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GLOBALIZATION AND CULTURAL IMPERIALISM: CORPORATE CONTROL VERSUS RESPONSIVENESS

ABSTRACT

When Tokyo Disneyland opened in 1983, the Japanese people welcomed this American cultural export with open arms – and open wallets. The decade that followed saw continually rising profits and the highest spending-per-guest of any Disney theme park. In 1992, the Walt Disney Company attempted to emulate this success by opening Euro Disney, only to face financial disappointment and cultural backlash. While some basis for these divergent experiences might be found in the inherent differences between Japanese and European (specifically French) culture, this is by no means a full explanation. Instead, this article places more of the onus on organizations to approach globalization in a more responsive, rather than control-oriented, manner.

Key Words: globalization, culture, responsiveness, Disney

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INTRODUCTION

Opened in the early 1990s, Euro Disney (now known as Disneyland Paris) lost nearly $1 billion in its first 18 months of operation. Meanwhile, Tokyo Disneyland made a profit of over $200 million in 1992 – its tenth year of operation – even at the depths of the worst Japanese recession in modern history (Spencer 1995). While numerous explanations have been offered for the divergent fates of these two theme parks (e.g., Brannen 2004, Spencer 1995), one common theme in most accounts is Disney's failed attempt at cultural imperialism at Euro Disney and the resulting conflict. This conflict is in direct contrast to the more successful, culturally-aware approach to Tokyo Disneyland.

From its inception, Euro Disney was owned and operated by the Walt Disney Company with a large financial stake held by a consortium of international banks. With Disney in direct control of the European theme park, attempts to import their entire business philosophy by enforcing strict personnel policies and creating a "wholesome American look" among all of its employees were met with resistance and lawsuits from the historically independent French citizens (Brannen 2004). Even worse than the human resource management errors was a serious misjudgment of the desires of the European market (Philips 1993). Rather than respond to the local culture, Disney attempted to import and impose its own culture. In this particular case, Disney suffered financially and faced a public relations nightmare as a result of its imperialistic control-based approach to globalization.

Tokyo Disneyland, on the other hand, was owned and operated by an independent Japanese company – the Oriental Land Company Limited – which compensated Disney for the use of its name and characters in the form of royalty payments. This independence allowed Tokyo Disneyland greater freedom to adjust Disney's attractions to be more responsive to local cultural preferences while also inhibiting the encroachment of Disney's corporate philosophies on Japanese employees, consumers, and culture. Admittedly, Disney's motive for this arrangement was more about limiting the financial risk of its first foreign theme park than any real concern for the preservation or inclusion of Japanese culture (Spencer 1995). Nonetheless, Tokyo Disneyland offers an example of how global enterprises can thrive when responsiveness to local culture and local interests drive their globalization strategy.

My goal for this article is to propose some lessons multinational corporations (MNCs) can learn from the experiences of the Walt Disney Company as they have attempted to export cultural and entertainment products beyond their American origins. Specifically, I offer arguments for a *responsive* approach rather than a *control-based* approach to globalization. The remainder of the article is structured as follows: First, I present a theoretical background on control versus responsive approaches to globalization. Second, I offer the experiences of the Walt Disney Company as a case study to illustrate the potential pitfalls that face any MNC attempting to implement a control-based strategy. Third, I discuss alternatives to the control-based cultural imperialism that tends to backfire on many corporations – including specific suggestions as to how globalization might be approached more responsively and, consequently, more successfully. Finally, I conclude the article with remarks on the wider practical implications of this research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Beneath the drive for globalization and the promise of vast new markets for products, services, and even ideas, is a larger question of whether or not globalization is necessarily a good thing for global society, individual local communities, or even those companies who may be profiting in the short term from their international conquests. Among the greatest concerns of multinational enterprises and their global targets is the management of cultural conflict that ensues when an organization from one country attempts to export to another country not only its goods and services, but also its philosophies on everything from personnel policies to life-value goals (cf. Brannen 2004). The common perception is that in order to succeed financially, multinationals must sacrifice any desire to do good and "overcome" the local culture by convincing (or forcing) the indigenous peoples to embrace the newly-imported ideals. In the end, however, it appears that on a global scale, doing well financially and doing good socially and culturally are far from mutually exclusive concepts. Instead, it may be necessary to be more responsive to local environments in order to reap financial rewards.

Globalization Strategy – Control versus Responsiveness

It has long been recognized that the most successful expatriates are those with sufficient openness to experience to adjust their own cultural outlook to whatever foreign culture in which they find themselves. Expanded to an organizational level, this openness to experience can be captured as a globalization strategy that values responsiveness rather than control. Defined as an approach that places value on the ability to keep in tune with the environment, a responsive strategy seems ideally suited for an organization attempting to globalize. In contrast, the guiding principle of a control strategy is the desire to keep everyone and everything aligned and under control by eliminating variance. In a *Harvard Business Review* article on globalization, Kanter (1995) urged globalizing businesses to avoid clashes between international economic interests and local political interests by learning how to be responsive to the communities in which they operate. The fact that this article was republished in 2003 as part of the ongoing "Best of HBR" series offers evidence that this important urging has gone largely ignored. One reason behind this failure to heed Kanter's warning may be that a responsive organizational strategy contradicts the traditional control-based strategy that permeates most MNCs.

The contradiction between control and responsiveness raises several questions, both economic and social, that deserve further consideration. Not the least of these questions is that of so-called "cultural imperialism" and its effects on the indigenous cultures of the "conquered" and "colonized" nations. Driven by a desire to export their own culture and values, many corporations have taken a control-based view of globalization. They have placed great value on the elimination of undesirable variation that comes with operating outside one's cultural comfort zone. One way to achieve this is to impose their will on the local economy, government, and culture. In many ways, this mirrors the traditional forms of imperialism that centered on the use of religion, education, and language to supplement military force. Through the use of missionaries and educators, imperialist culture was imposed on colonized lands. Influenced by religious zeal or more pragmatic needs to create and control a native labor force, the abolition of indigenous culture began long before the more recent trends of consumerism and the spread of mass media-produced pop culture.

Modern cultural imperialism is largely supported by the revolutionary technological advances of the twentieth century. Working from a control-based strategy, it is possible for a handful of corporations to spread their cultural content around the globe. First, the control of technological hardware and know-how has been kept in the hands of developed nations through patent laws, economic barriers and the drain of talented individuals out of less developed countries. Then, the control of communication software and content in the form of mass media (e.g., computer programs, movies, television, and music) was consolidated into many of the same hands. The proliferation of local cultural products is uncertain in the face of foreign control of both the content and distribution channels of communication. It is under this new imperialism, and the closely connected consumerism that it promotes, where decisions regarding the use of control or responsiveness strategies may determine both corporate success and the survival of indigenous cultures.

While the idea of cultural imperialism and the requisite control-based strategy that leads to it may appeal to MNC executives as an effective way of strongly establishing themselves in foreign countries, its application is more than just a matter of ethics and social responsibility. As I will illustrate in the following case study of the Walt Disney Company, a control-based strategy can be a liability rather than an asset – especially when operating in foreign cultures. It is important to tune in to the cultural environment of the local community and adjust your products, services, and ideas accordingly. This is true not only because cultures differ greatly on many important dimensions (Hofstede 1980, 2001), but also because many of these cultures tend to change over time (Jenner, MacNab, Brislin, and Worthley 2006). Following the case study that lays out the long-standing control-based strategy of Disney, is a discussion of an alternative responsive strategy that relies on adjustments to the local cultural environment rather than domination of it.

CASE STUDY: THE WALT DISNEY COMPANY

Among the largest exporters of American culture and management practices is the Walt Disney Company. In addition to global theme parks and worldwide distribution of Disney media content, even museums (King 1991) and Canadian government agencies (Marson 1993) have embraced and implemented the Disney culture. Throughout its corporate history, the Walt Disney Company has exhibited a prototypical control-based strategy that manifests itself in many different ways. As such, the Disney experience offers valuable insight into the possible breadth and depth of cultural imperialism and the conflict between control and responsiveness.

In attempting to uncover the origins of Disney's current position as successful and yet oft-criticized exporters of mass culture to the world, I discovered an interesting pattern. Wherever I turned in the retelling of the history of Disney, a common theme arose. Whether it was Walt Disney himself and his dealings with the original Disney animators, the building of Disney World in the swamps of Florida, or the worldwide distribution of blockbuster animated features, the key to understanding Disney is control. There is a need – embedded in Disney's corporate strategy – to control anything and everything that comes into contact with, and might endanger, the Disney dream and the Disney way. Taking into account this history of attempted domination of its environment, it is not surprising that Disney is currently a major force behind the cultural imperialism that threatens to replace indigenous cultures with a pre-packaged mass culture. The following sections explore various areas of the Disney environment that have been caught up in the drive to eliminate variance and ambiguity through complete control.

Servants of the Mouse: Control of Employees

Most fans of Disney animation could not name even one of the individuals actually responsible for their creation. Imposing executive figures from Walt Disney to Michael Eisner dominated the Disney landscape. It was Walt who was presented with a special Academy Award for Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs without so much as a thank you for the 750 artists who had worked on the feature (Bennis and Biederman 1997). Feeling very personal betrayal and loss of control over artist defections to other studios and to other artistic pursuits, Walt introduced scientific management principles to the animation process. By breaking down the complete process of producing an animated feature into several "assembly line" steps, the individual employee became anonymous and easily replaceable. The more recent addition of computer animation technology has further relegated the animator to the role of a technical drone rather than a creative artist.

As the Disney Empire has grown beyond animation, other employees have been subjected to unreasonable control of their work and their lives (Van Maanen 1991). At Euro Disney, management continually insulted employees by subjecting them to personal hygiene videos and dress codes aimed at turning Europeans of various cultures into clean cut, all-American representatives of Disney. Even in the more hospitable confines of California's Disneyland, a three week walkout in the mid-1980s by two thousand employees was met with scabs and strikebreakers. According to many accounts, Disney management had proved through this action that it could and would break the will of anyone who stood in the way of their corporate goals.

Decades after the iron hand of Walt Disney ruled the animation studio, little change can be seen in the treatment of employees as interchangeable parts in the Disney machinery. With this control over its individual employees, Disney has the capability to control the culture of the entire company and the official stories that circulate throughout the organization:

> Disney studios today is not a very postmodern organization. It is, in many ways, just as authoritarian, micromanaged, and surveillance-oriented as it was when Walt built tayloristic [i.e., scientific management] animation practices into it (Boje 1995, 1028).

Even the recent acquisition of Pixar Animation Studios can be seen as Disney's attempt to increase its control over a "rogue" partner and its employees who had overshadowed and then threatened to sever ties with Disney. These internal stories of the Disney way and the Disney life combine with carefully planned public relations and marketing to ultimately represent the Disney corporate image to the world.

The Official Story: Control of Organizational Culture

Ask the next ten people you meet what they think of when they hear the word Disney and the answers will probably be similar. There is a carefully crafted image of Disney that is crucial to their financial success. This impression management includes both an external image portrayed to the public and an internal organizational culture for the employees' consumption. Unlike the typical grassroots formation of a corporate culture, Disney employees are told what their culture is and how they should think and act. One of the dangers of such an organizational culture – developed by management for public relations purposes and based on the views of a long-departed company founder – is the tendency for "Walt's official story and singular worldview [to] dominate, socialize, and marginalize others' experiences" (Boje 1995, 1031) The importance of a strong and unified corporate culture has been well documented, and in some ways gives meaning and pride to employees. However, when the culture is imposed from the top down and encompasses values antithetic to individual autonomy and respect, it can be detrimental to the employees. Control of internal corporate culture perhaps offers the clearest analogy to Disney's external control-based globalization strategy and subsequent attempts to dominate local cultures. Even more powerful and telling may be attempts to control nature itself.

A Sterile Environment: Control of Nature

Many New Yorkers applauded when Disney opened up a theater and retail store in Times Square and led a campaign to clean up that rather seedy section of Manhattan. Such a sanitizing effort may be laudable on the surface, but it hides a less commendable pattern of sanitation by the Disney Corporation:

> It's not surprising that one company was able to change the face of Forty Second Street, because the same company changed the face of an entire state … Three decades after it began bulldozing the cow pastures and draining the marshes of rural Orlando, Disney stands as by far the most powerful private entity in Florida; it goes where it wants, does what it wants, gets what it wants (Hiaasen 1998, 4).

The need for nature to be obliterated leaving a sterile, man-made environment suitable for the creation of the Magic Kingdom is typical for Disney and its approach to nature. Even the more recent opening of Disney's Animal Kingdom, the first non-plastic, non-robotic, non-animated wildlife to be allowed in the Disney Empire, was handled with typical Disney control. A press release promised "… 500 acres reconfigured to look amazingly like animal reserves of Africa or Asia," or as one critic remarked, "[t]ypical Disney: Honey, I shrunk the Serengeti" (Hiaasen 1998, 68). This need to control nature, and simplify it so it is manageable, is only one part of a larger desire to control the entire "reality" that is Disney.

You Are Enjoying Yourselves: Control of the Entertainment Experience

Once nature is out of the way, Disney is free to create its own world for tourists', rather expensive, consumption. The vast expanses of Disney-owned land surrounding its theme parks not only allow for future expansion, but also place physical barriers between the world of Disney and the uncontrollable world the tourists are supposedly seeking to escape:

> Control has been the signature ingredient of all the company's phenomenally successful theme parks; every thrill, every gasp, every delightful "surprise" was the product of clockwork orchestration. Once you paid your money and walked through the turnstiles, there was virtually no chance (until you walked out again) that anything unrehearsed would occur in your presence (Hiaasen 1998, 69-70).

Add to this orchestration the virtual monopoly over area hotels, restaurants, and the rest of the vacation experience in Orlando, Anaheim, etc. (even their own cruise ship and private Caribbean island that are packaged together with Disney World theme park vacations), and your need to plan, or even think, is very limited – Disney will let you know what to do and tell you that you did indeed have fun while doing it. Again, this type of control is hard to argue with from a corporate perspective. Most organization would love to have complete control over its customers' experiences with and reactions to its products and services. Attempting to expand that control beyond its own walls and its own native country is only natural.

The Magic "Kingdom": Control of the Government

In a corporate attempt to recreate the America portrayed by 1950s television shows and add all the advantages of the information age, Disney created the town of Celebration, Florida. This was not merely an extension of Main Street USA to sit beside Frontier Land at Walt Disney World. It is a fully functioning, high-technology town with homes wired with fiber optic cables, schools that combine Osceola County School District tax dollars and educational certification with a curriculum produced by Disney-employed 'experts', and all the other comforts of home.

> But Celebration is more than a marriage between Norman Rockwell and Bill Gates: it also mirrors Disney's obsession with control. Living in Celebration has a price. Safety and security are exchanged for a significant loss of control over a number of decisions that homeowners make in most other communities. Much of Celebration, from its architecture to its horticulture, is scripted by the folks at Disney … The rules include not being allowed to hang the wash out to dry, keeping the grass cut, not being able to live elsewhere for more than three months at a time, holding only one garage sale in any twelve-month period, displaying only white or off-white window coverings, and using approved house paint colors. Big Brother in the nineties doesn't just come in the form of a totalitarian state, it also comes with a smiley face, masking the watchful eye of privatized government (Giroux 1999, 68).

The idea of a perfect community veils the creation of a mostly white, upper-class sanctuary that has less to do with nostalgia for small town America than it does with isolating the lives of a select few from the 'unsavory' groups that populate the rest of the country. It appears that Disney has answered the critics who charge that their entertainment products distort the reality of American life not by adjusting their movies to match reality, but rather attempting to adjust reality to match their movies.

The control of individual lives is not limited to those families who choose to live in the perfect splendor of Celebration. Disney provides similar, if only temporary, treatment for its vacationing theme park guests. When you enter the gates of any Disney property around the world, you enter the Magic Kingdom. This Kingdom is more powerful and autonomous than you may think. There are private police forces, firefighters, medical personnel – all answering, not to the laws of the land or the public, but to the corporate interests of Disney. The legitimate local and national governments, held hostage by the economic and political power it gives up to Disney in order to attract the giant influx of tourists, jobs, and cash that seem to follow wherever Mickey Mouse sets up shop, are unwilling or unable to intercede.

Cases of abuse of power, orchestrated criminal cover-ups, interference with legal authorities, and a pattern of putting the image and profits of Disney over the safety and rights of employees, guests, and the general public are too numerous to list here. A scathing portrayal of the government-like power wielded by Disney is well documented by Schweizer and Schweizer (1998). They pull no punches in cataloging incidents of "Mickey Mouse justice" at Disney resorts and theme parks. Unfortunately, a *20/20* newsmagazine piece on their book was cancelled by the president of ABC News, a Disney subsidiary, sending the disturbing message that criticism of Disney would not be tolerated anywhere in its growing global media conglomerate. This interference in, and in many cases the complete control of, supposedly unbiased reporting of the news in the name of Disney's corporate image is symptomatic of the increasing consolidation of worldwide media and mass culture industries into the hands of a few corporate giants.

The Complete Package: Control of the Media Cycle

A movie is produced and distributed internationally complete with a DVD version and a soundtrack. These are sold along with a series of companion books and merchandising tie-ins in retail stores around the world. A special on the making of the movie, a cartoon version of the movie, and promotional advertisements for both run on global cable as well as national and local broadcast television stations. Radio stations all over the country saturate their play-lists with the movie's theme song. Newspapers run advertisements and movie reviews. Popular Internet sites are bombarded with information on the movie, soundtrack, and merchandise – with opportunities to buy them at the click of a mouse. Travel agencies plan theme park vacations to visit the newest attractions based on the movie. Finally, a professional sports team, originally named after a movie, appears on the most watched sports network in the world – complete with generous promotion for an upcoming golf tournament to be played at a picturesque golf resort. The number of companies involved in and controlling this multi-media blitz – one.

Disney has under its corporate umbrella: movie production and distribution companies, book publishers, record companies, worldwide broadcast and cable television stations, radio stations, newspaper publishers, theme parks and resorts, cruise lines, travel agencies and tour companies, retail stores, clubs and restaurants, and numerous other independent and joint national and international media, merchandising, and retail ventures. Perhaps most confusing of all is the multiple names under which the ventures fall and thus veil the single corporate source for a majority of the information the world receives. Touchstone Pictures, Miramax Films, Pixar Animation Studios, Hollywood Records, Hyperion Books, ABC Television and Radio, ESPN, The Baby Einstein Company – are all Disney companies that do not bear the Disney name. Without really knowing it, the public can be constantly subjected to the Disney way of thinking while assuming that they are being provided with a choice among many various, independent media outlets. In this way, Disney can maintain control over the entire process and not rely upon, and thus not relinquish power to, outsiders.

It's a Small World After All: Control of Worldwide Culture

Considering this documented history of Disney's corporate culture of control and dominance, it should really come as no surprise that they are accused of being part of the front line offensive in a global drive towards mass cultural imperialism. It may be an overstatement to charge an entertainment and media company with undermining the cultures of foreign countries that pre-date Disney by centuries, but some important ideas must be taken into consideration before we can dismiss the actions of Disney and other global producers and distributors of mass culture simply as benign corporate strategy designed to sell entertainment.

The world is becoming smaller and more easily dominated by media and entertainment industries due to quantum leaps in technology and widespread access to foreign cultural products (Van Maanen 1992). The addition of multi-billion dollar Disney theme parks in Europe and Asia is further evidence that no corner of the world is out of the reach of Disney. Economic and environmental objections to these projects are usually raised, and cultural concerns usually follow. Chances are, however, that the Disney juggernaut will not be stopped, and entire generations of children will be brought up on a packaged mass culture more hypnotizing than anything their own local traditions have to offer. The domination of local culture is very much in keeping with the overall control-based strategy Disney has followed for decades. The Euro Disney experience, however, raises questions as to whether or not this strategy is translatable to the international stage. As the global reach of Disney increases, the line between corporate control and cultural domination becomes blurred and opposing viewpoints are often muted or altogether absent.

> [M]edia conglomerates such as Disney are not merely producing harmless entertainment, disinterested news stories, and unlimited access to the information age; nor are they removed from the realm of power, politics, and ideology. But recognition of the pleasure that Disney provides should not blind us to the realization that Disney is about more than entertainment (Giroux 1999, 4-5).

The ability of Disney to hide behind its clean, family entertainment image must be subjected to critical evaluation (cf. Garten 1998). Shrugging off the cultural imperialism issue as anti-corporation, anti-capitalism ravings is dangerous in that it turns the light of democratic conversation and appraisal away from a growing force in global economic, political, educational, and cultural domination.

In the next section of this article, I address the need to respond critically to the control-based cultural imperialism strategy and subsequent influence of global corporations. This is not merely an ethically-driven imperative. The alternative culturally-responsive globalization strategy is also advocated due to its greater chances for success. In support of this approach, I offer specific propositions regarding its application and implementation.

DISCUSSION

Simply raging against the attempts by Disney and other MNCs to control local communities and cultures is insufficient. Having presented a rather scathing criticism of corporate-driven cultural imperialism and of Disney's desire to control, even dominate, its ever-expanding internal and external environment, it remains necessary to offer more responsive alternatives to the current corporate world order. Underlying the economic and cultural effects of cultural domination by a handful of global behemoths is a communication world order that supports such domination.

> Within the last decade, corporate power and its expansion into all aspects of everyday life has grown exponentially. One of the most visible examples of such growth can be seen in the expanding role that the Walt Disney Company plays in shaping popular culture and daily life in the United States and abroad. The Disney Company is a model of the new face of corporate power at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Giroux 1999, 25).

Given its economic resources and increasingly global reach, the cultural impact of the mass media in the modern world cannot be underestimated.

> Quantitatively and qualitatively, in twentieth-century advanced capitalism, the media have established a decisive and fundamental leadership in the cultural sphere. Simply in terms of economic, technical, social and cultural resources, the mass media command a qualitatively greater slice than all the older, more traditional cultural channels which survive (Tomlinson 1991, 60).

One alternative to Disney-style control is a more responsive approach to globalization that distributes power and decision making to the local communities MNCs attempt to enter. Even Disney inadvertently followed a more responsive approach when it relinquished much of the control over Tokyo Disneyland to its local partners. Their motivation may have been risk management, but the result was cultural responsiveness. Being that Disney is a media corporation, it is logical to begin this discussion of responsive alternatives to cultural imperialism in the field of mass communication.

As powerful a force as global communication can be in the destruction of local cultures, it can be an equally powerful generative force in the restoration and preservation of these same cultures. Through accurate, locally produced media content, the true nature of indigenous culture can be saved from not only mass media homogenization, but also from the trend towards loss of culture as older members of a society pass away and younger members grow further from their roots. Faithful preservation of traditional stories, customs, beliefs, and other cultural artifacts in modern technological forms will open up a whole new world of cultural and cross cultural awareness. The stereotyping and homogenizing of cultures into mass consumerism is not the product of communication and information technology alone. The infrastructure should not be blamed for the destructive nature of the content. Rather, the same communication pipelines can be used for cultural preservation if the power and ability to use it is democratized into the hands of a greater proportion of local populations.

In an effort to raise consciousness of the ongoing debate over the need for and viability of a more egalitarian new information and communication world order to coincide with the overall new world order of the post Cold War era, Vincent (1996) offers numerous proposals for global media democracy and responsiveness anchored in his work in mass communication theory and international media. I have developed the most thought-provoking of these ideas into propositions that may inform multinational corporations and their many host nations as they attempt a more responsive approach to globalization. By examining each of these ideas, in general and in light of Disney's experiences, a practical guide to globalization can hopefully be offered to compliment the more rhetorical arguments against cultural imperialism that fail to provide realistic alternatives to fill the void that would be left if the current global corporate power structure were to cede control.

Proposition 1: Promoting Communication Equity

The first step towards a more responsive globalization strategy is to recognize the value of a shared-power approach to communication that reduces the forced imposition of foreign ideas on local communities and promotes equity between the two cultures. The adoption and use of media technology (e.g., means to distribute and receive mass media and other communication) are tied to the basic social conditions of a society. Literacy and education level both support and are supported by communication and information infrastructure and content. While production and distribution of media content often requires basic and technical knowledge lacking in less developed countries, the lack of communication tools (e.g., books, newspapers, computers, televisions) that provide the proper locally adapted training makes the obtaining of this needed education difficult if not impossible. This vicious cycle allows global corporations to dominate the information and communication flows with little challenge from educationally and economically disadvantaged indigenous peoples.

Information flows tend to follow traditional patterns based on power relationships forged by colonial imperialism. The movement of information from North to South and from West to East (i.e., from industrialized Europe and North America to Second and

Third World nations) is analogous to flows of religious, political, economic and other systems of colonization and imperialism over the centuries. Continuing the analogy to its financial end, the flow of wealth and power runs counter to the flow of information. As the Western companies send their communication hardware and software content around the globe, the returning money and control over international information distribution systems cripple the economy and culture of the Second and Third World nations as assuredly as did the drain of gold and spices centuries ago.

To illustrate the link between communication equity and wealth and power, Disney's marketing and distribution muscle has been used to flood both American and global media outlets with its entertainment products. The inability of alternative local media to compete with the economies of scale that can be brought to bear by MNCs has made animated feature entertainment an oligopoly. The flow of movies, music, television programming, and all the collateral media products out of Disney, and corporate media giants in general, drains consumer capital away from local alternatives jeopardizing their survival while increasing the coffers of Disney and similar mega corporations.

> Far from being a model of moral leadership and social responsibility, Disney monopolizes media power, limits the free flow of information, and undermines substantive public debate … It shapes public consciousness through its enormous economic holdings and cultural power … (Giroux 1999, 156).

Animated and other fictional entertainment is one thing, but when the news media is consumed by the entertainment and corporate machine (as with ABC and Disney) news is in danger of becoming simply another tool for the furthering of corporate goals. All of this corporate control of communication perpetuates the reliance of less fortunate nations on the corporate lifeline of information. Only through equitable distribution of power over communication content can a responsive approach to globalization that incorporates the local culture be fostered.

Proposition 2: Promoting Technological Equity

In addition to the equity of communication content, a responsive globalization strategy requires equity in the control of the technology that is at the heart of modern communication and mass media. The installation of communication hardware is not enough to ensure the communication equity called for by the proponents of the new information and communication world order. The keys to the democratization of the media (in all its various forms) are access as well as content. Only when the capability and power to create and distribute content through the hardware pipelines is shared by more than a few global corporations will the self-serving, one-sided, and often stereotypical information that floods global communication channels be balanced with alternative "community media" that speaks for and to local populations. The often low quality, sometimes laughable, and infrequently watched public access television programs are hardly an appropriate counterbalance to ABC and The Disney Channel.

With government support of public television stations in the United States at levels lower than the budget for military bands, other financial sources are needed. The danger of corporate sponsorships that many such stations rely upon is that the integrity of the stations may be compromised when their continuing existence depends on the philanthropy of the very companies who are most threatened by the critical media needed from public television. An alternative model would be similar to the public access requirements that must be met by cable television providers.

The wide audiences of Disney and similar corporate-produced information need to have equal access to alternative, even contradictory, information. However:

> As one of the most powerful media conglomerates in the world, Disney promotes cultural homogeneity and political conformity … Extravagant, feature-length animated films, theme parks, and the Disnification of West Forty-second Street in New York City certainly may have entertainment and educational value, but they cannot be used as a defense for Disney's stranglehold on the message and image business, its stifling of unpopular opinions, or its relentless corporatizing of civic discourse – all of which undermine democratic cultural and political life (Giroux 1999, 157).

The legal commandeering of the airwaves and cable systems for communication equity purposes may never be possible, but maybe such a radical proposal is needed to shake up the status quo and force corporate media empires to reevaluate their practices and offer their own alternatives to threatened government intervention. As long as ABC News is under the thumb of Disney and other similar corporate/news relationships prevail, there will remain a need to push for alternative sources that circumvent the foxes that are currently watching the hen house. The question of where the financial and moral obligation to support these alternatives lies remains undecided. What is more obvious is that truly equal multimedia partnerships with local communities require shared control of both the technology and the content of communication networks.

Proposition 3: Capital Assistance Is Not Enough

One argument used to defend control-based globalization is the immediate positive impact of vast amounts of foreign direct investment in a local community. However, the often used cliché of giving a man a fish to feed him for a day versus teaching him to fish and feeding him for a lifetime is apropos to the control verses responsiveness debate. Capital assistance, either governmental or private in nature, may provide communication hardware and information content to under-developed nations. This assistance alone does not produce the partnerships necessary to foster responsiveness to local conditions and concerns. When global corporations maintain control over these capital-intensive communication operations, a perpetual reliance is formed where the corporation becomes the sole decision maker and the only source of "fish" for the local inhabitants.

> When we speak of an information superhighway of the future, we run the very real risk that such a communication thoroughfare will be an exclusive highway of the developed world, which will drive the 'haves' and 'have-nots' even further apart than they are today … The greater the expense of access, the higher the likelihood that larger portions of the world's population – both developed as well as developing – will remain 'information poor'. Given their record, it is not likely that commercial interests will overwhelmingly support free and low-cost services for the poor without wide-scale public pressure (Vincent 1996, 187).

There is no short-term financial motivation for the corporations to hire local inhabitants for skilled positions or otherwise teach them how to fish for themselves. The reliance on corporate sources of information is a profitable and self-sustaining arrangement for many companies, an arrangement they have no intention of relinquishing absent proof of its strategic flaws. Without financial motivation to seriously consider the local cultural needs and concerns of their hosts, MNCs are unlikely to be in a position to respond to those needs and concerns.

A multi-billion dollar investment in a foreign theme park may seem on the surface to be a shot in the arm of any local economy. The amount of money lost to the actual local economy as profits and control flow back to Disney (not to mention the likely cultural and environmental damage) will assuredly cause the local population and government to rethink their open-armed welcoming of MNCs. In the end, the host nation may lose control over their own communication and information distribution as a theme park deal opens up their country to the rest of the Disney media armada.

Proposition 4: Supporting Humanitarian-based Education

Most decision makers in major MNCs have received some Western-style higher education – more often than not in business or other related disciplines. This is one means by which they are indoctrinated in the control strategy of globalization. More specifically, Western academic training in marketing, communications, and other areas that lead to global business careers tends to center around the technology and business of information creation and distribution. This is by no means a complete global business education.

> Students need to become multiply literate and focus on diverse spheres of learning. The issue of what is valuable knowledge is not reducible to the tired either/or culture war arguments that pervade the academy. Maybe the more interesting questions point in a different direction: What is it that students need to learn to live in a substantive democracy? [The answer is] to read critically in various spheres of culture (Giroux 1999, 167).

This critical analysis of communication or business strategy, if present in academia at all, is often left to departments out of the mainstream business curricula. The emphasis of higher education on the technical, rather than the cultural, aspects of communication, coupled with the general political apathy on many top-flight Western college campuses, leads to a workforce ill-prepared to champion communication or technological equity. The tendency for international students to return from the West to their native lands with Western attitudes and approaches towards business only compounds the global problem.

Combined with the academic training weaknesses of many future global media moguls is a corporate training agenda that seems to ignore many of the same areas overlooked by formal higher education. It is doubtful that the Disney corporate training operation contains a course on criticizing the Disney corporate way of doing things. It cannot be left in the hands of the corporations themselves to instill in their employees the value of alternative views and cultural respect. One goal of a large corporation is to replace individuality with some degree of unified corporate culture. If a humanitarian-based education is not being given to students prior to their working careers, it is doubtful that the typical MNC will provide it. The result will be the inability to devise and implement a truly responsive globalization strategy. Corporations could instead improve their ability to execute such a strategy by demanding a more inclusive educational background from its current and prospective employees. This would encourage colleges and universities to provide this kind of education in order to make their programs and graduates more marketable.

Proposition 5: Balancing Commercial Interests and Cultural Concerns

The vast amounts of wealth and power available to media giants and other information brokers force any cultural concerns to the back burner (or completely off the stove). The main question is whether to rely on government regulation and public pressure to force more altruistic formulas for success onto the corporate world, or to adjust the current economic models to better serve the cultural concerns. It is a basic carrot and stick debate that has raged in governmental deregulation and privatization debates worldwide. Is it the government's role to regulate industry, or will the people, through their purchasing power and other market forces, be enough to keep corporations in check? While the invisible hand of capitalism is a nice idea in pure democratic theory, the rules of the global media game have changed drastically since Adam Smith's time.

> As market culture permeates the social order, it threatens to cancel out the tension between market values and those values representative of civil society that cannot be measured in commercial terms but that are critical to democracy, values such as justice, freedom, equality, health, respect, and the rights of citizens as equal and free human beings (Giroux 1999, 162).

In the new corporate world order, media competition has been decimated. The remaining few media conglomerates no longer answer to governments – let alone individual consumers.

The sort of counterbalancing power needed to introduce alternative information sources to global media outlets resides in the hands of multifaceted coalitions. Only the combination of mass consumer demands, strategic governmental regulation, and increasing local and global competition can oppose the corporate mass culture. By educating consumers on media awareness issues, treating media conglomerates as the monopolies they truly are, and making the global media marketplace more hospitable to alternative information sources, the principles of communication equity can be realized. While these "sticks" may keep MNCs in line to some degree, it is the "carrot" of increased profits that will always be a stronger motivating factor. In that case, culturally-aware globalization is to be expected only if the premise of this article continues to hold true that a responsive strategy is the most likely road to financial success.

Proposition 6: Recognizing Communication as a Basic Human Right

Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights first introduced in 1948 states that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression … and this includes the freedom to hold opinion without interference." Adding 60 years of technological advances to this basic human right requires that we take into consideration the kind of expression that is possible today. The right to express an opinion entails the presence of an audience. Talking to oneself is hardly the cornerstone of free speech. In an information-driven world where the flood of communication from corporate sources can be deafening, the whisper of a single voice is often lost. Convincing MNCs that it is in their best interests to recognize the rights of everyone to express their opinions may be far easier than the next step of actually convincing them to open their communications networks for the use of these people to widely express and share these opinions. In fact, this is part of the responsiveness strategy in that responding and giving voice to local ideas is very much a sign of cultural acceptance and respect.

The rhetoric of media companies that consumers have the freedom to "change the channel" and choose their own information is only half of the issue. The right to receive alternative information (which, as mentioned above, is certainly not secure) requires the coinciding right to distribute alternative information. When there is an oligopoly controlling the distribution channels, the freedom to choose becomes an empty freedom as few choices are available. Hundreds of television channels, radio stations, magazines, newspapers, web sites, and so on, all controlled by the same handful of corporations and all with the same corporate profit agenda does not represent choice. Only when local communities have the same opportunity as their MNC guests to express their views and share their culture to just as wide of an audience will freedom of speech and consumer freedom of choice measure up to the simple principles of basic human rights. Likewise, only when a visiting MNC recognizes and respects this right to communicate will they be able to forge truly responsive partnerships with their local hosts that can greatly benefit both parties – financially as well as culturally.

CONCLUSION

All of the above propositions call not just for a strategic change by MNCs as they globalize, but also a newfound partnership between global corporations and their local community hosts. It will require a shared- power approach that may not be entirely welcomed by the traditional control-based philosophy of Disney and other MNCs. The results – both from a local cultural preservation perspective and a corporate profit perspective – should convince both sides of the cultural imperialism debate to recognize the value of cultural responsiveness. So rather than see this article as a rant against corporate abuses, I think it is wiser to look at the Disney story as a cautionary tale against cultural imperialism as the best path to global success. Limiting financial exposure in an uncertain environment – not cultural responsiveness – was the prevailing motive behind the more hands-off approach to Tokyo Disneyland. Likewise, lamenting the fact that their Tokyo agreement saw ninety percent of the park's profits stay in the hands of their Japanese partners – not an underlying bent towards cultural imperialism – drove Disney's desire to retain more control over their subsequent European venture. Still, these profit motives go hand-in-hand with the globalization strategy used in each case and capturing ten percent of Tokyo Disneyland's profits is better than absorbing a far greater percentage of Euro Disney's losses. So in its experiences we find a Disney corporation that enjoyed more success by relinquishing some of its traditional control over its environment than by exercising the full force of that control. Responsiveness to local culture has been a key to the success of Tokyo Disneyland. Lack of responsiveness was nearly the downfall of Euro Disney. Only a change of strategy necessitated by financial disaster transformed the control-based Euro Disney into the more responsive Disneyland Paris (cf. Philips 1993).

A third global Disney theme park – Hong Kong Disneyland – opened in 2005 to mixed reviews. It may be too early to tell whether this venture will follow the path of the Tokyo or Paris experience, but a few hints are already beginning to surface. While Disney did go the Tokyo route in partnering with a local entity in the development and control of Hong Kong Disneyland, their partner is the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China. Undoubtedly, the Chinese government is a very different type of partner than a for-profit Japanese corporation and their new governmental partners may not share their for-profit strategic or financial goals. One of the main complaints regarding the Hong Kong theme park is its small size. At less than one-third the size of Euro Disney, this could represent Disney's reluctance to fully invest in another foreign venture, or it could be a result of the Chinese government's attempts to limit Disney's encroachment for socio-political reasons. In addition, while offering a much more culturally-responsive public attitude to counterbalance the European difficulties, there have still been missteps in its understanding of and adjustment to the Chinese culture and its people. Overall, it appears that Disney is doing some of the right things by being more responsive to the local culture, but they may be doing them for reasons other than a true responsive strategy. In Tokyo, the motivation behind a responsive partnership was mitigating financial risk. In Hong Kong, accepting a partnership with the government may be a prerequisite condition for Disney to do business in China at all. As such, Hong Kong Disneyland will be another interesting case study on the road to determining if cultural globalization strategy affects financial success and if the motivation behind that strategy matters.

The Bigger Picture

The cold war spanning the half-century between World War II and the fall of the Berlin Wall may not have a clear military victor, but looking at the large red Coca-Cola machine in the shadows of the former royal palace in Budapest prompts one local to remark "[y]ou can see who won, can't you?" (Golding and Harris 1997, 1). Indeed the real winners of the long stalemate between the Western democracies and the former Soviet bloc may have been non-combatants. The spoils of war have mainly fallen to the MNCs that have entered the newly opened economies of Eastern Europe. This has been allowed, and even welcomed, largely because of the credit given to Western corporations for tempting the then-communist world with the consumer utopia that awaited them on the other side of the iron curtain. In an attempt to share in the glorious bounty of capitalism, the walls were torn down from the inside by the future consumers, rather than from the outside by conquering armies. Former Disney CEO Michael Eisner went as far as to credit the American entertainment industry with playing a part in the fall of communism in Eastern Europe:

> The Berlin Wall was destroyed not by the force of Western arms but by the force of Western ideas. And what was the delivery system for those ideas? It has to be admitted that to an important degree it was by American entertainment (Eisner 1995, 8).

While this may exaggerate the role consumerism played in the fall of the Soviet Empire, it has led to greater acceptance of the encroachment of Western – especially American – culture into the Second and Third Worlds. This is a trend that seems to be continuing in China and elsewhere. Capitalism, and its promised treasures, has become an accepted weapon for democratic reform.

Exposure to other people and cultures is desirable in the new world order for many reasons. Not the least of which is the need to understand those who are fast becoming our neighbors in a shrinking global village. However, when the delivery methods are so obtrusive as to lay waste to any indigenous culture, the desirability quickly fades. With the old colonial imperialism, the explicit purpose was to rid the natives of their "savage" ways and to enlighten them to the God-fearing values of Christian "civilization." Such blatant animosity towards the local culture is in some ways more easily perceived and resisted for what it is. In the case of the new cultural imperialism, however, the destruction of indigenous culture is characterized by a more ambiguous disregard for the side effects of profit making. It is not so much a corporate plot to westernize the world rather than it is a total disregard for anyone and anything that stands in the way of profit. This imperialism – disguised as capitalism and shielded by visions of bringing democracy and freedom to the "noble savages" – is more difficult to discern and isolate, and therefore more difficult to resist without being branded a socialist (or worse – a liberal). Current disregard for native culture may not be as overt as the missionaries and colonizers of centuries ago. It is, however, the seemingly innocuous nature of the new imperialism, coupled with the technology to reach billions of people around the world with each message that makes this threat even greater.

Even if corporations and the perceived political neutrality of their products and services are the Trojan horse of democracy, this is not, nor should it be, the primary goal of those who run MNCs. Neither MNCs nor their management are inherently evil bearers of cultural imperialism, but the profit motive will more often than not overwhelm any more altruistic motives. Instead, it is in the best interests of both MNCs and larger society to be more responsive to the cultures of local communities. As examples such as Disney's experiences in Europe and Asia are exposed and analyzed, hopefully more and more global corporations will begin to recognize that "doing good" through cultural responsiveness is not the antithesis to monetary success, but can actually lead to "doing well" financially.

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