

## Introduction

### *McTelevision in the Global Village*

*“To speak of the globalization of culture is to speak in the first instance of the globalization of capitalism, and hence of a globalization of the commodity form which is expressed in a fully internationalized, interdependent and interlocking market.”*

(FROW, 9)

*“At best, [globalization] is no more than a catch-all category to refer to various trends towards more complex patterns of international circulation, not only of media products, but also of technologies, finance, people, and ideas.”*

(SINCLAIR, JACKA, AND CUNNINGHAM, 22)

**A**lthough by now this revelation is obvious and perhaps even clichéd, any scholarly examination of the international marketplace must acknowledge that the practices and meanings of “globalization” are complex and multi-faceted. Even the term globalization must be problematized, as we recognize that, in the marketplace, not all nations count equally; nor have national governments and borders ceased to matter. The world is not one big global village—in terms of economics or culture. In a discussion of culture especially, the concept of globalization gets tied to notions of nationalism, homogeneity, and commercialization. Culture—whether popular or mass culture—tells people something about themselves, helps to define identities, and explains the worlds in

which they live. Culture teaches people what is right and what is wrong, what is inevitable and what will never be, what is worth thinking about, and what should be ignored. In an examination of global culture, observers invariably question what ideas and values get lost along the way and what rises up to take their place.

This book addresses John Frow's above assertion that the internationalization of culture is concretely tied to the economic structure in which it occurs and John Sinclair et al.'s suggestion that we break apart the concept of globalization to uncover the particular processes by which the international circulation of culture takes place. Focusing on a particular mode of production—the international co-production—I will consider this mode of production as a means by which transnational television is created as both an economic and a cultural commodity. This analysis will further highlight the ways that internationally co-produced television affects not only the cultural landscape of mass media but also larger cultural issues such as identity formation and commercialism.

Perhaps the most significant issue surrounding globalization is the threat that it poses to nationalism. Although some theorists suggest that nationalism should be seen as an early concept in the move toward globalization, there is no denying that the spread of global capital, regulation, and culture threatens the dominance of nations as an organizational structure of society. One reaction to the breach of national strength is an increased focus on the local as a source of identity and knowledge. Both a tool of and a reaction to globalization, the strengthening of local ties offers a way of grounding identity and loyalty in a very fast paced and much criticized global world. At the same time, localization rarely offers a concrete threat to global capital in the way that a strong nationalistic movement might. Local preferences and loyalties can easily be mobilized by transnational corporations and incorporated into global practices.<sup>1</sup> Within this framework of globalization, culture is considered an important tool for spreading ideology and encouraging global capitalism. National culture, for example, according to Philip Schlesinger, is the “body of values, practices and identities deemed to make particular nations different from others” (372). In an attempt to erase nationalism as a source of identity, national culture, then, must be overtaken by some kind of global culture.

Mass media, particularly film and television, have served as one of the most efficient purveyors of such a culture (Featherstone, 57).

As the world economy privatized, media companies increasingly consolidated to create a handful of large, transnational, horizontally and vertically integrated media companies. Although mostly based in the United States, these transnational conglomerates are not designed to promote U.S. nationalism. As Richard Gershon explains, “As the world’s economy becomes more fully privatized, the goal of nation states and the goal of [transnational media corporations] will increasingly find themselves on a collision course. For it is the purpose of nation states to strengthen the cause of political and economic sovereignty whereas the goal of the TNC is profitability” (35). Transnational media corporations are focused on creating profits, regardless of national allegiances.

The privatization and deregulation of the television industry in the 1980s and ’90s, discussed below, paved the way for transnational television ownership. The programming of common television shows around the world and the production of programs that could be shown internationally became “commonsensical.” The idea of national programming, while significant at a governmental level, began to lose its primacy for producers. While most national audiences certainly continue to prefer local programming with domestic stars and languages, producers learned that more money could be made with international programs, even with shows that were not the *most* popular, but just popular enough to get on the air in several national markets.

Furthermore, media producers and distributors found that they could not simply transmit “national” product overseas (Sparks, 115). Rather, they needed to produce programming with an international audience in mind. The expense and complexity of such productions led to several innovations in programming. For example, formatting became much more common, especially in the 1990s. Through formatting, producers sell the execution of an idea for a television program (such as *Wheel of Fortune*, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, *Pop Idol*) and the program is then re-produced for a different national audience. The commodity becomes the format, not the actual program. Formatting in the 1970s focused on finding successful programs

that had been created for national markets and adapting them for different audiences. For example, U.S. producers formatted the successful British sitcoms *Till Death Us Do Part/All in the Family*, *Man About the House/Three's Company*, and *Steptoe and Son/Sanford and Son*. In the 1980s and '90s, however, producers began to consider the potential of programs as international formats before even creating the original versions.

Like formatting, international co-production did not originate in the 1980s but did rise in popularity as a mode of production at this time as a reaction to the shifts in the international media marketplace. International joint ventures, an umbrella term for different kinds of co-productions, are the processes by which at least two companies in at least two different countries work together to create one media text. These kinds of productions come in many shapes and sizes. "Official" international co-productions are created through co-production treaties between the nations in which the companies are based. As of 1998, Paul Taylor counted the existence of 129 bilateral co-production treaties and six multilateral treaties (1998, 134). Such treaties help set the terms of the co-productions, including in them specific requirements surrounding factors such as the financial obligations of the co-producing partners, the nationality of creative and technical personnel, source materials, locations, language, and so forth.

Not surprisingly, the U.S. government has never entered into any co-production treaties; such treaties would establish limitations and rules that might hinder the "free flow of information." This, of course, does not mean that the United States does not take part in such productions. Technically, these productions are termed co-ventures—co-productions made without a treaty. Essentially, the difference is that instead of having terms of the co-producers' involvement spelled out by a treaty, these terms are negotiated by the co-producing partners themselves. While generally in international co-ventures there is some creative input on the part of all companies involved, this may not always be the case. In a pre-sale, for example, which some people do and some people do not consider a co-venture, a partner may simply agree to purchase the media text for distribution in advance. A pre-sale is very helpful for providing funding for a project, but also, by demonstrating at least one company's commitment to the film,

producers are more easily able to obtain additional funding and distribution deals.

For the purposes of this research project, I have included both co-ventures and treaty co-productions as “international co-productions.”<sup>2</sup> Wherever necessary (and possible) I will indicate whether a treaty existed between the non-U.S. co-producers. Additionally, when the partner takes co-producer credit, I am including pre-sales as a form of international co-production. My decision in doing this was founded on the “growing anecdotal evidence in the TV trade press that the customer often gets the programming made to order” (Paul Taylor, 145). In other words, it is highly likely that a distributor who agrees to a pre-sale arrangement will have some impact on the creative content of the unfinished product, if only indirectly. As we can see, international co-productions are a complicated business. Significantly their role in the process of globalization is similarly complex and allows us to pull apart the idea of globalization, as suggested by John Sinclair et al., and concretely connect cultural production to the flow of capital in the cultural economy.

To further set the terms of this research project, I should note that the focus in these pages is not on how companies outside the United States use international co-production to oppose Hollywood’s hegemony (as will be discussed briefly below), but on how Hollywood itself embraces international co-production to achieve certain goals. This book examines the impact of globalization in the United States by exploring its role in creating and airing international television culture. This book takes seriously the idea that the process of globalization within the television industry has affected the United States. As primary gatekeepers within the media industries, what happens within U.S. media is significant. Furthermore we must recognize that although the major Hollywood production companies are associated with the United States, they may no longer actually be based in the United States. Rather, as previously discussed, these large transnational media corporations, in search of profits, concentrate on multiple markets. The push toward globalization within the media industries, I argue, has influenced the industrial structure and cultural contributions of U.S. television. To this end, through the lens of the international co-production, this book focuses on the

complexities of media globalization by examining the impact of international media on U.S. media industries and culture.

Within the framework of globalization, international co-productions play a significant role. At various times, such productions are seen as both the carriers of Western capitalist media making inroads around the world and as the last bastion of hope for national media; sometimes as a mix of both of these. As Paul Taylor explains, international co-productions exist within the borders between the two main ways of conceiving of the visual mass media: as a cultural industry and as an entertainment industry. The “cultural” view, most popular in Europe, sees film and television as a reflection of “the identity and experiences of the originating country” (101). Those who consider film and television to be “entertainment,” focus on media content as an economic output that’s primary value is its ability to be bought and sold in the marketplace (Paul Taylor, 101). Although the entertainment industry perspective is certainly gaining in prominence, international co-productions can be motivated either by the desire to enhance a nation’s culture or the interest in making money or both (Paul Taylor, 113, 124).

As will be discussed below, international co-productions, particularly those based on treaties, are at least framed in terms of their ability to enhance a national media industry (by allowing the country to identify itself with a larger budget production) and national culture. To qualify for certain subsidies and production incentives, international co-productions are required to satisfy certain “national” conditions. For example, a production may need to meet some or all of the following requirements: hire national (or now in the case of Europe, regional) creative personnel, include national themes, or set the film or program in a national location. As the history of international co-productions will illustrate, national interests were a fundamental incentive for the expansion of international co-productions everywhere except the United States. Even the term international co-production privileges national origin as a way of categorizing media texts (Elley, 20).

At the same time, however, international co-productions must appeal to transnational audiences and include themes, personnel, and locations from other co-producing partners’ countries. In order to

succeed as international products, these productions must limit their national particularities and reflect global issues and concerns. Paul Taylor explains, “International co-productions have the curious quality of having the look and feel of both foreign and domestic programming in each of the partner countries. The quality of being mostly familiar and a little different reflects the unique creative and co-financing arrangements that made their production possible” (152).

We can see then that understanding international co-productions means fleshing out their existence in between the existing categories in which film and television are currently placed. International co-productions are both artistically and economically motivated; they are foreign and domestic; in the case of treaty co-productions, they are both privately and publicly financed (through tax incentives and subsidies); they offer economic benefits to both the wealthiest and the more peripheral media industries; they act as tools for spreading dominant culture while offering opportunities for transculturation. International co-productions, therefore, are an extension of the idea that “‘internationalization’ and ‘localization’ need to be understood as co-extant tendencies operating within even the same markets” (O’Regan, 76). Now we can see that these tendencies do not just exist within single markets, they exist within single media texts; within individual, internationally co-produced films and television shows.

The proliferation of such productions, which seemed to provide something for everyone, makes sense, especially during the 1980s and ’90s, when the increasingly transnational nature of the media marketplace was becoming apparent and necessary. Such productions could be justified both by those who wanted to herald their cultural benefits and those who wanted to focus on their economic rewards. Their existence within the overlap of growing trends within the media allowed international co-productions, for a time, to represent the best hope for many different factions of the media industries. Perhaps then, it is not surprising to see that so many accounts of co-productions include some version of the idea that “international partnerships and co-production ventures have emerged as one of the most important programming trends of the 1990s” (Gershon, 48).

### **“The Most Effective Response Strategy”— The History of International Co-Productions<sup>3</sup>**

Although international co-productions increased greatly in number on television in the 1980s and '90s, the process had been used often in film since the late 1940s and '50s. The tensions and uncertainties that surrounded the film industry at this time generated the economic, industrial, and cultural appeal of international co-productions. The parallels between the industrial pressures on the film industry of the 1940s and '50s and the television industry of the 1980s and '90s, and the benefits and drawbacks of international co-productions in dealing with these concerns are significant. Understanding the history of international co-productions in films, then, lays the groundwork for understanding how they later function for television.

Even before the late 1940s, in the period in between the end of World War I and the coming of sound, European countries attempted to work together to fend off the influx of Hollywood films (Kristin Thompson, 105). Many within the European film industries embraced a co-production initiative that became known as Film Europe. While head of Universum-Film AG (UFA), Erich Pommer remarked, “It is necessary to create ‘European films,’ which will no longer be French, English, Italian, or German films; entirely ‘continental’ films, expanding out into all Europe and amortising their enormous costs, can be produced easily” (qtd. in Kristin Thompson, 113). In addition to co-producing films, European companies invested in companies in other countries and entered international distribution deals thus ensuring the international distribution of films other than Hollywood productions (Kristin Thompson, 116–117). Although this program only lasted until the coming of sound, we can see early on a mixture of interrelated cultural and economic motivations for international co-productions. Companies wanted to create higher budget productions in order to compete with Hollywood films. At the same time, the desire to compete with Hollywood was at least partly driven by nationalistic and cultural motives.



In the late 1930s, as European film markets either shrunk (in terms of revenue) or completely closed to Hollywood due to the war, the studios attempted to make up some of their lost profits by increasing their distribution in Latin America. Latin America was also a political focus at this time, as Franklin D. Roosevelt instituted the Good Neighbor Policy in 1933, at least in part to prevent the spread of socialism in Latin America (King, 32). The film studios were called upon to present positive images of Latin American locations and characters, which the studios attempted with limited success. The desire to export U.S. films of all types to the Latin American market, however, remained strong. One strategy for this, according to Brian O'Neil, was to block book English-language films with Spanish-language films. Initially, the studios attempted to produce Spanish-language films in Hollywood. Soon, however, the studios realized that they could save money by simply financing films produced in Latin America. RKO Radio, for example, invested 50 percent of the financing for a Mexican film studio in 1945. This mode of co-production allowed the U.S. studios to maintain a presence in Latin America without producing their own Spanish-language films (O'Neil, n. 41).

In Europe, international co-productions resurfaced as a popular mode of production in the period following World War II. This time, however, there were two major differences from the post-World War I period: first, governments became involved by creating co-production treaties, and second, the U.S. film studios participated in international co-productions. Government involvement developed as a result of the creation of a number of incentive programs throughout Europe. To rebuild national film industries that had been devastated by World War II and the following influx of Hollywood films, governments in some countries initiated production subsidies and tax incentives for national films. To qualify for these incentives, productions had to meet specific requirements concerning their content, their personnel, and their financing. As interest developed in international co-productions as a way for European companies to increase the budgets of their films and thus compete with the high budget Hollywood films, companies wanted to be able to continue to tap into the European incentive programs. Co-production treaties became a way for

governments to lay out how companies creating co-productions could create a film that would be considered “national” in all of the producers’ countries and thus qualify for their incentives. France and Italy were the first countries to sign a co-production treaty in 1949. Treaties between other European countries followed. Such treaties generally spelled out the amount of financing, the number of personnel, the language, and the content required to make a film under the treaty that would be eligible for each country’s incentives. The creation of international co-production treaties helped, then, both to formalize the co-production process and dictate terms of creativity within them by prescribing certain conditions necessary in order to create a production that would be economically viable.

International co-production treaties were not the only bilateral film agreements being signed by European countries. In the late 1940s both France and the United Kingdom signed pacts with the United States determining the terms by which U.S. companies could distribute films within and remove funds from particular nations. Along with tax incentives and subsidies, many European nations instituted quotas and other restrictive legislation that made it more difficult for U.S. studios to distribute their films and remove profits from Europe.<sup>4</sup> Although the U.S. studios chafed against such restrictions, in the end they established ways to make money from the funds that they were unable to take out of Europe. These blocked earnings, for example, were used to create subsidiaries in Europe, purchase distribution rights for European films, invest in co-productions, and produce films overseas (runaway productions). One of the most important steps taken by the U.S. studios was to have their European subsidiaries declared national companies. This way, these companies could produce films that qualified for the European subsidies and tax incentives (Guback, 165).

The major studios, according to Thomas Guback, were, in the end, quite content to produce overseas. During this time, the U.S. film audience decreased, competition for leisure time increased, production costs rose, and the Paramount Decision bit into the studios’ domestic profits (Guback 164). All of these factors made it more difficult for the major studios to continue their production slates. The lower costs of labor in Europe, combined with the subsidy programs,

made European production appealing. Furthermore, the changing tastes of U.S. audiences resulted in an interest in more mature films (Wilinsky, 82–90), a quality that could be assisted by “international” locations and storylines.

Co-production of European films such as Jean-Luc Godard’s *Contempt* (1963) and Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Blow-Up* (1966) was an additional attempt on the part of the Hollywood industry to tap into the U.S.-based “art house” audience interested in foreign films. Furthermore, production of European films could assist in reaching audiences within Europe. Peter Lev explains, “European markets became a necessity, not a luxury to American film companies in the 1950s, because the American audience for motion pictures was rapidly shrinking” (18). U.S. companies, therefore, not only created runaway productions of U.S. films, but they also invested money in many European art films. Ironically, while U.S. companies were co-producing art films, European companies were co-producing Hollywood style movies. As Tim Bergfelder notes, many of the European co-productions of the 1950s and ’60s searched for “generic formulae which had the widest possible appeal across national borders” (2000, 146). The action genre (and its hybrids—western action, historical action, biblical action) became most popular for co-productions (Bergfelder, 2000, 149). The focus on spectacle rather than narrative frequently resulted in co-productions with very high budgets, by European standards (Betz, 23).

Not only did U.S. companies invest in European productions, but as explained above, they did so in ways that allowed them to benefit from the incentive systems that had been created in order to fend them off. According to Guback, *Variety* estimated that in 1966 U.S. subsidiaries would receive 80 percent of the subsidy money distributed by the British Film Production Fund (Guback, 170). Many British producers actively sought out U.S. money in order to fund their films. Not only did U.S. involvement allow for an increase in the production budget, but it also helped ensure U.S. distribution (Guback, 171), a major goal of most commercially-minded producers.

We can see, then, that the subsidy system and the co-production treaties, which had been established with the economic and cultural

goals of rebuilding European film industries and encouraging competition with the United States, were in many ways usurped for the commercial purposes of the U.S. majors. As one Italian producer said in the 1970s, “We in Italy can no longer pursue films for the Italian markets. The costs are too high, and we can’t get our money back at the Italian box-office alone. We need American capital, we need the American market, and we need American companies to distribute our films globally” (qtd. in Bergfelder, 2000, 141). By the late 1960s and early ’70s, the United States’ role in European film production was well recognized. Anne Jackel noted that by this time, many of the treaty films were “international” films backed by U.S. money (88). And Guback wrote in 1969, “The British production industry, if one can argue that a substantial *national* one really does exist today, is little more than a branch of Hollywood, dependant upon American companies for both finance and distribution” (172). At the same time, U.S. investment in European art films declined, as the U.S. majors focused their attentions on the American art film movement of the 1970s (Lev, 25). Although the end result appears to be filmic co-productions that use the English language to focus on “international” appeal, for a time the intersection of the cultural and commercial considerations of international co-productions resulted in non-English-language, high budget, U.S.-style costume dramas, European art films, and U.S.-backed “national” films.

Importantly, Europe was not the only place that such conflicting motivations played out in co-productions. In the 1950s, for example, companies in Hong Kong worked with Japanese studios to co-produce films for the Asian market, and in the 1970s the major U.S. studios became involved in co-productions with Hong Kong. For the United States, Hong Kong action films appeared to be a way to reach a young, racially and ethnically diverse audience (in the same way that blaxploitation films reached this audience). The first U.S.-Hong Kong co-production was the classic Bruce Lee film *Enter the Dragon* (1973). The film’s Hong Kong production company, Golden Harvest, soon opened up offices in Los Angeles and has been active in the global film market since then (Fore, 46). Certainly these films went a long way to introduce U.S. audiences to Asian culture; however, they were primarily designed for economic reasons.

Around the 1960s, Canada also began to promote international co-productions with plans to use such projects to build its national film industry. According to Michael Dorland, the Canadian government hoped international co-productions would allow Canadian involvement in larger budget productions with international distribution thus boosting the industry economically. Another goal was to expose Canadian filmmakers to more established producers who could teach the Canadians about running a national industry (Dorland, 15–16).

Significantly, when the Canadian film industry faced a serious economic downturn in the 1980s, the industry looked to U.S. companies to help bring in capital and to the U.S. market as a main outlet for its product (Pendakur, 203–213). The Canadian industry wooed U.S. co-production partners and offered strong exchange rates and lower labor costs to encourage production in Canada (Pendakur, 215). U.S. companies took advantage of these benefits and particularly looked for projects that involved both a Canadian and a European company, preferably in a country with which Canada had a co-production treaty. This, according to Manjunath Pendakur, allowed U.S. companies to benefit from the incentives in Canada and the third country and offered an inroad to the European marketplace since the project would count as European product. The turn of the Canadian industry to U.S. partners, despite, as will be discussed below, the tendency of U.S. companies to take over any given project, signals the significance of international co-productions during times of economic difficulties.

In another example, in the 1980s, Latin America suffered from a generally weak economy. Funding and distributing films became a serious difficulty. At this time, discussions began to increase about developing a general Latin American market. While there were certainly partnerships between Latin American countries before this time, the downturn in the economy led commentators like Gabriel García Márquez to become vocal in the need for a united Latin American market to make higher budget and commercially popular films (King, 75).

In Asia, the U.S. film industry embraced co-productions as a way of creating low budget films that could tap into the straight-to-home-video

market (Morris, 185). In fact, the relationship between co-productions and the rise of home video is quite significant. As Paul Taylor writes, both U.S. film and television adopted co-productions in their “maturity” as they “fac[ed] rising production costs, audience fragmentation and a new threatening technology on the horizon” (112). For film, this period of growing instability was the 1950s, when shifts in the U.S. market and the pending growth of television viewership threatened the dominance of the motion picture as the main form of mass entertainment. For television these threats came in the 1980s and ’90s when the broadcasting industry (both in the United States and in Europe) confronted a similar crisis.

As many scholars have noted, the 1980s proved to be a period of change for the television industry, both in the United States and abroad. Within the United States, the rise of cable and satellite channels (and to some extent the growing popularity of home video) opened up a new demand for programming, and at the same time fragmented the viewing audience and eroded the power of the big three networks. Due to the argument that “air time” was no longer a scarce resource, the opportunities opened up by these new technologies also helped to justify deregulation of the television industry. This deregulation fueled station conglomeration, thus limiting the opportunities for syndicated programs. And, in the 1990s, deregulation led to the removal of the Financial Interest and Syndication Rules (Fin-Syn), allowing the networks to produce their own programming and paving the way for mergers between film studios/television production companies and broadcast networks.

Overseas, privatization worked with deregulation and technological shifts to create not only an increased number of television stations but also commercialization of these stations. The European market, therefore, grew while the U.S. market fragmented. As Simon Olswang explained:

With the coming of home video and cable and satellite television, traditional American television markets have fragmented whilst costs have risen to the point where increasingly in television the U.S. can no longer go it alone; where deficits for television series, movies of the week and mini-

series grow even larger, and where for the feature films the prospects in overseas markets grow ever more important—the U.S. television networks, cable channels and film studios are forced to look increasingly to foreign markets in the decision making process. (21)

Certainly, co-productions in television occurred before the 1980s. Public broadcasting outlets both in the United States and overseas felt the pressure of increased production budgets and competition with commercial outlets by the 1970s. European public stations worked together to produce programming, and the BBC was a particularly popular co-production partner for the U.S.-based public stations. According to Vincent Porter, by the 1970s, WGBH in Boston already had a bad reputation as a co-production partner for its tendency to make unauthorized changes to the television programs for its home market (8). Cable networks were also early co-producers (Strover, 107), frequently working with the European-based public stations as well as NHK in Japan to create programming.

For the broadcast networks, early participation in the international market involved purchasing interests in international television companies. The U.S. networks also formed early affiliations with broadcasters in Latin America, though, according to John Sinclair, they limited their assistance to technical and organizational advice rather than financial contributions until the late 1950s (38). Direct investment began in earnest in the 1960s when ABC entered a production deal with the major Mexican producer that would eventually become Televisa and Time Life invested in Brazil's TV Globo (Sinclair, 41). By 1965 ABC had financial stakes in 54 television stations in 24 countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia (Herman and McChesney, 21). By the early 1980s, ABC also held a 49 percent interest in Telemunchen, a Munich-based television production and distribution company (Gershon, 48). And in 1990, CBS and NBC had co-production agreements with British production companies: CBS with Granada and NBC with Yorkshire TV (Gershon, 48).

The move from financial investment to co-production arrangements reflects Carl Hoskins and Stuart McFadyen's statement that by

early 1985, industry participants recognized that international co-productions were “the most effective response strategy to the new economic pressures reshaping the television programming environment, in the USA and abroad” (220). The major networks ramped up their international co-productions in the 1990s, particularly as Fin-Syn began to fade away. As *Variety* reported in 1997, “these days being a major player in U.S. television isn’t enough. To maintain a spot at the top of the network heap, companies have to conquer the world” (Stuart Miller, M3).

According to Marc Doyle, these deals of the late 1980s and into the ’90s were not solely financially driven. Rather, by this time, co-producers recognized the importance of a creative collaboration (Doyle, 12). In 1991 an executive vice president for the Italy-based Berlusconi Communications reported that a company getting involved in co-productions “is not looking anymore just for money for his own production, but for a partner to help create” (qtd. in Glenn and Amdur, 23). At the very least, U.S. television producers needed to look beyond the tastes and interests of the U.S. market. As Ralph Negrine and Stylianos Papathanassopoulos write, “In the end, the liberalization of broadcasting systems leads to an internationalisation of television by forcing broadcasters to operate on the international stage—seeking funds, co-producing, merging and so on” (23). To do this, U.S. producers were challenged to “become more international in outlook and content” (Andrew Neil qtd. in Doyle, 119).

As this brief history of international co-production illustrates, the motivations for international co-productions on television, as in film, have always been a blend of interrelated economic and cultural concerns. Both a form of foreign and domestic media, both privately and publicly funded, both a means of production for the wealthy and poorer media makers, and both an outlet for distributing dominant and peripheral culture, international co-productions have a unique and complex position within the media financial and cultural economies. A more thorough consideration of the benefits and drawbacks of such projects will highlight the specific ways that the process of international co-production interacts with the industrial and cultural contexts in which media are produced.



## **“Fully Authentic”—The Benefits of International Co-Productions**

As their history illustrates, international co-productions have been seen by scholars and industry insiders to have a range of economic and cultural benefits. Undoubtedly, the economic considerations appear to outweigh the cultural considerations. Most likely, without the economic benefits, few companies would engage in international co-productions. Moreover, the economic and cultural benefits of co-productions are frequently intertwined. For example, Paul Taylor writes, “International collaboration is seen as a way of pooling together enough money to produce programming that will provide viewing alternatives to American television” (123). We see in this comment the desire to increase production budgets in order to offer a cultural alternative. We must recognize, however, that different parties involved in co-productions have different primary motivators. For example, while the governments that create production incentives and co-production treaties may be most interested in building up national culture, producers may focus on co-productions’ potential to earn more money in the transnational marketplace. Furthermore, these motivating factors can be flipped: some governments may have a primary goal of strengthening a national film industry for economic reasons, while some producers may use international co-production money to make their artistic visions possible. We must be cautious, then, about generalizing motivations and making assumptions about why others act. With that said, however, we cannot fully understand international co-productions if we do not consider who stands to benefit—and to lose—from this mode of production.

The most careful study of the benefits and drawbacks of international co-productions has been performed by Hoskins and McFadyen who, in 1993, examined the trade press for producers’ claims about why they engage in international co-productions. Hoskins and McFadyen found that the primary reasons for co-producing were: pooling of financial resources, accessing subsidies and incentives, accessing partner’s markets, accessing third country markets, learning from partners, reducing risks, and accessing resources (such as stars

and other creative personnel) and locations (Hoskins and McFadyen, 227–229).

Pooling of financial resources has been repeatedly cited by observers as the primary reason for international co-productions. Producers in smaller countries frequently view international co-productions as their opportunity to get involved in bigger budget projects (Paul Taylor, 101). Whereas their own small, domestic markets cannot support high priced productions, when the costs are shared and the potential markets transcend the domestic market, national production companies can invest more money. For many small broadcast outlets, both overseas and in the United States, “co-production may be the only way of participating in the production of large scale fictional programs” (Porter, 7).

Although many of these smaller companies get involved in international co-productions in order to fend off the presence of major U.S. films and television programs, even the major media producers now prefer to lower their risks by working with partners to produce product. These larger companies, however, could work with other domestic companies to lower their costs. The focus on international co-production reflects the majors’ interest in increasing their presence in overseas markets. While international co-production essentially guarantees distribution in the partners’ countries, the benefits go well beyond mere distribution. For example, international co-production provides the major U.S. companies the ability to enter other markets without setting up subsidiaries (Paul Taylor, 132). By working with companies in Europe or investing money in a project that is already being co-produced under a treaty, producers are able to create television shows with “national” or “European” status, or both, thus allowing the media text to qualify for subsidies and tax incentives and to avoid quotas that might limit U.S. product (Hirsh). Australian co-productions, for example, get local content consideration, tax incentives, and government funding (Cantanzariti, 11). Through involvement in treaty co-productions, the majors lower their risks and the amount of money they must invest in order to create a “quality” production.

Additionally, programs that are co-produced benefit from the insight that the co-production partners bring about their markets. The

inclusion of a “cultural collaborator in the creative process” can help produce a more saleable product (Hubka, 2002, 243). Not only will the content be more likely to fit the interests of the various audiences, but the program’s format (in terms of length, room for commercial breaks, and such) can be tailored for the markets and various regulatory requirements surrounding, for example, sex and violence (Hubka 2002, 235–37). The programs can be more fully developed so that they will appeal to the co-producing countries’ markets and seem more “authentic.” Such a process can limit what Carl Hoskins, Stuart McFadyen, and Adam Finn have explained as a media text’s cultural discount—the loss of value faced by a cultural product when it leaves its country of origin based on the fact that it will not be fully understood or appreciated by the new, culturally distinct audience. A television program, then, that is produced with a French partner may seem more “French” than if the partner had not been involved and may not suffer as large a cultural discount. After all, as John Frow explains, “under the particular conditions of a globally integrated cultural market it is precisely whatever can be taken to be fully authentic . . . that can most readily be sold on the export market” (17).

The television program *Scene of the Crime*, as discussed by Sharon Strover, illustrates the benefits of co-production for optimizing access to partners’ countries. Co-produced by companies in the United States, Canada, and France, the producers were able to get approximately \$200,000 per episode from a French network. Typically U.S. exports received only \$40,000 per episode due to the cultural discount. Because the program could be billed as French, and because the network could count it within its quota for airing French programming, the producers received a significantly higher sum (Strover, 114).

In addition to gaining access to the partners’ markets, international co-productions are often expected to travel well to third markets, simply because they are created to appeal to multicultural audiences. As Leo Eaton said of U.S.-Japanese co-productions, “If the two of us can co-produce together, coming from such wide cultural differences, then we will probably be able to produce a film that is accessible to just about any other audience in the world” (10).

Perhaps the most important market for all co-producers with the goal of global expansion is that of the United States. Regardless of whether a U.S. company is a co-producer, which for various reasons discussed below is only sometimes desirable, many companies hope that by co-producing a project, they will create an “international” program that can sell in the large and powerful U.S. market. Canadian co-productions are particularly aimed at the U.S. market (Dorland, 16). Production companies in Canada, imagined to be closely related to the United States because of geographic and linguistic proximity, are frequently sought out as co-production partners as a gateway to the U.S. market (Hoskins and McFadyen, 232).

Canada is also seen as a country that can easily “double” as the United States. Access to such locations, landscapes, and internationally known actors and actresses are seen as a reason for co-producing (Strover, 112). It is doubtful, however, that an international co-production would be created solely for such access.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, access to an advantageous exchange rate or lower labor costs could be the basis for an international co-production agreement (Pendakur, 25).

The ability to learn from international partners is another reason for collaborating on international co-productions. Media makers, for example, can learn about international audiences and their tastes, thus allowing them to produce products that will sell overseas (Strover, 112). Additionally, technical skills can be learned when international crews work together. Octavio Getino, a founder of Third Cinema, praised international co-producers for their ability to provide filmmakers with learning opportunities. Getino said about U.S.-Argentina co-productions, “U.S. co-productions are a business and I think that is fine. This helps us because it makes our film crews undergo some technical gymnastics . . . in film production. Some money stayed in the country too, but fundamentally it was in the experience” (qtd. in Falicov, 34). As discussed above, the Canadian government first entered into international co-production treaties at least in part to allow Canadian filmmakers the opportunity to work with filmmakers from around the world and learn about running a national industry (Dorland, 16).

These examples from Argentina and Canada illustrate that there can also be very focused cultural reasons for international co-production involvement. In these cases, the goal of co-productions was to provide knowledge that would allow for the development of a national film industry and thus a national culture. Regardless of whether this resulted, these motivations were taken seriously by many filmmakers and government officials. In addition to developing national industries, international co-productions are also often cited as a way of eliminating national differences and bridging global communities. As Carla Johnston explains in her book *International Television Co-Production: From Access to Success*, “legitimate co-production can serve an important role for the advancement of global understanding and the liberation of people from oppression, and it can be an economic cornerstone for both micro and macro levels of the communications industry” (2). A similarly celebratory reflection on co-productions comes from German media producer Regina Ziegler who says that a “further advantage” of international co-productions “is that national cultures will no longer exist . . . in their pure state within the European countries.” At a time when there’s a move to a European Community, Ziegler explains, international co-productions can foster a corresponding European culture (Ziegler, 6).

### **“World Wide Cultural Homogenization”— The Drawbacks of International Co-Productions**

The promotion of global or transnational culture through international co-productions is considered by many observers (particularly scholars) to be not a benefit, but a drawback of international co-productions. In their analysis of the pros and cons of international co-productions, Hoskins and McFadyen found that the primary concern about international co-productions reported in the trade press was that “the cultural integrity of the program produced is undermined” through the process (230). This drawback of international co-productions was linked in the press with a loss of control over the

project. The other main problems with international co-productions that Hoskins and McFadyen reported were the increased administrative costs and organizational difficulties.

So, while Johnston and Ziegler propose that the ability to create transnational media will be a boon to culture, many other scholars and industry participants worry about the cultural harm that international co-productions may cause. The major concern is that international co-productions will create homogenous programming that models itself on U.S.-style media. Cultural and national issues will be sacrificed to the creation of internationally appealing commercial films and television shows that are actually, as the *Electronic Mail and Guardian* referred to them, “polyglot mess[es]” (Worsdale). This is a problem, many academics claim, on numerous levels.

First, the erasure of national media is of concern. As Dorland explains, Canada’s intense focus on international co-productions in the 1970s resulted in decreased funding for national films (Dorland, 16). Pendakur agrees that even later in the 1980s, Canadian companies’ “preoccupation with the production of U.S. television series meant . . . fewer films and television projects that had their origin in Canada” (216). In the end, Pendakur argues, the model of international co-production resulted in an abandonment of Canada’s stated goal of using the process to build up a national media culture (Pendakur, 221).

Speaking to a group of public broadcasting executives about international co-productions, Eaton said that “the things that go into good films are universal. It’s just the styles and the way we approach our subjects that are different” (4). Although Eaton was suggesting the promise of international co-productions (since the elements that go into good media are “universal”) his dismissal of national styles and approaches demonstrates why some critics are concerned about the impact of co-productions. As Negrine and Papathanassopoulos observe, “French programmes clearly cease to be ‘French’ if they adopt North American pacing and production values” (101).

As national media content is overshadowed by internationally co-produced programming, concerns continue to grow about what will take its place. The terms applied to such programming, McTelevision, Europudding, or Euroschlock, illustrate the accusations that

these programs lack substance and artistic value. A classic example of Europudding is described by a German television executive:

I saw a German/Italian/French co-production. It involved three hour-long programs. A German girl went to Italy and met a young Italian. They fell in love. But the daughter of a French banker, who was more attractive than the German girl, eventually ended up with the Italian boy. . . . It's what they call 'Europudding.' It won't work. To construct a plot that should appeal to all three publics is too artificial. (qtd. in Johnston, 14)

Another more prominent filmic example of Europudding is the 2001 film *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*. Produced by companies in France, Great Britain, and the United States, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* tells the story of a romance between an Italian officer (played by American Nicholas Cage) and a Greek woman (played by Spanish actress Penelope Cruz) during Italy's World War II occupation of Greece. Set on a Greek island, the film presents characters who all seem to speak English—but with different accents (such as British, Greek, American, Italian). Many reviewers picked up on this assortment of accents, which seemed to contribute to the critique that the film lacked cohesion.

Not only are such productions devoid of complex issues, but they also illustrate a homogeneity that centers around the commercial impulses of Hollywood. On a very basic level, the downside of crews from around the world working together, is that they will eventually begin to create programs that look alike (Paul Taylor, 153). Additionally, time slots and lengths of programs must all be adjusted so that broadcasting systems around the world can share programs (Strover, 116). Furthermore, these programs, produced for international distribution with a special focus on the U.S. market, imitate Hollywood style and content in order to capitalize on the international success of U.S. media. Tamara Falicov noted that the international co-productions made between Roger Corman and his partners in Argentina overwhelmingly resulted in imitation (and exploitation) of Hollywood blockbusters (Falicov, 33). As Bergfelder

very strongly states, “Internationalization is exclusively linked to Hollywood’s hegemonic, imperialist politics, whose ultimate aim is world wide cultural homogenization” (2005, 323–24).

For aesthetes, less concerned with culture than artistry, this mimicry of Hollywood media leads to concerns about media quality. In her analysis of the relationship between international co-productions and nationalism, Strover writes, “In that coproducing is essentially an industrial response to needs for capital and to newer, wider opportunities for obtaining it, it should come as no surprise that new creativity is not its trademark” (121). The BBC in particular has come under heavy criticism for its use of co-productions, as critics worry that such programs will sacrifice quality in order to obtain funding from other countries and wider distribution (Nossiter, 133).

Questions about the quality of international co-productions also raise concerns for industry participants. While they may not worry about a loss of national culture and increased Hollywood-style homogeneity, they do worry that international co-productions will not sell. Toby Miller et al. explain that producers have “fears of creating the ultimate blandness of ‘un Euro-pudding’ that works so hard to include multiple linguistic, audience and production norms that it loses form” (92). Mark Betz remarks on the poor reputation of international co-productions, explaining that “the equation of coproduction in Europe with Hollywoodization and U.S. economic and cultural imperialism is ubiquitous” (18). The concern here is that if such media texts are not seen as “good,” then they will not get distributed or viewed. Entertainment lawyer Nigel Palmer cautions regarding co-productions that “most dangerous of all, is the (high) probability that the mixture of such disparate elements will inevitably make the sale of the film in the United States of America—still the key to a film’s success—extremely difficult outside the art house market” (5). Certainly the same concerns hold true for television co-productions, for which the result of Euro-pudding may also limit a program’s distribution potential.

The focus on the U.S. market illustrates the unequal levels of power held by companies in different countries. Control over the script, the creative personnel, post-production, and so forth, are all negotiated between partners. If a treaty is invoked, however, the terms of the partners’ involvement are somewhat clearly dictated. For



example, for an Australian co-production to qualify as a national product, requirements must be met regarding the source of the script, the financial contribution of the partners, and a certain number of points must be attained, with points being given for the involvement of Australian creative personnel, talent, and crew. Without a treaty these terms are determined by the partners. When a U.S. company is involved, most production executives say that the U.S. partners dominate productions. As one French producer explains, “Co-productions with Americans invariably suffer from identity problems. . . . The American determines the script. There are no compromises” (qtd. in Hoskins and McFadyen, 231).

In her analysis of Roger Corman’s co-productions with an Argentine company, Falicov illustrates the problems that arise when the partners are unequal. The Argentine production designer said, “Corman would send down these young arrogant men to work in special effects. They felt uncomfortable working in collaboration with the Argentine crew, despite the fact that many of us spoke English. They essentially gave orders and refused to hear our suggestions” (qtd. in Falicov, 33). As Falicov demonstrates, the production of these films primarily for the U.S. market from the start diminished the power and control of the Argentine production crew (Falicov, 37). One of the main reasons that Canadian companies are so appealing to many European producers as co-production partners is because they offer the North American sensibility without the U.S.-dominated power struggles.

In addition to concerns about media content and control over productions, the number of organizational and administrative incongruities between national media industries is cited as a drawback of international co-productions. Funding sources, regulation, time slots, programming styles, and many other factors vary greatly from country to country leading to confusion and higher costs (Eaton, 7–10). Simply dividing the labor in a way that satisfies necessary treaties often becomes an issue. An example of the division of labor for one Canadian-German animated co-production illustrates some of the complexities. The German partner handled “painting, compositing, and rendering the series with the help of a company in Hungary.” The Canadian partner worked on the “script, storyboard, design, art

direction and post production.” The layout and posing were split between the two companies and the digitally scanned animation was done by a company in the Philippines (Hirsh). This division of the work could undoubtedly lead to confusion, but most certainly created administrative problems in terms of communication (through different time zones), billing, organization, and creative collaboration. Although these concerns may not be primary in keeping companies from co-producing, they are issues that impact the cultural products that result from the process.

### **“Globetrotting through Convolutd Global Intrigues”—The Content and Culture of International Co-Productions**

This book will explore the various ways that these benefits and drawbacks of international co-productions work together to affect the kinds of television programs that get created. Primarily, these chapters tie together the way that the U.S. media—and its reliance on corporate capitalism—impact television programs that are ultimately intended for international audiences. Here, I suggest some of the main issues that will be touched upon in the case studies that follow.

Certainly, one of the main themes that will run throughout all of the case studies is the demise of national culture and the spread of a questionably “global” culture. As Bergfelder observes, “Amidst increasingly international casts globetrotting through convoluted global intrigues, the notions of national and cultural identity became dispersed or reduced to empty clichés” (2000, 150). As he further notes, the significance of the national versus global cultural debate, as it plays out in internationally co-produced media, is related to notions of identity and how people understand themselves and the world in which they live. Is it actually the case that audiences are instead, through international co-productions, being asked to develop a “cosmopolitan and classless identity in a new world made accessible and commodified by tourism, leisure and lifestyle consumerism” (Bergfelder 2000, 150)? As this is so clearly and emphatically explained by Edward Herman and Robert McChesney, “the global media’s

news and entertainment provide an informational and ideological environment that helps sustain the political, economic, and moral basis for marketing goods and for having a profit-driven social order" (10).

We can also question, however, as Paul Attallah does, whether the consideration of television's "canonical expressions of a national culture" is the most useful way to evaluate media texts (180). Rather, it may be more useful for us to question how international co-productions depict the concepts central to understanding culture. We must examine, then, the global culture being promoted by international co-productions and the ways in which these texts shape the cultural context in which viewers form identities, come to understand the world around them, and think about others.

Most frequently the new global culture is seen as Northern/Western (mostly American) and homogenous. Serra Tinic writes that international co-productions "aim at a form of universalism that homogenizes television content" (175). At a stylistic level, narrative structures follow U.S. patterns. Program formats, pacing, and content reflect the desire for U.S. distribution. There is no denying, however, that U.S. media is also affected by the need to meet demands of the international audience. As early as the 1960s, Guback recognized that "the connections established between the two industries are yielding hybrid films not typical of either the United States or any European country" (176–78). Strover examines the need for U.S. programs to consider European regulations regarding violence and sex, the interest in fewer episodes of any given series per season, the inclusion of international actors and locations, and a story that "operates on some middle ground appealing to both Americans and Europeans" (Strover, 119).

By examining these particulars in international co-productions we can get a better sense of the specific ways that such television programs reflect and impact the globalization of culture. Only through the specifics of television programs can we come to understand any relationship between the globalization of television and issues of national identity and the commercialization of culture.

Language, for example, is an important point of negotiation when trying to determine how to produce an international co-production. It is believed that, in general and for reasons discussed in the next

chapter, the programs with global distribution potential—and certainly the only programs that will be distributed in the United States—are English-language programs (Farhi and Rosenfeld, A1). The resulting increased use of English, even when there are no English-speaking partners involved, illustrates a shift in global culture. Additionally, as Strover illustrates, the subject matter of international co-productions represents a need to meet the interests of a varied audience. At the 1926 League of Nations’ International Film Congress focusing on intellectual cooperation, a recommendation was made to avoid content that would “arouse a spirit of animosity between nations” and to avoid degrading other nations/races (Kristin Thompson, 115). So, even the 1920s Film Europe movement reflected an understanding that international co-production must influence content. Today, the focus on action, travel, and history, for example, and the avoidance of political and controversial issues, certainly tell us something about the global audience and what it is imagined to find interesting. And, of course, the ways that these “non-controversial” subjects are presented and represented tell us a great deal about the middle ground being laid out for global culture.

Each of the remaining chapters examines a particular type of international co-production. The chapters address the historical and theoretical effects that the industrial mode of international co-production has on television content. Additionally, within each chapter two case studies are used to illustrate and flesh out the relationship between international co-production and television content. Significantly, all of the programs chosen in this book have aired in the United States and all are available for viewing on home video.

The first chapter looks at the genre of historical fiction to consider how international co-productions present the past to international audiences. The chapter considers the representation of concepts such as space and place; nationalism, localism, and globalism; and the role that family plays in these historical dramas. Ultimately, the chapter explores the ways that the past is re-imagined to appeal to audiences around the world while supporting the structures of global capitalism. While the examples in the first chapter illustrate the ways that nationalism can be elided within international co-productions, Chapter 2 focuses on how nationalism can also be constructed to meet par-

ticular industrial goals. This chapter focuses primarily on the co-production of “Britishness” by the A&E cable network in order to create programming that promotes its desired brand image. This chapter illustrates how A&E used international co-productions to create distinctive (and distinctively) British television shows to develop an A&E brand while still attracting a large and somewhat diverse target audience. Chapter 3 moves away from the “prestige” British programming of A&E to explore one of the most popular genres of internationally co-produced television: children’s programming. This chapter primarily centers on notions of citizenship, primarily in pre-school programming. The goal in this chapter is to consider how programs produced by companies in multiple countries specifically for international audiences can teach children about the function of community and the children’s role—and future role—within it. Chapter 4 explores the television documentary and the ways that international co-production shapes these television programs for the international market. Rather than focusing on the content of these “global” documentaries, this chapter analyzes the evidence that tends to be used within them. By looking at the modes of knowledge promoted by internationally co-produced documentaries, this chapter demonstrates how the process of international co-production can support modernity and the ideological constructs that support it. Finally, the conclusion will briefly bring together these separate chapters to discuss the overall implications of this analysis.

Guback, in 1969, perhaps best summed up the complexity of understanding media through the lens of international co-production:

The finished product will reflect universal idioms at the expense of national ones. These social and artistic features are further enhanced by the economic imperatives connected with the production. . . . While this can yield products which are technically slick, the range of differences among them is reduced considerably—as among loaves of commercial white bread. (178)

The following chapters will offer a more nuanced understanding of whether the comparison of internationally co-produced television

to “commercial white bread” is a fair one, and if so, what this means for the television industry and for global audiences arranging their cultural diets around these choices. As this book hopes to demonstrate, internationally co-produced television programs can be quite interesting—in their style, their narrative, their themes, and their ideologies. In the end, however, the corporate capitalist system weaves through and impacts these programs in profound and significant ways.