What is the Future of Intercultural Communication in South Asia?

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Abstract

One word that has become the currency among journalists and academics in the past 20 years: globalization. From terrorism to the environment, free trade to protectionism, population growth to poverty and social justice, globalization seems deeply implicated in nearly all of the major issues of the new millennium. Every discipline is seeking to find its own epistemological location in the globalization debate. Some equate globalization merely with free markets; others use the term interchangeably with concepts such as trans nationalism or post nationalism. People's experiences are linked to economic realities, social processes, technological and media innovations, and cultural flows that traverse national boundaries with greater momentum. Given the increasing global flow of information, culture, and capital, scholars are wrestling with the question of how globalization is impacting international and intercultural communication. In this talk, using examples from South Asia, Middle East, and Latin America, I will focus on how media globalization is influencing communication between cultures and nations and why it is important to study global media for its content, impact, and practices if one is fully understand the future of intercultural communication.

1. Introduction

One word that has become the currency among journalists and academics in the past 20 years: globalization. From terrorism to the environment, free trade to protectionism, population growth to poverty and social justice, globalization seems deeply implicated in nearly all of the major issues of the new millennium. Every discipline is seeking to find its own epistemological location in the globalization debate. Some equate globalization merely with free markets; others use the term interchangeably with concepts such as transnationalism or postnationalism. "Called upon to account for developments as diverse as the value of the euro," observe Held and McGrew, "the worldwide popularity of Star Wars, the rise of Third Way politics and religious fundamentalism, the discourse of globalization seem to offer an analysis of the contemporary human predicament." While human lives continue to be lived in local realities, these realities are increasingly being challenged and integrated into larger global networks of relationships. People's experiences are linked to economic realities, social processes, technological and media innovations, and cultural flows that traverse national boundaries with greater momentum. In the past two decades, liberalization and privatization of the media systems, first in Europe and North America and then in the countries of South

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has created a new media world order. The existing centers of power for the past few centuries – be it the European nations of Britain, France, Spain, and Italy and the post World War II US – are currently renegotiating their place in world history and in increasingly transnational media flows. The old categories which had defined international communication are passé. The rise of 'Chindia' (the joint economic and political powerhouses of China and India); the post-apartheid rise of South Africa; Middle east nations', such as United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia, vast repositories of natural resources; and the post-Soviet Russia's resurgent military and cultural dominance over Eastern Europe and Asian Republics challenge and render obsolete previous descriptions of the global mediascape. The rise of satellite television, internet, and geo-linguistic media markets have created new structures of media production and consumption, undercutting the pre-existing dominance of state-controlled media. The focus of academic work in Communication has shifted from a paradigm of international communication to one of media globalization where cultural, economic, political, social, and technical analysis of communication patterns and effects between nations has given way to studies of exchanges between transnational corporations, local and regional media companies, consumers, and media workers.

In intercultural and international media studies, debates have been raging about the complex and contradictory influences of the global media industries on local identities, cultures, and ideologies. Recent trends toward concentration of media ownership deregulation and new alliances between transnational media corporations and national governments are changing the nature of media content and practices. Journals and monographs in media studies have been inundated with theories attempting to explain the dramatic changes in the global media scene. One theory consistently advocated has been a kind of "bureaucratic rationalization or McDonalization", an analysis in which the takeover of locally-owned media and other similar inflow of foreign capital has been seen as "the progressive erosion of local media and their incorporation into, or replacement by, larger predators". While study of global media has historically emphasized on media and cultural imperialism – especially inaugurated in the works of Schiller and Hamelink - these explanations emphasized one-way media flow. Hamelink (1983), in the introduction of his book Cultural Autonomy in Global Communication, wrote, "The process of cultural synchronization implies that a particular type of cultural development in the metropolitan country is persuasively communicated to the receiving country. The metropolis offers the model with which the receiving parties synchronize" (p. 5). While the scholarly gaze was on whatever the presumptively imperialistic foreign content does to the local people, the local people were characterized as passive victims rather than as agents of their local appropriations of the foreign, however complicitous with or resistant to hegemonic ideologies. There had been a failure to recognize the fraught, tense, uneven, and shifting reciprocity between the global and the local.

Scholars such as Appadurai (1994) and others have begun to critique such assumptions. In his essay titled "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Culture Economy", Appadurai centralizes and problematizes the inherent tension between homogenization and heterogenization. He argues that global cultural process is fundamentally characterized by "radical disjunctures between different sorts of global flows and the uncertain landscapes created in and through these disjuncture" (p. 296). "Modernity as rupture" is constituted by, for Appadurai (p. 297), the joint work of media and migration. The global movement of media technologies into every aspect of individual lives and the unprecedented mass migration of peoples across the world together define "the core of the link between globalization and the modern" (p. 297). Media and migration, both separately and together, produce an enormous degree of instability in the creation of selves and identities. Sparks has similarly argued for a theory of media globalization involving a "dual movement" in which we find "media organizations and regulatory structures, migrating 'up' to global forms or 'down' to local forms" (p. 80). In this process, we can observe "the erosion of the power and influence of the state-based media on the one hand, and a parallel strengthening of both the local and the global media" (p. 80). I find that postcolonial theory offers several concepts that can help us think about this dynamic relation between the global and the local in media studies. Shome and Hegde's (2002) essay titled, "Postcolonial Approaches to Communication: Charting the terrains, engaging the intersections", in the special issue of Communication Theory, speaks of merging the rich literature in postcolonial theory to Communication as a way to provide some epistemological questions and answers. Media scholars, Shome and Hedge observe, have continued to valorize views of media and culture rooted in the West which have remained predominantly influenced by modernist intellectual and institutional structures. For Shome and Hegde, it is the epistemic reorientation of media studies which is necessary in order to enter any cogent discussions of the global/local dialectic. Their starting point is the fast changing and overly mediated social and cultural formations dominating our world and linking these changes to history, power, space, and politics. If one is to proceed with academic responsibility, they argue, Communication and media scholars must include representation, identity, hybridity, and agency in their discussions and analyses. By invoking the critical vein of postcolonial theory, these authors urge the readers to take Communication and media studies out of the parochialism of theory steeped in Eurocentrism that "either ignores completely or oversimplifies the complexity of the rest" (p. 260). Postcolonial theorists, Shome and Hegde write, understand the current global order is not "born fully-formed, Minerva style" but come to us situated within the larger historical sweep of colonialism and its imperial centers (p. 261). I do not assume that postcolonial theory (as opposed to Feminism, Marxism, or Poststructuralism) provides the only resources to scholars in media studies, but two concepts, "critical regionalism" and "planetarity", from Gayatri Spivak strike me as particularly useful.

The emergence of colonial and postcolonial studies within the academy as a distinct mode of critical analysis can be dated to the end of the 1970s perhaps best periodized with the publication of Said's book Orientalism (1978). The concurrent works of Bhabha on hybridity, mimcry, and mimesis and Spivak's essays on subaltern politics, situated in the disciplines of English and Comparative literature, asked provocative questions about representation, language, power, and

knowledge, and abstractly engaged the problem of ways to begin to grasp the relationship between the colonial/imperial and nationalist past and the circumstances and the exigencies of the present. As Young (2001, p. 88) has pointed out, postcolonialism examines "the material and epistemological conditions of postcoloniality and seeks to combat the continuing, often covert, operation of an imperialist system of economic, political, and cultural domination." Postcolonialism should not be taken as an "endorsement of the new world system"; it is a "radical response to its condition" (Ashcroft, 2001, p. 24). While the label 'postcolonialism', like any term that ends in 'ism' describing a critical enterprise, implies a homogeneous ideology, theoretical perspective, and political agenda; its name contradicts its divergent actual critical practices. All critical practices that go under the name of postcolonialism, however, have sought to dismantle the West as the normative center of the world, to move beyond West-centered historicism, beyond imperial binary structures of Self/Other and center/periphery, and ultimately beyond any form of imperialism. Such theory can help us create an epistemology for media studies that also deconstructs hegemonic Western notions about a globalized media. It is only recently that theorists have attempted to engage postcolonial studies in contemporary global terms. Globalization does not exist outside history, "in a kind of universal postmodern space" (Spivak, 2003, p. 80); it also reveals itself best as the site of practices and strategies which have been developed by local communities over many centuries. We cannot understand globalization without understanding the structure of global power relations which flourishes in the 21st century as an economic, cultural, and political legacy of Western imperialism (ideas which are at the core of the postcolonial disciplinary stance). Postcolonial theory can provide clear models for understanding how local communities achieve agency under the pressures of global hegemony. Postcolonial theorists resist the common view, often purported by academic left in the developing world, that "globalization is simply re-colonization" (Xie, 2006, p. 71). To the contrary, the engagement of local communities with global culture is marked by great degree of self-determination and creative interpolation of local empowerment in the face of dominant hegemonic discourse. Postcolonial theory offers intellectual critique and countervailing ethics for the new eco-environmental issues, electronic media and networks, and increased mobility of peoples. Spivak and others have tried to shift the debates in postcolonial theory from the study of "metropolitan multicultural phenomenon" (Spivak, 2008, 101) to more regional and local issues, often situated outside of Western academies and institutions. It is in Spivak's most recent writings that one sees the beginnings of two nuanced concepts – "critical regionalism" and "planetarity" - which I explore next in this paper.

2. Critical Regionalism : The 'Local' in Intercultural Communication

One of the defining features of 21st century is the increasingly convoluted and complex interplay between localism and globalism, and its implications for disciplinary boundaries. Clearly, this process has been in operation for centuries, but the velocity of it has risen sharply during the past fifty years. The interaction has produced remarkable transformations in the spaces of politics, economics, and culture, as newer forms of capital began to imprint their local visibilities and inflect on locality (and nation) in unanticipated ways. A productive way to understand the dialectic between the global and the local, writes Dissanayake (2006, p. 26), is through "an examination of the production of newer and more complex localities." Whenever scholars seek to interrogate the intersecting narratives of the global and the local, what they are hoping to do is to focus on the production of the local and its ever changing contours in response to the imperatives of the global. The local is never static; its boundaries both temporal and spatial, are subject to ceaseless change. The local is characterized by a web of power plays, agonistic interest, pluralized histories, and the struggle over polysemous and asymmetrical exchanges. The local is constantly transforming and reinventing itself as it seeks to reach beyond itself and engage the translocal. The question, "What is local?" has remained at the center of disciplinary conversations as theorists struggle with notions of justice, tolerance, and coexistence. Spivak (2008, p. 95) in the essay "1994: Will postcolonialism travel?" tackles the most challenging question of our times: "What kind of a collective are we part of or on what plain can we be imagined as a collectivity?" She carefully charts the idea of critical regionalism which I want to elucidate for use in media studies. Various new spatial keywords – regionalism, regionalization, territorial complexes, deterritorialized publics, borderlands, glocalisms, transregional – have come to the fore in Humanities and Social Sciences because they seem especially well suited to an analysis of present-day restructurings. In one of the first usages of "critical regionalism" geographer Edward Soja saw its analytic powers to bear the answer for reconceptualization of the local and then working through it to formulate theories of "newer global communities and relations" (1989, p. 31). Regionalism as a scholarly area of interest has itself been a remarkably diffused concept. A term that has currency, but different values in political science, urban planning, architecture and design, history, literature, and visual arts. More recently, regionalism has moved beyond being perceived merely as a geophysical entity to an emerging scholarship which shifts the emphasis away from the products of regional culture to the processes by which ideas about regions come into being and become influential. Instead of asking whether a particular version of region is valid or invalid, authentic or not, "critical regionalism asks whose interests are served by a given version of the region" (Powell, 2007, p. 22).

Spivak borrows the term from Frampton (2002) whose academic work in architecture forms the basis for its use in other disciplines. As an architect, Frampton was appalled by what he viewed as the increasing "megalopolitan development" of large cities lined with free-standing high-rises and serpentine highways (p. 78). Architecture, Frampton wrote, can only be sustained today as a critical practice if it assumes an "arriere-garde position", one which distances itself equally from the Enlightenment myth of progress and from a reactionary unrealistic impulse to "return to the architonic forms of the pre-industrial past" (p. 81). The fundamental strategy of critical regionalism in architecture, for Frampton, mediates the impact of universal civilization with elements derived directly from the peculiarities of a particular place. "The practice of critical regionalism is contingent upon a

process of double mediation," writes Frampton, "it has to 'deconstruct' the overall spectrum of world culture which it inevitably inherits and it has to achieve, through synthetic contradiction, a manifest critique of universal civilization" (p. 83). For critical regionalism in architecture, local topography and nature was integrated into the structures one builds; the site – signs of its history in geological, archeological, and agricultural terms - becomes inscribed in the design and realization of the built structure. Critical regionalism in architecture acknowledges, and tries to alleviate, what Heidegger (1975, p. 154) called the "loss of nearness" characteristic of built structures of global modernity.

Spivak's use of the architectural strategy of critical regionalism is partly based on Heidegger's plea of renewing "nearness." Critical regionalism, in Spivak's work, is connected to the view that Asia (as a Continent) needs to be pluralized; that Asia singular must become conceptualized as "other Asias", as the title of her book suggests. Spivak observes that we know little about "areas that are not immediately in our experience, areas that general official histories have marginalized" (2008, p. 95). While she was growing up in post-independence India of the 1950s, she knew more about European and American culture and politics than about adjoining Asian nations'. Although they did not play out in geopolitical realms and among policy mavens, the historically strong regional connections, Spivak (2008, p. 95) writes, "lingered in cultural memory." In Other Asias, Spivak focuses on a question posed by two scholars, Anahid Kassabian and David Kazanjian, "Why is there no Armenian postcolonialism?" (2008, p. 99). Here Spivak acknowledges the limits of postcolonialism thus far. Focusing on Armenia requires a renewed understanding of Said's Orientalism and postcolonialism; she says, "It is a different kind of postcoloniality that we have in those areas. It is not a repetition of the Victorian model of the division between public and private" (Spivak, 2002, p. 275). Given that the Southern caucuses and Central Asia are looking at the displacement of the Soviet Union into the Russian Federation, postcolonial questions do not fit neatly on to Armenia. Spivak writes :

Armenia cannot lean towards existing theories. It cannot be comfortably located in the generally recognized lineaments of contemporary imperialism and received postcolonialism. Its history is diversified, with many loyalties crosshatching so small a place (2008, p. 117).

To locate Armenia within the larger grid of crisscrossing identities and histories, is to practice "othering ourselves into many Asia-s" and to release Asia (and Asian thinkers) from hermetically sealed identities of being 'Asians' but locate Asia as a contested site of multiple hierarchies, genealogies, national, and ethnic histories superimposed by colonialism, genocide (her example here is the centrality of Armenian genocide of 1915), and modernity (2008, p. 211). The only way out, Spivak argues, is to advocate for an anti-ethnic regionalism that displaces ethnic histories but reterritorializes regional histories and also moves us "a step beyond the nation-state" (2008, p. 233). Critical regionalism is not about a space or site - which makes her use of the concept different from that of Frampton - but naming of a "critical position" (2008, p. 235) through a pedagogy of "genealogical deconstruction" which makes it possible for other Asias, others Africas, and other globes to erase the "regionalist unilateralism of Euro-US and diasporic hegemony" (2008, p. 238). The route to "rewriting postcolonialism into globality through critical regionalism" needs a rigorous intellectual path focused on epistemic and ethical pluralization, not simply recognition of cultural difference (2008, p. 131).

As we acknowledge the positionality of other Asias, we must reconfigure if the 'local' in media studies must go over and beyond the nation into new forms of collectivities. For instance, studying Bollywood films (Hindi films made in Mumbai in India) requires understanding of varied and highly diverse transnational audiences; the 'local' in Bollywood audience studies includes audiences all over the world. Kaur and Sinha's (2005, p. 1) descriptive term of "Bollyworld" challenges the utter absurdity in trying to fix audiences to a singular locale (Hindi speaking audiences in India), as these films routinely play to sold out crowds in Dakar, Dubai, Cairo, Johannesburg, and Toronto. Joshi's (2007, p. 5) term of "Bollylite" extends the analysis further as some of these films – radically apoliticized - appeal to primarily wealthy diasporic Indian audiences living in the West. While critical regionalism supplements the notion of "cultural proximity" (Straubhaar, 2007, p. 23) in media consumption and production, it also assumes a fundamental of the postcolonial stance: the shared meaning of historical experiences and imaginations. The 'local' must then get reterritorialized and historicized outside of lineaments of nation and ethnic nationalism to a different kind of collective. I chose to use media in South Asia in this analysis because it can provide us with frames of intelligibilities, repertoire of images, and enfolding discourses that can enable us to make greater sense of the interanimation of the global and the local. I begin with a question: What is South Asia? A wikipedia list includes the nations of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. What the wikipedia list does not include are the sub-states - with quotation marks around them – of Tamil Eelam, Kashmir, and North West frontier province in Pakistan. Defining South Asia - as in Spivak's chagrin in defining Asia diversified - requires the conscious marginalization of nation as providing linear and policed cultural parameters. The new vocabulary of critical regionalism requires reconfiguring the kind of collectives which have existed and might evolve in South Asias.

A visit to a town like Janakpur, like a close look at the complicated history of Armenia, alerts us both to the problematics of cultural, political, and lingustic boundaries of the postcolonial state and possibilities for critical regionalism. About ten miles from the Indian border, Janakpur is the capital to the region of Terai, part of Southeastern plains of Nepal, and a Hindu holy city signfied by the massive presence of the Janaki Temple in the city square. The area has close connections with the northeastern Indian state of Bihar which borders Terai, but the town, with a population of less than a hundred thousand, is far-away from the geopolitical 'nations' of Nepal and India. People in Nepal who speak Maithili and Bhojpuri and call themselves the Madeshis live primarily in Terai. Maithili and Bhojpuri are also the two dominant languages of Bihar. Like Biharis, Madeshis are predominantly Hindus, as opposed to the Newars of Katmandu Valley who are Buddhists, with a belief that Sita, the consort of Rama from the

Indian epic of Ramayana, was a Maithili princess from the region.

A long-standing socio-political movement in the Terai region, under different names and political leaderships, has been fighting for rights and recognition for the Madeshis since the 1950s. Until recently the movement had been defined by Nepal's monarchy (and, subsequently, by the democratic governments) as an ethno-linguistic movement; but movement leaders were actually primarily focused on land and cultural rights of the population. While the movement had had some violent factions, such as the Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha under the leadership of Jai Krishna Goit aligned to the Maoist guerillas who were waging a armed struggle against the Nepali monarchy, the Madeshi movement has largely been a peaceful one based on land rights. Says Yadav (2008), one of the leaders of the movement :

Colonization of Madesh and Madeshi identity became essential [for Nepalis]. Exclusionary nationalism became the foundation of modern Nepali state. Before the advent of democracy, the design of Shahas and Ranas for a Nepali state have been imperialistic and feudalistic in nature. The political elites after 1990 have further built on that. While the seizure of state power from the King provided the base for a new political nationalism, the colonization of Madesh provides the economic base for reinforcing hill-centric rule of the country by the Nepalis. From the very beginning, Madesh has been placed at the service of Nepalis.

In the past few years Girija Prasad Koirala, first Prime Minister of post-Monarchial democratic Nepal, had pursued radical land reform programs along the principles of democratic socialism in the Terai region. He intended to institutionalize peasant economy in Terai and in Nepal. According to Yadav, however, Koirala refused to share the same egalitarian approach of land reform to political representation of the Madeshi. Most of the land seized by the state has either been given to Nepali hill migrants known as sukumbasi or continues to be under state control. Madeshi landless people remained dispossessed under new land reform policies of the state. In fact, the new citizenship act pending in the Nepal parliament might de-recognize some Madeshis. Madeshis, in organizing their social movements, have long taken cues from similar land rights movements in Bihar in India where the landless continue to face profound oppression as do the Madeshis in Nepal. While these communities are connected ethnically and linguistically, they are also connected historically by their marginalization (both Terai and Bihar have been marginalized in state policies of Nepal and India respectively) and in seeking demands for political representation, cultural autonomy, and land rights. Yadav acknowledges the influence of Bihari social movements such as those launched by the Ekta Parishad, an organization committed to the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi of redistribution of lands to the landless and Bhoomi Sena, a group formed by the lower castes of Bihari Kumris, on Madeshi movements.

To reconfigure the local in South Asian media and to adopt the epistemic project of critical regionalism, media scholars must focus on places like Janakpur. In Janakpur, houses along the narrow streets of the bazaar leading from the Janaki Temple, are littered with satellite dishes receiving a number channels from Nepal and India with the most popular being the general news and entertainment channel in Bhojpuri called Mahuaa TV. The one movie theatre in Janakpur plays Bhojpuri films produced in Patna, the capital city of Bihar. Janak FM, the local radio station, carries news programs, songs, and talk-shows in Maithili, Bhojpuri, Hindi, and Nepali. For media scholars, an overt focus on the structure of global media networks located in the Western hemisphere will not work in Janakpur. There is no CNN, BBC, or STAR TV here. Similarly, there is no presence of state-owned Television and Radio. Even Bollywood, the largest film industry in South Asia, with its own preoccupation of reimagining the national space is absent. As in many non-media centric societies, a person's experience with media in Janakpur may comprise a small percentage of his or her total experience facilitated more by other institutions such as religion, education, and government.

I suggest that critical regionalism in intercultural communication and media studies begins by de-anchoring the geopolitical location of such audiences, understand their historical links to other regional/ethnic communities, understand the postcolonial condition in which these communities live, govern themselves, and seek self-determination, and role, if any, the media play in grassroots communication and activism and in forming cross-border alliances. Part of the project could also include giving voices and to reinvigorate neglected contacts that already exist, investing a socially and spatially constructed idea of region with agency and purpose, to open the intellectual project to local participation specifically instructed by the voices and experiences of those normally excluded from powerful strands of public discourse, and survey the range of representational strategies for defining places and regions expressed or implied in a variety of media artifacts. Continuing to equate the 'local' with the nation suppresses a more complicated matrix of ethno-linguistic, regional, communal, provincial, caste, gender, class, education, spatial, and historical connections. These interstices of regional connections serve the powerful functions of establishing cultural memory and identity through multiple layers of media consumption and production. While the tendency among media studies researchers is to gravitate towards centers of media production, McMillan (2007, p. 185) has urged scholars to expand media studies to "non hot spots" so that we are not left with "geographical gaps" in our understanding of media globalization. A critical regionalism in South Asia, especially in connecting ethno-linguistic media consumption and production, would answer McMillan's call.

3. Planetarity : The 'Global' in Intercultural Communication

Scholars agree that cultural and social entities are increasingly defined by overlapping satellite footprints, cable networks, and web-spaces, rather than inaccurately and questionably by fixed geo-political boundaries. Globalization has accelerated the erosion of the nation-state, even while the postcolonial state has attempted to present itself as a unified society, often implementing violent policing mechanisms, and subverting the "many nationalities within the state" (Butler and Spivak, 2007, p. 76). The new forms of globalization, for Hall (1997, p. 67), occur in two opposite directions: "it goes above the nation-

state and it goes below it." If it is not the nation, what are the alternative collectives of the future?

A growing demand in media studies for theoretical and epistemic clarity about what it means for media to be 'global' can be answered, at least in part, by Spivak's concept of planetarity. Spivak's (2003) book, Death of a Discipline, begins to facilitate a vision for moving beyond disciplinarily that patrols the cultural-ideological borders between, for instance, the first-world-based Comparative Literature frame and the third-world-oriented Area Studies. She proposes: "learning the protocol of those disciplines, turning them around, laboriously, not only by building institutional bridges but also by persistent curricular interventions" (2003, p. 11). Spivak argues that, while speaking of the 'global' assumes the same system of exchange everywhere, and has come to connote merely the economic sphere, speaking of the planet acknowledges alterity, but does not assume universality (2003, p. 72). How is the planet different from the globe? Spivak explains as follows :

The globe is in our computers. No one lives there. It allows us to think that we can aim to control it. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan. It is not really amenable to a neat contrast with the globe …If we imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities, alterity remains underived from us; it is not our dialectical negation, it contains as much as it flings us away (2003, p. 72-73)

Globalization as a historical process, Spivak suggests, has created a drastic alienation on earth; by conceptualizing planetarity, a concept based on the materiality of the earth she is, thus, calling forth some sort of international formation on the one hand and a reconfiguration of national landscape on the other hand. Invoking Jose Marti's powerful sentence, "Cities are the minds of nations; but their hearts, where the blood rushes back and from where it is redistributed, are the country side" (quoted in Spivak, 2003, p. 92), Spivak elaborates:

The country here is not simply the prenational as opposed to the national. It is also hyle or mass of the national, to which the blood rushes first and that becomes continuous with the exchange with the Earth. The Earth is a paranational image that can substitute for international and can perhaps provide today a displaced site for the imagination of planetarity (2003, p. 95).

Spivak's postnational imagination of the planet does not necessarily require the nation-state as the base and gives hope for those who have been disappointed with the postcolonial project of national liberation. To imagine planetarity from the current global condition is undoubtedly a difficult task but given the saturation of capitalist and xenophobic nationalist mindset, it is the responsibility for intellectuals to show the way.

Planetarity acknowledges that today we are dealing with heterogeneity of a different level because of vast information and financialization of the world but in this kind of reconstellation, planetarity anchors us in an epistemological space where universal values are always under question, under threat, beyond the horizon, and in others domain. The opening question for Spivak is not, "Who are they?" (as she laments has been the focus of traditional Anthropology and Archeology), it is "Who are we?" Spivak contends that collectivities are undetermined – since the others are not explicitly "knowable" – implying a space of great uncertainty in which descriptions have to be worked, negotiated, and revised (p. 91). Planetarity is the acknowledgment of indeterminacy, mystery, and discontinuity with an added question, "How many are we?" (2003, p. 91) In media studies, particularly in South Asia, the genealogical importance of nation cannot be undermined but planetarity is a concept for the future and a different ontology of the nation. As South Asia is ravaged by escalating inter-ethnic and inter-religious violence, the postcolonial national project is under intense scrutiny. What's next? Spivak asks us to begin to conceive of 'ourselves' as belonging to the Earth that we inhabit as species and in such a conception leave room for negotiations, failures, and slippage.

In studying global audiences, in conducting critical media ethnographies, reading and producing media narratives, planetarity can keep media studies aware that everyone (and every practice) cannot be known. Concurrently, it can give us a visual image of the entire planet rather than the circumambient language of nation and ethnicity. Media scholars and practitioners can constantly remind their audiences and readers of connections and (dis)connections which constitutes the existence of the entire planet – it joins and fractures us at the same moment; it is never fully comprehensible (can one ever know the Earth?); and the alterity of others as an undeniable component of such connections. It is the planes of co-existence rather than fractures that drive planetarity.

A point that foregrounds Spivak's analysis is the work of imagination that has assumed unprecedented and significant proportions today and in order to fully comprehend the global we need to map the diverse ways in which new imaginations operate. Media, often, becomes the vehicle of such imaginations of people's collectivities; scholars not only need to critically unwrap such imaginations, but also, simultaneously, advocate for new non-ethnic pacifist planetary imaginations. The integration of planetarity into media studies must go beyond questions of methodology. As media scholars seek connections globally, beyond the immediate parameters of nation-states and since Earth is a "bigger concept-metaphor" (Spivak, 2003, p. 91) than bounded nation, planetarity can become the epistemological springboard for the future.

4. Conclusion

Postcolonial revisions of dominant Eurocentric theories have attempted to shift the epistemological questions in Humanities and Social Sciences by subalternizing knowledges and methodologies. Part of the battle, for postcolonial critics, has been to problematize "the nation-state as a broker of the local" (McMillan, p. 218). In South Asia, as Guha (2001, p. 44) notes, "The nation-state did not arise out of the indigenous society but was foisted on it by conquest and condemned to live in utter isolation." Critical regionalism and planetarity are two epistemic positions which seek a 'way out'; the point is not to ignore the salience of the nation but revitalize collectives that have existed as pre-capitalist formations but now take on new

powers within contemporary world equations. I have discussed the example of the Madeshis in Nepal. Many such examples of the complexity of the local can be found all over South Asia and other parts of the world. The Madeshi movement, I argue, cannot be analyzed merely as the failure of Nepal as a state to recognize cultural differences of the Madeshis. The region's ethno-linguistic and historical collective alliances with Bihar and Northern Nepal must be studied as should their media for clues to identity imaginations. Media studies 'canon' has undergone radical changes with awareness among scholars of the increased global interdependency, interconnectivity, proximity, and international/intercultural contact (Semati, 2004). Media journals have been inundated with studies in global communication access, international traffic in media content, international news agencies, free flow of information, global news flow, and transborder data flow. Issues which have concerned postcolonial scholarship for long are gradually beginning to penetrate the field with emphasis on cultural hybridity, nation-state, sovereignty and communication, media imperialism, glocalization, and cross-cultural media reception and ethnographies as elaborated in Hegde's (2005) remarks in the inaugural issue of this journal. As such, insertion of Spivak's postcolonial thematics of critical regionalism and planetarity is in an academic area where there is growing interest in such questions.