated conjuncture. (It is worth emphasizing that this notion of time is itself a fantasy.i.e. lived reality never corresponded to this teleological temporality). In terms of media like global television, the relationship between time and space is further complicated. If the national community for Anderson was bound by the newspaper and the novel, at present, television functions quite differently. As we have seen, television networks do not address national audiences per se, but move between different levels including the trans-national, the sub-national and the national. Thus, the sense of an imagined contiguity between readers of the newspaper and novel have shifted to a recognition that viewers of TV programmes are scattered across the globe. This recognition would, one assumes, have different effects depending on the location of the audience and the kind of text. For example, a TV programme that takes a trip down memory lane (a fantasy linking past to present) would have quite different resonances depending on who was watching it and where. For diasporic Indian communities who receive ZEE in Europe or the U.S., such programmes are articulated to a predominantly nostalgic mode, where “home” is viewed and experienced through the televisual image as a “return to the source.” For audiences in India, particularly those I encountered in large urban cities, documentaries or fictional programmes of this type elicited almost no interest. For them, lifestyle programming on beauty, interior decoration, serials set among the lavish mise-en-scène of upper-middle class Indians, music shows targetted at urban youth, and fashion programs seemed much more popular.

In the case of religious programming, which remains popular both within and outside India, the particular meanings attached to these shows by different audiences cannot be assumed to be the same. A nostalgia for home marks much of the reception of these shows, as I encountered among expatriate Indians in the U.S., often providing the resource through which parents could educate their children in the “home culture” and protect them from the influence of their present domicile. Within India, while a multitiude of meanings could be ascribed to audience readings, the spectacle of these shows such as the special effects and costumes provide for much fascination, which could hardly have the same appeal for Indians who live in the West. While emphasizing the differences in terms of viewing different kinds of programming in spatially separated locations, it is important to recognize that these are not absolute distinctions but context-dependent in terms of kinds of audiences and kinds of texts, among other things.

The imagination of community and the nation is thus fractured by the spatial separation characterized by the presence of diasporic communities. Further, the temporality of programing and its reception is also complicated by the dispersal of audiences and texts. Through the internet and satellite TV, spatially disparate groups of Indians have access to “home” in quite dramatically different ways than in the past. A certain proximity is thus facilitated by technological innovation. But what sort of proximity and temporality is this? In the case of many diasporic Indians, particularly parents, the temporal distance of programming such as old Hindi movies or even recent mythologicals (set in the mythic past) have a present resonance that is tied to nostalgic invo-
cations of “home.” For Indians in India, on the other hand, the spatial dissonance of programming that features affluence traditionally identified with the West is experienced as a time to come – as a future promised by the fruits of globalization.

The past for such audiences would not be marked by the sense of nostalgia and a search for roots evident among diasporic groups. The aspirations for home, “tradition” and the past coexist under the present global media landscape with aspirations of consumption, the “good life” and the West. The temporal and spatial dimensions of imagination and identification are not reducible under such circumstances to that of a homogenous community moving through linear time, a developmental history where the goals and pleasures of fantasy can attain to coherence.

The unbounded character of the imagination and its articulation to nationalism has been recently addressed and investigated by Anderson. He argues for understanding unbound seriality which is marked by universal categories such as citizens, revolutionaries, workers and the like. He contrasts this with bound serialities, consisting of limited and narrow definitions reducible to the logic of finite numbers: such as, for our discussion, tribals, Hindus, Muslims etc. Anderson sees in the latter the dangers of ethnic absolutism and the irruption of particularistic tendencies leading to conflict. Unbound serialities on the other hand, transcend exclusivistic tendencies and point toward more universalistic and expansive grounds for identification. In a recent reappraisal of Anderson’s work, Partha Chatterjee points out that “it is not entirely clear why the “unbound” serialities of the nationalist imagination cannot, under specific conditions, produce finite and countable classes.” What might this debate have to offer for our present considerations?

It needs no emphasizing that global media cultivate highly-differentiated modes of imagining, of belonging, among spatially disparate groups. These audiences transcend the governmentality of particular nation-states in the specific sense that they do not constitute the figures of a national census. They could be understood as examples of an unbounded seriality. The Hindu Nationalist movement however, as we have already seen, hardly limits itself to Indian citizens; rather, it actively cultivates support from diasporic communities. Further, culture provides one of the most important mediums through which economic and political support for Hindu Nationalism at home is garnered. The importance of Indian programming on global TV networks in the West would be integral to understanding this trans-national dimension of Hindu Nationalism. The importance of this NRI support for Hindu Nationalism is felt concretely in the Indian nation-state itself – through financial support for national parties, through state policy regarding investment and trade flows for example. In this situation, the bound and unbound seriality that Anderson distinguishes become difficult to sustain. The numerical classification of Hindus in India is linked to another notion of “Hindu” attached to diasporic populations. While they do not count as citizens, their presence and support is felt by Hindus at home, and sometimes unfortunately, by non-Hindus. Thus, where does one put the label “Hindu”? As a category of the census it has been mobilized often by Hindu Nationalism in its discourse as the defender of an aggrieved majority held hostage by “preferential treatment” to minorities. At the same time, Hinduism as the ideological glue that brings together individuals and groups separated in time and space has been consistently deployed to mobilise financial, cultural and political support for the BJP in its political campaigns at home.

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Chatterjee’s argument for thinking bound and unbound serialities together further develops an understanding of globalization as a contradictory movement, that fragments space and time. As we just saw, the spatial separation of people results in different forms of identification with the discourse of nationalism, one primarily though not exclusively affective and cultural (diasporic Indians), the other demographic and juridical (Indian citizens). This is further linked to the ways in which media texts from global networks are made sense of. The social location of particular kinds of audiences bear on the possible modes of identification made between text, audience and the meaning of national belonging. In this context, Henri Lefebvre’s important argument of “the production of space” concretizes and conceptualizes our engagement with the production of locality, and enables us to comprehend the link between capitalist globalisation, transnational media and the imagination. Lefebvre (similar to Chatterjee) argues against mistaking the utopic time of capital as the smooth surpassing of spatial differences for the real, contradictory coexistence of different space-time relations. He argues that those who inveigh against capitalism fail to understand that “they… bestow a cohesiveness it [the capitalist system] utterly lacks upon a totality which is in fact decidedly open.”\(^\text{24}\) The spatial contradictions of capital include the fact that social space can never coincide with society per se. For example, the space of imagination, particularly in the context of mass media like satellite television crosses and recrosses the borders of the nation-state (society) and intersect with but surpass the latter. It is precisely here that the imaginative dimension of space (the representation of space, through media texts for example) cannot be bound to the physical space of the nation-state. Hence, the possibility that while the same texts might be read by different spatially-separated audiences, their mode of identification and the logic of imagination is different. Here the tension between global media studies and audience ethnography can be undone, firstly, by recognizing that the temporal and spatial dimensions of media expansion and capitalist globalization are not linear and chronotopic, while insisting that the audiences themselves are located within a larger grid of power-relations (capitalist media with all their complexity) where the meanings of texts and the processes of identification are linked to other groups, in other places and can have significant impact on cultural politics (the dual meaning structure of “Hindu” for example).

Attending to the cross-national dimensions of Hindu Nationalism, and the transnational modality of global television enables one to map out the complexity of the present conjuncture of cultural politics. To term Hindu Nationalism as reactionary or as a return to the past, an anti-modern or pre-modern movement fails to do justice to the imbrication of the discourse of tradition in the evolving modern dimensions of contemporary globalisation. The temporality of the imagination and the spatiality of capital become increasingly important with regard to nationalism. As has been argued above, to conceptualize nationalism and the role of imagination in linear, teleological terms is to succumb to the error of confusing a utopic developmental vision with the complexity of real structural change. Chatterjee argues that “people can only imagine themselves in empty homogenous time; they do not live in it. Empty homogenous time is the Utopian time of capital. It linearly connects past, present and future, creating the possibility of all those historicist imaginings of identity, nationhood and...

CHAPTER 7

progress... But empty homogenous time is not located anywhere in real space – it is utopian. The real space of modern life is a heterotopia...”

This notion of empty homogenous time has underwritten much developmental communication which sought to harness the media toward the progressive goal of furthering the conditions of post-colonial nation-states towards material prosperity based on capital. However, as the recent upsurge of popular protest around transnational bodies like the IMF and the WB, the G-7 meetings etc. illustrate, the utopic and ideological discourse of development has been revealed to be just that. For Chatterjee and others, “uneven development” and alternative modernities mark the contemporary conjuncture. In other words, the coeval existence of differentiated understandings and workings of economics, culture and politics. These Others of the West do not signal a return to the premodern. Reading nationalisms thus merely replicates the logic of capital. As Chatterjee argues rightly “[B]y imagining capital (or modernity) as an attribute of time itself, this view succeeds not only in branding the resistances to it as archaic and backward, but also in securing capital and modernity their ultimate triumph.” In the present study of course, this “difference” (of Hindu Nationalism) is not necessarily resistant at all. It is embedded in the particular logic of difference as the modality through which capital (and media) operate.

As argued above, the space of capital is in fact heterotopic. The temporal dimensions of the imagination as well as global television do not operate on the logic of linearity. This “irruption of difference” in the wake of capitalist globalization is not thus a return to the past, but a recognition, a bringing into focus, of the essentially contradictory character of capitalist expansion in all its various forms. The media illustrate this point well as has been argued above – in the hybridity of programming, the collapse of temporal and spatial unity, the mode of multiple address and multiple audiences. This relationship between nationalism, capital and the media must be framed within a now-famous quote by Marx:

...capital drives beyond national barriers and prejudices as much as beyond nature worship, as well as all traditional, confined, complacent, encrusted satisfactions of present needs, and reproductions of old ways of life...

But from the fact that capital posits every such limit as a barrier and hence gets ideally beyond it, it does not by any means follow that it has really overcome it...its production moves in contradictions which are constantly overcome but just as constantly posited.

This is a complex passage but signals some of the present concerns succinctly. It warns against the kind of celebration of difference, hybridity and syncretism that marks recent cultural studies, as well as the tendency to assume homogenisation as the logical outcome of capitalist expansion. If capital can annihilate space through time, an apt description of the technologically-facilitated expansion of global broadcasting, the overcoming of “difference” (‘national barriers and prejudices’, ‘old ways of life’)

26 Lefebvre makes this point forcefully. “Actually existing capitalism has many facets: landed capital, commercial capital, financial capital – all play a part in practice according to their varying capabilities, and as opportunity affords; conflicts between capitalists of the same kind, or of different kinds, are an inevitable part of the process. These diverse breeds of capital, and of capitalists, along with a variety of overlapping markets – commodities, labour, knowledge, capital itself, land – are what together constitute capitalism.” The Production of Space, p.10.
27 Chatterjee, “Anderson’s Utopia”, p.131.
remains at the level of an ideal rather than a reality. Hence the utopian dimension of homogenous time. If “it does not follow that it [capital] has really overcome it [difference]”, cultural studies would have to seriously engage with the transformations that occur at this level – at the point of encounter between capital and difference. As we have seen, global media networks speak the language of localism within India, while the “local” is being continually produced in the context of globalization. The encounter between the barriers to capital and capital itself, it can be argued, lead to a reshaping of both. It is also precisely here, that within media studies, attention to difference remains partial if it fails to recognize the articulation of cultural difference to socio-economic and political relations which transcend the local.

To summarize the implications of the temporal and spatial dimensions of imagination, nationalism and media under capitalist globalization, the following points require emphasis and point toward areas for future study:

1) The expansive dimension of contemporary capitalism, and its augmentation through global television must not be cast in utopian terms, as the homogenization of difference. To buy such an argument, is to deal in the currency of essentialism, and to misrecognize the differentiated and contradictory character of both capitalism and “cultural difference.” For example, within some discourses of cultural imperialism, the overwhelming power of the U.S. in terms of media corporations owning and exporting their products such as TV programming was rightly pointed out. However, the take-overs by Japan’s Sony corporation and Matsushita of Columbia and Tristar, CBS records, and MCA signified a shift in the global balance of power. Yet, this did not entail a shift in content – that is, U.S. programming continued its predominance and was not replaced by Japanese programming. Thus, the link between ownership of capital did not result in a shift in the cultural content of the products of capital, TV programming.

If culture is always in the making, so is capital. Hence, the importance of Lefebvre’s reading of actually existing capital. Further, by confusing the utopian character of time as homogenous and developmental for the heterotopic existence of competing temporalities, the temptation to cast assertions of identity as “reactive” and “pre-modern” goes counter to the historically-intertwined, conceptually diverse and empirically-messy modalities through which “difference” is constructed. One would thus have to refuse James Carey’s argument that in media studies “in cultural terms, time meant the sacred, the moral, the historical; space the present and the future, the technical and the secular.” The multiplication of spaces and the extension of spaces through global television networks, the internet, fax and telephones has had a significant impact on new religious movements and cannot be seen as the triumph of the secular.

2) By the same token, television, while dominantly undergirded by the profit motive is fractured in terms of space and time. It moves through different temporalities (some programming taking longer to reach its non-intended audiences, if ever at all) and spatial zones (targetting geographically - separated groups). For example, to illustrate the temporal disjunction, not only do some programmes travel instantaneously but others (such as the “social” programming, about the impact of globalization on small rural communities) never reach foreign audiences – there is no “market” for them. Further,
state-controlled television like Doordarshan still exists, although under strongly commercial imperatives. It, nevertheless, has a more direct connection with the state (the hiring and firing of Doordarshan’s director-general is a highly-charged political issue) while in the case of private television, its relationship with the state is more attenuated, and its need to service the integrating function of early state television much more muted, if there at all.  

3) If we have established that both capitalist globalization, cultural identity and global television are hybrid in character, we need to pursue this claim further, outside the Inside/Outside and Tradition/Modernity divide. Capitalism and capitalist media like global television networks are indeed placed and locateable, in terms of their ownership and control. They are also, primarily though not exclusively located and controlled by groups in advanced capitalist countries. However, their space of operation is planetary in scope, and more importantly, the surface of the planet is itself fragmented in broadcasting terms by the location of particular audiences. Is this hybridity therefore subversive? Does it run counter to the entrenchment of capitalist relations? Paradoxically, the simultaneous placed and placeless character of global television (social space does not correspond to society) is its precise strength, and indicates that the dual dimensions of belonging and not-belonging provide the condition of possibility for its continued profitablity and success. One can already discern then, that hybridity when understood in its empirical dimensions does not signify “homelessness” but rather multiple-belonging. Marc Augé’s anthropological investigation of the “non-place” is one example of recent work that, while tending toward a dialectical investigation of the old anthropological notion of “place” and the postmodern notion of “non-place”, over-amplifies the latter to such an extent that any sense of the dialectic of flow and closure in terms of identity gets evacuated. In terms of cultural difference, the conclusion to the chapter on Hindu nationalism emphasizes precisely that through its simultaneously embedded and dis-embedded character, its flexibility, security and effectiveness is further strengthened. Similarly, capital when understood historically is not homogenous. It is truly hybrid in the sense that its component segments (types of capital) are hardly uniform in form or function, while its interests (the accumulation of surplus-value) do not follow a single logic.

4) Media as resources for imagining nationalism and community and as motors for profit accumulation, and capitalism as a simultaneously unifying and disaggregating development of economic, social and cultural relations thus have a properly dialectical relation. That is, capital, media and identity are both de-territorialized and re-territorialized, as our discussion of the collapse of bound and unbound seriality elaborated by Chatterjee shows. They do not function as opposites as we have seen but as complexly articulated tendencies that keep open both the nature of their encounters.

34 Marc Auge, Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity, New York: Verso 1995. For a similar tendency, with even more problematic consequences refer Manuel Castells, The Information Age: Economy, Society, Culture, Oxford: Blackwell 1997. For one example of dramatic evocations of absolute ruptural change: “...a new culture has emerged from the superseding of places and the annihilation of time by the space of flows and by timeless time: the culture of real virtuality.” (p. 350) Emphasis in original. Lefebvre, in The Production of Space as has been argued earlier, systematically analyzes the unsystematic character of the production of space at different levels, including practices, representations and the imagination, while Castells’ argument focusses largely on the last, and simplifies the uneven character of the production of space under capitalism, like Derrida Spectres of Marx, primarily attributing it to financial capital flows. See footnote no. 8.
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(complete overlapping or absolute disjuncture) as well as their own “identity.” Concretely, this abstract conceptual point can be understood by locating our analysis at the encounter between capital and cultural difference (once we have understood of course, that neither are empirically separate or uniform and homogenous). The consequences of this encounter cannot be foreseen since they are context-dependent. That is, the singularity of each case must be historically and empirically analysed. The temptation remains, of course, to therefore dissolve this question into absolute uncertainty, vertiginous fragmentation and the sort of postmodern nihilism or celebration that marks some strands of social theory. Hence the problem with the McLuhanesque celebration of technologically-mediated communication under contemporary capitalism as necessarily democratic.36 As Raymond Williams has argued, the uses of technology and the crucial importance of those who control it are lost in such diagnoses of the “global village” and result in a technological fetishism where the organization of social relations is lost.37 Lynn Spigel’s excellent analysis of post-war U.S. television and the reorganization of domestic space and gender relations for example fleshes out precisely how technological change is related to power-relations, the management of time and space.38

Here, the necessity of stressing the complex structuring role of capitalism, and the historical and discursive limitations of cultural politics cannot be over-emphasized. Particularly in the context of the over-valuation of hybridity and contemporary multiculturalism, the necessity for a dialectical framing of the “fragment”, “difference” and the like remains crucial. As Žižek, at times polemically, argues today’s critical theory, in the guise of ‘cultural studies’, is performing the ultimate service for the unrestrained development of capitalism by actively participating in the ideological effort to render its massive presence invisible: in the predominant form of postmodern ‘cultural criticism’, the very mention of capitalism as a world system tends to give rise to accusations of ‘essentialism’, ‘fundamentalism’, and so on. The price of this depoliticization of the economy is that the domain of politics is in a way depoliticized: political struggle proper is transformed into the cultural struggle for the recognition of marginal identities and the tolerance of differences.39

Parenthetically, it is worth emphasizing that his argument is not that class struggle in an essentialist way is the truly political politics; rather, he argues that if the politics of cultural difference is disarticulated from contemporary capitalism, we end up in an elitist form of multiculturalism which manages difference precisely through producing it, via its circuits of power/knowledge.40

Further, Appadurai, whose own work has at times contributed to the celebration of “resistance” makes the right and provocative claim that “a social theory of post-

modernity” cannot do away with the vexed question of “causal-historical relationships.” His emphasis on the “macrometaphors” of “fractals, polythetic classifications, and chaos” is tempered with the nagging question of whether we thus suspend all systemic thinking of causality or history.\(^41\) Obviously, one cannot disregard the present state of flux in terms of dimensions of time and space, forms of capitalism and scripts for imagination through media. Neither can we posit an ahistorical, uniform capitalism as the causal engine for such change. Rather, we are required to identify how, at particular historical conjunctures, the contradictory and evolving internal character of all these elements intersect. To fix on just one of them (such as capitalism, global television or Hindu Nationalism) or to think relationally of them as if they themselves express essential characteristics (capitalism as homogenizing, television as narcotic and Hindu Nationalism as tradition) would be to take the wrong route – what is needed is to grasp the flux as it were, to analytically bring the dialectic to a standstill.\(^42\)

Hence, thinking dialectically of the inter-penetration of different spheres of activity (economics, media and politics) calls attention to the to-and-fro between fragmentation and centredness that marks cultural politics.\(^43\) Further, if one overvalues hybridity in terms of identity politics or audience readings in the contemporary technologically-mediated space of imagination, a creeping romanticism becomes evident as the ideological substratum of such claims. As if hybridity emerges only after the technology-induced fragmentation of time and space; as if unitary identities marked the period prior to our contemporary global social formation.

If one understands the space of modernity as heterotopic, of media like global television as central to the fracturing of a chronotopic vision of society, and fantasy and imagination as structured around these shifting and fragmented dimensions of time and space, one would have to explore further what sorts of modernities do global media point toward. How does the imbrication of technology, capital, imagination and nationalism refigure our familiar understandings of cultural politics? If the “local” and “difference” perform important functions in critiquing teleology and homogenization, one would need to interrogate further the assumptions behind these buzzwords. Media studies can be a good place to start this questioning, precisely because it can concretely attend to the production of difference at the intersection of globalization and media institutions and texts.

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\(^40\) The question of articulation is central to understanding capital, in the sense that capitalism was never understood by Marx as an apolitical, machine-like actualization of the profit motive. Hence, his critical and intimate re-reading of English Political Economy. Arguing for the ambiguous rather than essentialist character of Marxism, Žižek insists that “the very term ‘political economy’ also opens up the space for the opposite gesture of introducing politics into the very heart of the economy, that is, of denouncing the very ‘apolitical’ character of the economic processes as the supreme ideological illusion.” Ibid, footnote 20, p. 241. Thus, the obsessive detail through which marketing research targets audiences, media corporations produce programming and both national-states and global media corporations speak the discourse of “difference.”

\(^41\) Appadurai, Modernity at Large, p. 47.


\(^43\) For an excellent, historically-situated and complex appraisal of questions of media, economic power and cultural identity, see Armand Matellart and Michele Matellart, Rethinking Media Theory: Signposts and New Directions.