Media Globalization and State Power: An Elusive Concept in Social Sciences

HASMAH ZANUDDIN

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the usefulness of state theory and concept in order to explain media globalization. It is important for media researchers, lecturers, and students to understand that media and communication is strongly governed by the state. Thus state theory is the most useful tool to explain state behaviour. State theory and concept has been used and discussed extensively by Krasner (1991), Giddens (1985), and Skocpol (1985). "Statists" like them stress the prime importance of state, power concept and state sovereignty. Scholars of state actions, policies and transformation have generally presumed the existence of separate and analytically distinct "levels of analysis" (Waltz 1979; Singer 1961; Keohane 1980; Krasner 1976, 1991). The state does not make any decision in a doldrum without considering the surrounding factors. So, any decision would have an implication on other nations in the international system. The international system ruled by the globalization wave managed to create a new idea that globalization successfully reduced state power and side step the importance of state. However, no matter how strong the challenge and the globalization force, it could not erase state power, the importance of state and state sovereignty. It might able to weaken the state but it would still exist. So, a country's decision and policy could not be explained without the theory and concept.

Keywords: *state theory, state concept, media globalization, power, sovereignty*

INTRODUCTION

The idea that globalization erodes the power of the state has become conventional wisdom in globalization studies. As a process that supersedes geographical borders, the argument goes, globalization deals a powerful blow to the nature of the state. Governments claim to exercise authority over territorial space but this becomes increasingly difficult, if not impossible, amid globalization. Regardless of which dimension of globalization is considered, according to some globalization theorists

the result is the same. The rise of transnational organizations, the unprecedented worldwide expansion of corporations and market economies, the global capacity of military superpowers, the ability of technology to eliminate spatial barriers, and the consolidation of an international legal system, to mention a few dimensions of globalization, render obsolete the basis of stateness, the existence and protection of a sovereign territory (Wriston 1992; Featherstone, Lash and Robertson 1995; Waters 1996).

These arguments are found across the social sciences, and they are central to communication and media studies. The impact of international forces on state sovereignty is a long-running theme in the field of international communication. The cultural imperialism and New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) literature of the 1960s-1980s criticized the presence of foreign media, particularly from the United States, as a threat to cultural autonomy in the developing world (Dorfman and Mattelart 1972; International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems 1980). Several now-classic volumes have examined the challenges that international media flows pose to national autonomy. Kaarle Nordenstreng and Herbert I. Schiller's *National Sovereignty and International Communication,* published in 1979, laid the cornerstones for discussion of issues related to development communication, the "new information order", and emerging communications technologies. Long before the explosion of megacorporate megamergers, the birth of the World Wide Web, or the coining of the term "globalization", Nordenstreng and Schiller noted that "powerful forces have been trespassing over national boundaries on an unprecedented scale. The central organizer of this border-crossing has been the business system, operating globally" (1979: ix). They highlighted "the vital importance of communication in the struggle to achieve meaningful national autonomy" (1979: xi. See also Hamelink 1988). In a follow-up edited volume published fourteen years later, Nordenstreng and Schiller noted that the concept of national sovereignty in international communications was "a continuing, though problematic, theme" (1993: xi).

As several authors (Alleyne 1995; Federick 1993; Hamelink 1988; Mohammadi 1997a; Mowlana 1997) have argued, the coming of digital technologies and systems that transcend geographical limitations, coupled with the unfettered worldwide expansion of media and telecommunications companies, represents the latest assault on state sovereignty—that is, on the capacity of states to rule within a certain territory without intrusion from other parties. The premise of sovereignty is that states have undivided power (Held 1989) to make decisions within their borders without interference from other states or organizations. Communications sovereignty refers to states' exercise of authority over flows of ideas and information inside their territories. The gap between the ideal of sovereignty and contemporary reality, a concern of globalization scholars in several fields, has been particularly evident with regards to communication and information. Although states are endowed with the task of cordoning off communicative spaces, the control of these intangible borders is seen as a Sisyphean task in the face of media globalization.

While some observers celebrate the effects of media globalization on states, others find them deeply troubling. Optimists believe that cross-border technologies open up new possibilities for more people around the world to have better and faster access to more information. This position brings together Ithiel de Sola

Pool's "technologies of freedom" (1983) argument with antipathy to government intervention in communications that underlies, most clearly, the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. Media moguls, Western officials, neo-conservative thinkers, and technology enthusiasts have repeatedly touted the benefits of media globalization for democratic prospects worldwide. From a perspective that sees the state as the bogeyman of information democracy, the globalization of media technologies makes it possible to bypass government control. The democratization of information undermines the attempts of authoritarian states to control information flows and to curb the entrance of ideas that autocrats might deem inappropriate. As catalysts of the breakup of government communications monopolies, market reforms coupled with wider access to media technologies usher in information democracy. Any individual connected to the global information superhighway has access to more information than any of his or her forebears could ever have imagined, and this access comes substantially without government regulations.

Other observers, in contrast, find such rosy promises unconvincing and alarming. They see such information utopias as myths rather than real prospects (Ferguson 1992). For critical political economists, media imperialism theorists, and anti-globalization activists, the process by which media corporations gain power, and untrammeled market forces consolidate their hegemony is hardly a matter for democratic enthusiasm (McChesney and Herman 1997; Schiller 1996). In this view, the organization of global information flow along free-market lines signal the eclipse of state projects for self-determination and for the protection of autonomous information spaces, reducing states' historic grasp on communications sovereignty. With the possible exception of economic nationalists and cultural purists, proponents of this position do not romanticize state control of communications, even as they continue to warn against the damaging consequences of media globalization.

In this context, this article explores the role of the state in communications and cultural policymaking in a globalized world. Although there is substantial evidence that the forces of global media and commerce threaten the state in relation to communication and information, I seek to examine this argument more closely by asking what states can and cannot do. Certainly, states currently face changing and challenging conditions. The remarkable global expansion of media corporations, facilitated by liberalization and privatization of media systems worldwide and the development of cable and satellite technologies, has reduced states' ability to exercise power and maintain information sovereignty. It would be unwarranted, however, to conclude that the state no longer matters.

Reports about the death of the state may be greatly exaggerated, as many have written. Also, there is insufficient evidence for asserting the death of the state, because the state remains under-analysed in the literature on media globalization. Pinned between the global and the local, states continue to be largely absent from current analyses in media and communications. Fundamental to this article is a reevaluation of the notion that globalization erodes state power. As such, this article shares the idea that it is premature to conclude that the state is withering away and to assume, catastrophically or gleefully, a post-state world. I agree that the interaction between globalizing forces and states is more complex than is usually recognized in the globalization literature, and that states retain important functions

and are not likely to disappear (Evans 1997a; Hirst and Thompson 1995; Sassen 1998; Krasner 1991).

WHY STATE MATTERS?

My starting point is that the state still matters as an analytical category despite the considerable confusion that surrounds it. As Nikhil Sinha (2001) points out the state remains a problematic and elusive concept in the social sciences. In recent decades, renewed intellectual interest has not put this matter to rest but, rather, has revealed the difficulty in reaching even a minimal definition of the state that is widely accepted. There is little consensus beyond agreement that the state is related to rulemaking and enforcement within geographical boundaries. In Zygmunt Baugman's (1998: 60) words, "States set up and enforce rules and norms binding the run of affairs within a certain territory." Despite this persistent confusion, the state remains a fundamental pillar of the international system and fundamental point of reference at individual, national and supranational levels. "[A]s even the name of the United Nations reveals," Jürgen Habermas (1998: 105) points out, "world society today is composed politically of nation-states." Thus, the state merits analysis and this article examines the role of the state with regards to media and information sovereignty, relationships between states and communications issues and state as actors in media and telecommunications.

STATES, LAWMAKING AND POWER

The coercive and discursive powers that states hold in controlling communications are increasingly at loggerheads with globalizing forces. Governments cannot escape confrontation with powerful transnational corporations and international organizations whose horizons extend far beyond the state. States remain fundamental political units in a world that continues to be divided along Westphalian principles of sovereignty according to which states are supreme authorities within their borders.

The growing prominence of international agreements has not eclipsed the most tangible power available to the states: lawmaking. Globalization has challenged but not eliminated states as power centers (Garnham 1986)—sets of institutions where decisions are made regarding the structure and functioning of media systems. Just as states continue to assert and defend sovereignty by participating as autonomous organizations in international organizations, sovereignty is also expressed through a variety of media policies. Studies of media policies continue to demonstrate that, notwithstanding the strong combined pressures from external actors (global corporations, financial institutions and international bodies), states ultimately hold the power to pass legislation that effect domestic media industries. The dynamics of media policymaking, whether policies adhere to or maintain distance from the neoliberal cornerstones of privatization, liberalization and deregulation, suggest states' relevance as power containers (Giddens 1985). For many, the state remains the best hope for harnessing market-driven media globalization. While some authors see governments as guarantors of the interest of media capital (Winseck 1998), others hold democratic expectations and endow the state with important

functions. For example, Oliver Boyd-Barret (1997: 25) writes, "there is no other credible route [than the state] available for the resolution of significant media issues in the twenty-first century unless we are prepared to believe that the 'free' market is the best regulator."

Globalized and globalizing free-market practices are sweeping the world. Yet even in media systems ruled by free-market principles, governments continue to license broadcast frequencies, impose limitations on media and telecommunications ownership and operations, and enforce existing laws—in other words, to set up and monitor the basic legal system supporting market policies that underpin media systems.

However, in the tug-of-war over media and telecommunications, states are not equally powerful in terms of their ability to negotiate with global corporations the conditions for establishing media businesses in their countries. But, for every example of state powerlessness when confronted by the market juggernaut, there is a counterexample of how state power. Consolidation and concentration of ownership in media and communications are penetrating deeply into areas that were formerly highly regulated. A growing body of literature indicates how liberalization and privatization policies have opened up previously closed markets to omnivorous media companies (Bustamante 2000; McChesney 1999). Malaysia is one of the cases (H. Zanuddin 2005). At the same time, large states with promising market potentials are able exert influence over global media conglomerates. China, for example, has gotten concessions from Rupert Murdoch in exchange for allowing his media companies to enter the largely untapped market of the most populous country in the world (Gittings 1998). Emerging supranational organizations can command sufficient political power to counter conglomerate economic power as illustrated, for example, by the conditions imposed by the European Union on the AOL/Time Warner merger.

For states, retaining control over communication is in part a matter of economics. Just like any other product or service, anything legally produced and sold within a country generates jobs and tax revenues and contributes to GNP, and anything exported additionally generates foreign earnings, while anything imported drains national coffers. Media policies regarding taxes and tariffs aim to achieve economic results.

Further economic tools may be used for political ends. The protection of internal markets for a country's own media and telecommunications companies can be used by ruling parties or dictatorial regimes wanting to gain or maintain the cooperation of the domestic media. Notwithstanding globalization, governments retain the capacity to control the media to reinforce legitimacy or fortify a regime's hold on power. This use of the media goes directly to the fundamental role of media as carriers of messages. (This is not to deny that goods, too, carry messages, but without accompanying media to provide possible interpretations, the messages conveyed by goods are not transparent in the way that those conveyed by media are). Considering that power building today generally takes place in highly mediated societies, authorities resort to a variety of media mechanisms for instrumental purposes.

Governments attempt to manipulate news and intervene in various media and cultural matters. Covertly or openly, they court and cajole, control and caress

media organizations and orchestra news management strategies to gain political advantage and featly from different constituencies. Authoritarian governments in Latin America and in the former Communist bloc exerted direct control over media through employing censorship, licensing of journalists, or simply shutting down dissident media outlets (see Fox 1988; Fox and Waisbord 2001; Downing 1996). Despite the demise of authoritarianism and totalitarianism in many regions of the world, these sort of practices have not completely disappeared. Although they rarely advocate formal censorship to domesticate public opinion, democratic administrations frequently resort to more subtle methods, such as libel suits to muffle critical reporting or withholding official advertising to keep the news media at arm's length.

POLITICAL AND CULTURAL PARTICIPATION

Certain areas of governmental control have been less susceptible than others to globalizing forces. States continue to cordon off spaces for political debates. Within a country, the media are crucial to political participation. Democratic theories, whatever their conceptual or normative differences, consistently assign the media the role of providing information necessary for democratic governance and citizen participation. This premise underlies much of the analysis and criticism of media performance in contemporary politics (McQuail 1992). Insofar as authorities wish to encourage democratic participation, they may enact communication policies to that end. Government-mandated community access channels on U.S. cable TV systems are one example of such policy. Another is found in Germany, where broadcast regulations explicitly favour a strong community orientation (McQuail 1992: 59—60). Robert B. Horwitz (2001) describes the democratization of South Africa's broadcasting sector as one example. However, Malaysia's broadcasting sector moulds itself according to the needs of media liberalization and privatization; increasing in broadcasting channels without necessarily increasing local citizen democratic participation. In a way citizen gain better options for channels but on the other perspective, it is more towards enhancing Hollywood movie makers orientations (H. Zanuddin 2005).

States also still control the processes and mechanisms of formal citizenship and the movement of people across borders. Mobility of capital and goods, ideas and images, does characterize the current global era, but citizenship continues to be tied to states. Unprecedented numbers of migrants, refugees, and tourists daily cross political boundaries but states still have the privilege of citizenship rights and control. Law concerning the citizenship of media company owners are one of the issues of control. Many countries like the United States and Canada require owners of broadcast media licenses to hold national citizenship (United States 1998; McQuail 1992: 54). Europe's historic pattern of public monopolies of broadcast media is yielding to private ownership of new outlets, with citizenship requirements. The maintenance of provisions that establish that citizens should control the majority of media ownership was an important issue during NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) debates (McAnany and Wilkinson 1996). Rupert Murdoch took the exceptional step of becoming a U.S. citizen in order to further his media empire in the world's wealthiest media market—a glaring

illustration of the power of the citizenship requirement. Media market in Asia function differently in different countries, but the state often invoke citizenship requirements using various mechanisms and laws. Malaysia allows cross-media ownership but foreign ownership is governed and limited by the state through the Company Act (H. Zanuddin 2005).

Morris and Wisbord (2001) discussed at length the need to re-evaluate nation-based models of citizenship. There exist various forms of transnational political participation, and in a global sphere with growing numbers of diasporas, cyber-societies create cultural groupings of communities that cut across state boundaries. The availability of transnational media may facilitate the creation of transnational collective identities. Electronic mail groups and global news networks provide the communication backbone for global political activities. Constant flows of media materials between home countries and diasporic communities feed long-distance nationalisms. But, one can ask, does the cyber-community warrant an elimination of state control over citizenship? The political and cultural realms intersect in the formation of collective identities, a less tangible aspect of the relationship among globalizing forces, the state, and the media. Living in a country and holding formal citizenship engender a sense of belonging and identification with that country and fellow other residents—which cyber-community cannot do physically.

Observing these phenomena, some analysts have taken the notion of belonging that accompanies citizenship and applied it in metaphorical ways, coining phrases such as "cultural citizenship" (Garcia Canclini 1995) or "cosmopolitan citizenship" (Hutchings and Dannreuther 1999) to describe postnational forms of participation that supersede territorially based citizenship.

Media issues are of paramount importance for the prospects of "information citizenship" (Murdock and Golding 1989). Nation-based media continue to be important not only for propagandasing state ideals but, contrarily, for expanding the opportunities for citizens to produce and consume information that is relevant to them as members of political and cultural communities.

Information citizenship has an equivocal relationship with information sovereignty. Pursuing different goals and driven by different intentions, governments have invoked "information sovereignty" to justify various communications policies. Some governments have enacted statist cultural policies to protect indigenous media producers and fend off Hollywood interests. Some policymakers feel there is a need to encourage national media production and thus limit foreign values or identity messages carried by communications originating from outside a country. This desire is based on the notion that imported media material damages national and cultural identities (Schlesinger 2001). Malaysia has expressed concern over such development and has even set up a new ministry known as the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage in 2004. Its minister, Datuk Seri Rais Yatim maintained that "culture, arts and heritage is the pillar of civilization of a nation and it is up to us to uphold for future generation," (Rais Yatim 2005).

Other countries, such as Mexico and Brazil, have comprehensive and protectionist policies that have contributed to the development of relatively strong media industries (de Santis 1998; Sinclair 1999). Some governments in Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan have expressed concern over the effects of global media flows on cultural mores and gender images. To keep out foreign television programming,

Iran's Islamic Council Assembly banned satellite dishes in 1994 (Mohammadi 1997b: 88). Germany has tried to curb Internet traffic in pornographic and Nazi material by targeting Internet Service Providers (Vick 1998: 420). The Chinese government has blocked satellite TV broadcasts of BBC news. The Malaysian government take very seriously negative and pornographic materials on Internet and satellite television. The Ministry of Energy, Telecommunications and Multimedia and the Malaysian Multimedia Commission (MMC) were asked to implement greater control using Software and Content Code Guidelines.

The promotion and maintenance of national and cultural identities is a prominent reason why governments regulate certain aspects of the media. Nationally produced media can be used to promote local values and identities. Local identities may also be encouraged by language policies such as the Irish government's support of Gaelic media (Hall 1993) or Equador's bilingual education program for indigenous peoples (Rival 1997) which Malaysia already has in the education system and the terrestrial television news but not on satellite news which mostly broadcast foreign news such as the BBC or CNN.

But in the information realm, governments are finding it increasingly difficult to restrict access to external sources. Motivated, well-resourced, and technologically savvy citizens find ways to evade restrictions in order to connect to the Internet and to receive other globalized communications. Activist groups can now reach constituencies that were previously inaccessible. From the outside in, human rights groups such as Amnesty International communicate directly with affected publics, and from the inside out, opposition groups such as the Zapatistas in Mexico bypass traditional media and disseminate their statements worldwide on the Internet.

The tools that governments use that go beyond economic inducements and sanctions include limiting foreign material by imposing "domestic content" quotas requiring that a certain percentage of the content on cinema screens, television and radio be of national origin. Other than Malaysia, countries such as those in the European Union, made an attempt to engender a "European identity", which requires broadcasters in member states to devote 51 percent of their airtime to European works. This directive has significant loopholes and there have been conflicts about its implementation but it remains on the books. A number of countries throughout the world have also instituted domestic content requirements. Direct state support for film industries is widespread throughout the developing world (Armes 1987).

Malaysia is one example where the state is seriously making efforts to uplift the cultural service sector/industry. The effort is translated through the formation of the National Arts Academy and the National Filem Policy (Dasar Filem Negara). The National Film Policy (Kekkwa 2004) will give FINAS (Filem Nasional) a better role in assisting local film producers. A working capital of RM50 million was allocated by the government through the ministry to be utilized by local film makers. In Europe, for example, the U.K. allows tax write-offs for production costs of lower-budget films, and France subsidises its filmmakers (Hamilton 1998). Canada, prior to liberalization in the 1980s, had a strategy for cultural policies to maintain access to "Canadian voices" included support for the public broadcaster, protection for nationally based private broadcasters in exchange for their production of Canadian

voices and themes relevant to Canadians. Thus, a number of grant and tax subsidy programs were made available to support a space for cultural production in Canada (Communication Canada 1992; McDowell 2001).

Although factors such as language barrier and the size and wealth of domestic markets are responsible for different balances of domestic and imported media content (Hoskins, McFadyen, and Finn 1997), government policies are also crucial in understanding why communications systems world-wide feature a great deal of domestically produced content supplemented with imported content. Others, in contrast, consistently depend on imported media fare and have difficulties producing a steady flow of local audiovisual content. The cases of Canada, France, Japan and Korea, among other countries where the proportion of foreign content on terrestrial television remains low, attest to the fact that government policies continue to make a difference (Daeho, Kim and Seok-Keong 2001).

The flip side of controlling imported media is exporting media with the aim of disseminating certain messages internationally. Economic and cultural concerns overlap when exported media are deliberately used as carriers of positive messages about a country. The desire of some governments to keep foreign markets open for their media exports may stem from recognition of the direct economic benefits of creating an amenable environment for consumption of other products from the exporting country. The motivation is evident in U.S. film history (Guback 1969). Further, media can carry ideological messages that authorities wish to propagate internationally, a function that has also been noted in discussions of U.S. films (Izod 1988).

CONCLUSION

It would be premature to announce that states have become irrelevant either as sites of political activity or as hubs for cultural solidarity. Collective identity is still fundamentally tied to the state as both a power container and as identity container. State control over citizenship not only encompasses as the organization of persons within and crossing borders but also as a primary category of self-definition remains a powerful tool that has not succumbed to globalization (Waisbord 1998).

In order to understand media globalization, the role of the state and state power, we have to consider and understand state intervention in globalized communications. States maintain control over political tools, which are deployed differently in different parts of the world, depending on the type of regime, the and the level of media. It is difficult for all states to monopolise the information that citizens consume, but it has neither eliminated attempts to influence media content nor slowed governments' allocation of resources to make this possible.

States and global interests interact in complex ways. The tension between them is a defining force in contemporary media and telecommunications, and their overarching commercial and political environments. States remain important agents in shaping the global media order and the structure of the media markets. They perform different functions with unequal forces. States remain the focus of decision making on domestic policies, and they concentrate technical administrative capacities that are not currently replicated by any other institutional arrangement.

Not all states are equally important and effective in carrying out those functions, however. Power asymmetries among states in the international arena must be considered to understand how media globalization affects different societies. The U.S. government wields more influence in shaping international communications policies than any other state; members of the European Union (some more than others) speak louder than the majority of the Developing World countries in global communication matters.

These are some of the issues that form the multiple dimensions of the interaction between states and media globalization. It is more than relevant to understand and discuss the role of the state within developing countries in trying to secure a better seat in the communication market. It is also very relevant to understand the argument about the decline of state power by suggesting that the interaction between the global and the national is more complex than is generally recognized in globalization literature. It is also very important to have an analysis of the various capabilities of states with regards to communication, which allows nuanced and qualified conclusions that are not captured in broad-brush statements that announce the end of the state. The state will not disappear from international communication—as it should not be absent from debates about the internationalization of communication!

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