Television Flows: A Regional Alternative?
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The concept of "the regional" and "regionalization" gained currency within global media studies in the 1990s as an antidote for the perceived excesses of some top-down models of media imperialism, which presumed a progressive narrative of increasing Western media domination. Against this narrative, theories about geo-linguistic regions, geo-cultural regions (Sinclair, Jacka and Lewis. 1996; Lewis, 1999), and regional production centers (Varis, 1983) charted the resilience and the importance of cultural relevance and locality for theorizing global television flows. These newer models suggested that a good deal of commercial television trade took place within geographic regions, where importing and exporting nations shared linguistic and cultural features, including shared histories, political structures, and generic preferences (Straubhaar, 2000). Subsequent scholarship explored the development of regional centers of television programming in Latin America, Southeast Asia, East Asia, Europe, North America, and beyond (Sinclair, 1999; Ray and Jacka, 1996; Iwabuchi, 2002; Garitaonandia, 1993; O'Regan 1990). However, the theoretical purchase of regionalization as a concept reached a lacuna soon after its introduction: while it helped explain the rise of particular production centers and trade routes, it failed to provide additional insights into the origins or consequences of media globalization. More recently, theoretical considerations of the geographies of global media have foregone the regional to focus instead on "translocalism" or the ethnographic comparison of how various local practices intersect with global forces (Kraidy and Murphy, 2008), as well as the growth of media capitals, which serve as modern city-states where capital and creative personnel come together to produce media (Curtin, 2008).

Without discounting the importance of media capitals and the persistence of local particularities in an age of globalization, a full accounting of current media geographies would benefit from a reinvigorated concept of the region. As evidenced by the continued presence region-wide cable and television channels, the regional divisional structure of many media corporations, and the growth of regional television programming markets in East Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Central and Eastern Europe, transnational regions retain currency for both producers and consumers of television. Meanwhile, subnational regions have flourished in the post-network environment, offering programming and viewer configurations quite different than their national and regional counterparts (Kumar, Tinic, 2004).

One path toward reinvigorating the region as a productive theoretical concept in global media studies might be a comparative approach that emphasizes differences among media regions and the cultural and political consequences of regionalization. For instance, the regionalization of television ownership groups, program exchanges, and television channels that we find in the former Eastern-bloc nations of Europe evince multiple media centers. Though dominated by Germany and Russia, the linguistic and cultural complexity of the region guarantees that numerous other media centers thrive as well, including Prague, Warsaw, and Budapest. At the same time, shared histories, economic challenges and regulatory practices help guarantee the coherence of the region.

Meanwhile, while the Latin American media region includes several smaller centers, including Buenos Aires and Bogota, the media capitals of Rio, Mexico City, and Miami are far more dominant than any center in Eastern Europe due in large part to linguistic and historical similarities among the region's population. In Eastern Europe, then, the regional may be far less of a threat to the national than in Latin America.

A second path toward reinvigorating the region in global media studies may lie in studying the dense overlaps among various regions both currently and historically. That is, returning to the example of Eastern Europe, large sections of that region are not only integrated formally and informally into a larger European region, but are also former members of both the Soviet and Habsburg empires. Exploring these complex and historical interactions among different types of regions that cross the same space might yield compelling insights into how regions have formed, changed, and operate in an era of global media.