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Travelling Methods: Tracing the Globalization of Qualitative Communication Research

Abstract

Existing discussion of the relationships between globalization, communication research, and qualitative methods emphasizes two images: the challenges posed by globalization to existing communication theory and research methods, and the impact of post-colonial politics and ethics on qualitative research. We draw in this paper on a third image – qualitative research methods as artifacts of globalization – to explore the globalization of qualitative communication research methods. Following a review of literature which tentatively models this process, we discuss two case studies of qualitative research in the disciplinary subfields of intercultural communication and media audience studies. These cases elaborate the forces which influence the articulation of national, disciplinary, and methodological identities which mediate the globalization of qualitative communication research methods.

Keywords: Globalization; Qualitative research methods; Communication discipline.

Qualitative researchers currently work in an era of self-conscious ‘globalization.’ Like all humans, they are affected by recent transformations (e.g., the ‘compression’ and ‘flattening’) of space-time relationships in international politics, economics, and society attributable to technological innovation and neo-liberal hegemony. Uniquely, however, these phenomena encourage qualitative researchers to understand and perform their work *differently*. Our purpose in this essay is to better understand how these differences affect qualitative *communication* researchers. We begin by identifying three discourses which configure the relationships between qualitative research and globalization.

1. Globalization as a topic of qualitative research

Conventionally, qualitative researchers orient to globalization as a confluence of changing conditions which affect their chosen objects of study, and which provoke the revision of existing theory and methodology (Brown & Labonte, 2011; Featherstone, 2006; Gille & O’Riain, 2002; Quilgars, et al., 2009; Ramabrahmam & Hariharan, 2005; Sreberny, 2008). These conditions include the increasingly fluid movement of material and symbolic phenomena (e.g., bodies and information) within and across national borders, the erosion of the regulatory state by multi-national corporations and international regimes of aid and development,

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the use of new media by cultural members to expand their social networks, the acceleration of transactions created by the increased access of cultural members to shared information sources, and an increasingly-standardized global landscape of (predominantly Western, but increasingly hybrid) cultural meanings and artifacts created by converging media corporations.

In this discourse, globalization is depicted as a complex and urgent phenomenon, one whose material, symbolic, and cognitive components are to be explained. Three issues have been especially salient for qualitative researchers. The first involves the types, amounts, and effectiveness of influence exerted by interdependent actors engaged in international exchange (e.g., categorized as causality, co-constitution, and/or indeterminate ‘flow’). A second issue involves the tendencies towards integration / homogeneity and differentiation / heterogeneity that are experienced by groups subject to the forces of contemporary globalization. A third issue involves the rise of international social movements challenging neo-liberal hegemony.

Here, successfully-adapted qualitative research is depicted as uniquely capable of capturing the granular integrity of subtle, complex, and local activities conducted in relation to contemporary globalization. Cultural subjects are viewed as mobilizing their available resources to interpret their increasingly jagged and fluid forms of experience. Those resources enable them to conceptualize and interact with changing conditions (Burawoy, 2001), and to forge specific forms of connection and disconnection which serve their situations. As a result, qualitative methods are held to generate inductive knowledge which usefully complicates the macro-level abstractions and universalism of dominant globalization discourses.

2. Globalization as a transformation of the ethical and political contexts of qualitative research

This second discourse addresses the consequences for qualitative research generated by what de Sousa Santos (2006, p. 397) has termed “insurgent cosmopolitanism.” de Sousa Santos defines this condition as resistance practiced by “social organizations and movements representing those classes and social groups victimized by hegemonic globalization and united in concrete struggles against exclusion, subordinate inclusion, destruction of livelihoods, and ecological destruction, political oppressions, or cultural suppression . . .”

These consequences are also tied to the post-colonial atonement of cultural anthropology (with its attendant “crisis in representation”) famously performed in landmark volumes authored by Clifford and Marcus (1986) and Marcus and Fischer (1986). This discourse emphasizes the historical complicity of qualitative researchers in facilitating the global hegemony of Western culture and modern institutions (e.g., urbanization and industrialization). Specifically, their work presumptuously objectified the manifold cultural Other as primitive and exotic, depriving it of its rightful agency and voice (Sullivan & Brockington, 2004). As a result, qualitative research has been hoisted on the petard of its espoused values of empathy (*verstehen*) and diversity. Practitioners and participants alike have recounted the irony of how, in practice, those ideals contribute to ethnocentric knowledge which inhibits their very fulfillment. One example here involves the dependence of the ethnographic interview on distinctly Western, liberal-democratic assumptions concerning the inherently ‘private’ individuality of speakers, their related existence in separate ‘publics’, and their subsequent possession of relevant ‘opinions’ and ‘attitudes’ (Gobo, 2011, pp. 423-427).

This discourse expresses the mixture of anger, sadness, resolve – and also cautious optimism – felt among indigenous peoples and their scholarly advocates, as the former seek to move beyond their historical experience of degradation and exploitation under imperialism, and to develop distinctively *de*-colonizing structures of critical qualitative research. Jointly enacted with sympathetic researchers, those structures may realize a constellation of alternative values, including: *spirituality, embodiment, openness, equality, accountability, respect, collaboration, and empowerment*. Two prominent exemplars here include Smith's (2005) and Bishop's (2005) manifestos for qualitative research of/with the Maori people of Aotearoa / New Zealand, based on master principles such as *tino rangatiratanga* (self-determination) and *whakawhanaungatanga* (extended family-like relationships, based on consistent displays of cultural appropriateness and shared commitment to mutual well-being).

Depicted in this discourse, researchers use qualitative methods to engage distinctively local inflections of counter-hegemonic and post-colonial discourses. These inflections manifest as, for example, participants' vernacular conceptions of cultural performances and research ethics which they have deemed sufficient to honor – and perhaps recover – what has been compromised and displaced by the twin juggernauts of modernism and (neo-) imperialism (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, pp. 1118-1121). Here, qualitative researchers must develop improvisational skills required to negotiate emergent challenges posed by cultural members even to their ethically- and politically-sensitized positions [e.g., in fieldwork conducted among groups who have been historically victimized by a researcher's home culture (Uddin, 2011)].

Qualitative research methods as artifacts of globalization

Our third discourse is also concerned with global change and post-colonial politics. Distinctively, however, it depicts qualitative research methods as *a commodity circulating in a global geography of knowledge flows* (Alasuutari, 2004). This condensed image requires some unpacking.

First, it establishes that qualitative methods possess material status as artifacts fashioned and exchanged in particular international economies. Commentary here establishes the local heritage of qualitative methods as 'inventions' produced during the 19th and 20th centuries by British, Western European, and North American scholars. Although these methods were originally intended to solve particular problems faced by those scholars, they have nonetheless been "exported" to other nations and cultures, where their use has constrained the potential for cultivating plural and mutually-implicating systems of cultural knowledge (Gobo, 2011).

Second, this image politicizes the forces of supply and demand which structure this international knowledge economy. Here, commentary underscores the hierarchies of legitimacy and authority which have privileged the import of Western-based theory and methods to develop scholarly institutions in the nations of the global East and South.

These structures have produced several undesirable outcomes, which disadvantage non-Western scholars seeking to access and influence the mainstream institutions of contemporary social science (Liu, 2011; Ryen & Gobo, 2011; "World Social Science Report – Summary," 2010). Six outcomes are especially relevant. The first involves the normalization of Western epistemologies which universalize culturally-specific qualities of human subjectivity and agency (e.g., of rationality, individualism, separation, competitiveness, and strategic calculation). A second outcome involves the centralization of advanced academic training among institutions of higher education located in North America and Western Europe.

A third outcome involves several developments associated with the academic publishing industry. One of these is the centralization of academic publishing by and for scholars inhabiting those regional markets. This concentration of activity includes the publication of textbooks and citation indices, two genres which may further institutionalize ethnocentric knowledge of theory and methods. One consequence of this centralization is that academic publishing dominated by Anglophonic writers and speakers, a condition which affects the ability of academic journal editors to recruit “international” reviewer boards, and to mentor non-Western authors (Chenail, et al., 2007). Another consequence affects indigenous scholars who are either independent, or who are not affiliated with educational institutions that are able to pay the rapidly-growing costs of journal subscription and monograph-acquisition, which are set by multinational publishing firms. These scholars are often shut out of this professional archive.

Looking beyond the publishing industry, a fourth outcome of Anglo-American domination of international social science involves the privileging by research funding and publication gatekeepers of the unique experience of *Western* cultures, even when that experience reflects incomplete knowledge. A related presumption is that global audiences should already be familiar with those experiences (i.e., it is the experience of *other* cultures which requires contextualization). Fifth, the hierarchy of core-periphery relations among Western and non-Western researchers has discouraged members of the latter group from recognizing their shared interests. Ideally, these scholars would organize to develop greater capacity for alternative scholarship through forums such as professional associations, journals, and regular conferences and symposia (Hsiung, 2012). A final – and perhaps most pernicious – outcome here involves the hegemonic assumption that American and European societies represent pinnacles of human development (if not also virtue), to which other global cultures should aspire – a presumption which inflects their local development of self-knowledge and theory.

These six outcomes interact with other, even-larger circumstances influencing the global production of qualitative research (World Social Science Report, 2010). For our purposes, seven of these circumstances are especially relevant. First (and most obviously), global regions and states display uneven types and degrees of political, economic and cultural development. This unevenness creates divergence in national conceptualizations of general scholarly missions – for example, whether research should reflect the ideologies of nationalization or privatization, or how it should shape state policies. Specific national priorities for research topics and methods are affected as a result. Similar unevenness is displayed in the development of national infrastructures for research funding (with the lion’s share commonly flowing to the natural sciences and engineering disciplines), and thus in the capacity for different disciplines to effectively pursue their research priorities. Additionally, international NGO’s are increasingly engaged in the funding of short-term and applied research projects, which may inhibit local scholars from conducting longitudinal and basic research. Fourth, non-Western nations face continued challenges in repatriating their cultural members who have received advanced scholarly training in the West – although we may note the competing benefits of diversity created for Western institutions by their increasing employment of these non-Western scholars (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, pp. 1121-1122).

Fifth, international research collaborations continue to display undesirable patterns of core-periphery relations, and asymmetrical exchange between their participants. For example, Western and/or urban scholars commonly assume the privilege of designing research projects and analyzing data, while allocating data collection tasks to non-Western and/or ru-

ral researchers. Sixth, international scholars enjoy uneven access to communication technologies which facilitate these kinds of collaboration, and also subsequent opportunities for research publication. Finally, global institutions of higher education vary in their conceptions of academic- disciplinary identities (discussed further below), and in their composition of related units. This variation is further complicated by persistent efforts to promote “interdisciplinary” education and research, resulting in mergers or other kinds of restructuring of social science disciplines.

From these premises, this third discourse chains out a number of implications concerning qualitative research methods and globalization. One is that this history of methodological “movement” (Koro-Ljunberg, 2012) might have been (and thus may yet be) otherwise, had different power relations structured the allocation of opportunities and burdens to participating actors. Another implication is that qualitative research methods may be relativized as merely one discourse introduced into existing cultural systems that are always-already characterized by multiple forms (e.g., animistic geography) and practices (e.g., ritual prayer) through which cultural members have historically generated, tested, and shared knowledge of their realities. This insight invites a heightened level of reflexivity among qualitative researchers: that they might bracket and investigate the status of *their own methodology* within complex “ecologies” of knowledge operating among the cultural groups they study. In this view, qualitative researchers should examine how their “methods” are actually produced and consumed through specific interaction that occurs among various actors, practices, and resources, with all such phenomena considered to possess equal legitimacy.

This position rejects uncritical embrace of *either* pro-Western *or* post-colonial positions regarding the supremacy of political interests surrounding qualitative research encounters (Ryen, 2011). Instead, the relevant question is not *whether* Western-based qualitative methods, in either their traditional or “alternative” forms, “work” in various non-Western contexts. As practices that generate material effects for their participants, this capability is taken granted. Rather, an arguably more important question is: *What do / should we desire that “work” to be?* This question begs yet another: *How is that work subsequently accomplished by the participants in research encounters?* It is also assumed in this view that knowledge claims are contingent: it is thus more valuable to document the distinctive character of “globalized” encounters which produce particular “hybrid” and “creolized” configurations of knowledge, and to assess their implications for the needs of qualitative research stakeholders (Gwyther & Possamai-Inesedy, 2009).

3. Interval: Our Agenda

Our discussion to this point has reviewed contingencies affecting the globalization of qualitative research methods. There are at least two benefits of completing this inventory. The first is that such knowledge inhibits further reproduction of uneven power relations in the conduct of qualitative research (e.g., the enforced subaltern mimicry of dominant discourses), and fosters the development of alternative relations capable of generating diverse, sophisticated, and reflexive knowledge about human society and culture. The second benefit is that this knowledge permits the stakeholders of social science disciplines to better understand the historical practices and current status of those disciplines. As a result, these stakeholders

may be better able to steer the evolving future of global social science as a massive, influential enterprise. Successful stewardship, it would seem, requires increased self-awareness.

In this essay, we are primarily concerned with cultivating this third discourse to better understand the globalization of qualitative *communication* research methods. Our motives in pursuing this goal are complex, and thus warrant disclosure. We are U.S. (and also white, male) communication scholars (albeit with divergent training and sub-disciplinary affiliations) who are also the co-authors of a qualitative research methods textbook franchise (Lindlof and Taylor, 2010). Founded by the current second author, this franchise is now nearly twenty years old, and has generated three editions which have enjoyed commercial success in our home-nation market – and which have now attracted minor interest among British and Western European readers. We have only fragmentary information about the volumes' reception beyond these regions.

In producing these volumes, we have aspired to comprehensively represent the relationship between the communication discipline and qualitative research methods. Thus far, we have enacted that responsibility by surveying a variety of topics. These include the historical emergence of qualitative research within the discipline, the range of epistemologies and theories which animate disciplinary research, and the multiple, disciplinary subfields which variously engage the traditions of qualitative research. Along the way, we have attempted to address issues of post-colonial ethics and politics – particularly in considering the implications of the crisis of representation for the writing and publication of qualitative communication research.

Increasingly, however, we have recognized both the opportunity and the responsibility to better represent the international diversity of qualitative methods, as they are actually practiced by communication researchers. As a result, we have undertaken the reflection required to revise material in this volume that is unnecessarily mono-cultural.

In this process, however, we have struggled to develop sufficient resources. There is no shortage, for example, of discussions setting the agenda for critical-cultural studies of communication in the current era of globalization (Hegde, 1998; Shome & Hegde, 2002). Many of these discussions indict the parochial qualities of existing communication theory and research conducted by U.S. scholars (Gunaratne, 2009; Shome, 2006). And an increasing number of these works assert alternate strategies for representing the integrity of local, indigenous communication (see Chen, 2009). These discussions revise traditional conceptualizations of phenomena such as space, identity, bodies, gender, nationhood, technology, militarism, and discourse. Their discussion of concrete methodological issues, however, is generally scant, indirect, or nonexistent.

Meanwhile, current discussions of these issues, as exemplified by the works cited throughout this paper, have been largely authored by scholars *outside* of the communication field, and/or address the distinctive situations of *other* disciplines (e.g., anthropology, sociology, education, and psychology). Thus, we seek in this essay to develop a richer account of the globalization of qualitative *communication* research methods. Generally, we define these methods as *the specific forms and practices uniquely suited to the inductive and reflective generation of culturally-grounded knowledge about the myriad performances of human symbolic expression*.

As a result, we proceed in two stages. First, we summarize the global status of the communication discipline, in light of arguments developed above. Second, we provide two brief case studies which enable closer analysis of the contingencies which interact to shape the global flow of qualitative communication research methods. Our goal throughout is to expli-

cate the conditions which shape the potential relationship between global communication scholars and qualitative research methods.

4. The Global Communication Discipline: A Sketch

Is communication a global discipline? And if so, in what ways? For a variety of reasons, the answers to these questions are uncertain (Craig, 2008; World Social Science Report, 2010). One reason is that communication is a relatively young academic enterprise (i.e., approximately a century old) that has enjoyed less time than other disciplines to develop coherence – measured, at least, by traditional indicators such as paradigmatic consensus, unified pursuit of specific topics, and the degree of cross-citation displayed by the field's leading journals. During this period, communication has grown rapidly and unevenly, both within and across nations and regions. While that growth has undoubtedly been influenced by American and European scholarship, this influence has not been unidirectional, or determinate: across the world, the character of “communication” research and education vary widely (see Adoni & First, 2008; Martin-Barbero, 2008; de Beer, 2008; Eadie, 2008; Mowlana, 2008; and Thomas, 2008). This condition poses significant challenge for projects such as this one. As Kim, Chen & Miyahara (2008, n.p.) note, “Any attempt to generalize about [disciplinary] conditions and patterns in [a given region] immediately comes up against vast differences and anomalies that arise from [its] diverse cultures, languages, religions, and traditions.”

This condition is due in part to the distinctively interdisciplinary heritage of communication scholarship. Historically, multiple research traditions in the fine arts, humanities and the social sciences (e.g., film history, performance studies, media effects, etc.) have either affiliated with the study of communication, or have been incorporated by the communication discipline (e.g., as subfields). This mass of diversity organized under the banner of communication has contributed to the discipline's global visibility, but has also tested its capacity for managing fragmentation and entropy. Equally important, the configurations of these components at institutions of higher education have often been influenced as much by local needs and preferences, as by conformity to a single, consistent disciplinary identity.

Historically, the advocates of an independent communication discipline have asserted the converging topics of various research traditions (e.g., linguistics, psychology, anthropology, etc.) as sufficient basis for self-organization. This claim, however, is not honored by all scholarly cultures, some of whom prefer to view communication as a less-stable ‘field,’ incidentally composed of overlapping interdisciplinary agendas. As a result, competing interests may succeed in determining the identity of any particular communication unit.

And, to complicate matters further, political and economic interests in emerging nations have historically linked the imperatives of societal development to the creation of mass (and now ‘new’) media infrastructures. State, corporate, and religious authorities have subsequently invoked this linkage to control the development of these infrastructures, the agenda of national media scholars, and the institutional production of communication professionals to serve local industries of journalism, telecommunications, broadcast media, public relations, marketing, and advertising. As a result, communication programs around the world vary widely in their political relations with state institutions, and with the sub-state actors vying to influence and replace them. One example here involves whether and how communication programs integrate the missions of intellectual development and professional training, and the

extent to which that integration is experienced by their stakeholders as complementary or competitive.

To this point, we have traced the myriad conditions which shape the international flow of qualitative communication research methods, including the evolving status of communication as a global discipline. We may conclude this inventory by noting six additional factors which may affect this relationship, including:

- The role of professional associations in cultivating international networks of communication researchers, and methodological traditions;
- The institutionalization of methodological forms and practices among communication researchers affiliated with particular subfields or areas of study, based on shared problems and shared habits of solving them;
- The role of international and interdisciplinary journals in serving as proxy forums for the development by communication-affiliated readers of methodological agendas;
- Intergenerational networks of advisors and advisees, and synergy among long-time local colleagues, which may combine to shape the methodological identity of a particular communication program (or a regional cluster of programs);
- International variation among communication scholars in access to external funding sources, and in constraints imposed by those sources on their categorization and use of ‘legitimate’ theories, topics and methods; and finally,
- Variation in institutional requirements for the research performance of communication faculty, which may influence the topics, theories and methods they select by for use in their own – and in their students’ – research.

How might this inventory be revised to produce a more concise narrative of the global flows of qualitative communication research methods? As we have noted, existing literature in the discipline is largely silent on this question. Some scattered clues however, indicate how various factors may converge in particular moments and places, for particular groups of communication scholars, to open and foreclose articulations of their national, disciplinary, and methodological identities. In the field of media studies, for example, Ndela (2009) has discussed the successive impacts of colonialism, development, pro-democracy movements, and the HIV/AIDS crisis on the development of sub-Saharan African audience research. Here also, Murphy and Kraidy (2003) have discussed the role of globalization in stimulating new associations between the methods of audience ethnography and the subfield of international communication. In the field of discourse analysis, Chinese scholar Shi-xu (2012), has criticized the “repressive” circulation of “irreverent, over-simplistic” (p. 490) Western theories and methods, and has argued for an alternative project of “Cultural Discourse Studies” that is both more “locally grounded . . . and globally minded” (p. 485).

In this next section, we extend these contributions by discussing two separate cases. For each case, our guiding questions include the following: *How do these artifacts display the identification of associated researchers with the following three entities?*

- The professional, academic discipline of Communication
- The traditions and practices of qualitative research methods
- Local, regional, national, and international cultures

Answers to these three questions scale up to address one that is overarching: *How do these cases display articulations within and between these categories of identification which improve our understanding of the global flows of qualitative communication research methods?*

5. Case Study I: Intercultural Communication in Western Europe

Our first case study is taken from the on-line, open-access publication *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung* (Forum: Qualitative Social Research; hereafter, *FQS*). This peer-reviewed, multilingual journal was established by a group of German social scientists in 1999, and focuses on “empirical studies conducted using qualitative methods, and in contributions that deal with the theory, methodology and application of qualitative research” (<http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/about/editorialPolicies#focusAndScope>).

The corpus for this case involves a 2009 “thematic issue” of *FQS* devoted to the topic of “qualitative research and intercultural communication” (<http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/issue/view/30>). This particular thematic issue yielded 26 articles authored or co-authored by 34 distinct scholars. The reported national residence of these authors spanned 7 countries in Great Britain and Western Europe¹, with the majority (56%) living and working in Germany. Their reported academic affiliations included 13 fields and disciplines², with the highest percentage of authors (38%) affiliating with Education.

In their introduction to this thematic issue (Otten, et al., 2009), the guest editors note that these submissions provide the opportunity to deepen readers’ understanding of several topics, including: comparison and contrast of interdisciplinary conceptualizations of culture, and of their applications in qualitative research; the mutual accommodation of tradition, topic, and methodology required in qualitative studies of intercultural communication; and the potential for increased clarity and coherence generated by mapping the intercultural communication field against qualitative research traditions.

Space does not permit full discussion of the content of these articles, which includes discussion of founding figures (e.g., Edward T. Hall); interdisciplinary influences (e.g., cultural anthropology); theoretical traditions (e.g., phenomenology); methodological approaches (e.g., autoethnography); practical issues (e.g., the selection of language used in multilingual interview contexts), and specific research findings pertinent to the study of intercultural communication. Instead, we focus here on the ability of this corpus to illuminate the articulation of qualitative research methods with localized manifestations of the communication discipline. As a result, we treat three distinct themes.

Our first theme involves the triadic – and mutually constitutive – relationship depicted in these articles between the phenomena of intercultural communication, qualitative research, and globalization. This theme captures the ways in which phenomena nominally attributed to any one of these categories frequently exceed its apparent boundaries to implicate and co-constitute phenomena associated with another category. As a result, we are able to see how a particular field of communication inquiry distinctively activates the global potential of qualitative research methods.

This theme is apparent in several arguments made in the issue’s articles. At a basic level, for example, intercultural communication has historically been concerned with the constitution of identity and difference within and around the geo-political “container” of the nation-state. As a result, it is uniquely sensitive to the dislocating and de-territorializing impacts of contemporary globalization. Additionally, as demonstrated by the profile of issue contributors, the international scope of this topic facilitates the development of a global infrastructure of related research and education. The distinctively European composition of these authors will be discussed further below; suffice for now to note that it is international (although not exhaustively so).

A third argument demonstrating this theme of co-constitution involves the significance of cultural reflexivity for each of the three topics. Simply stated, the discourses of qualitative research, globalization, and intercultural communication each emphasize (although in different ways) the importance of relativizing the cultural particularity of knowing and acting subjects in order to produce accurate knowledge and successful relationships. Qualitative research and intercultural communication, for example, have long shared the icon of the ‘stranger’ confronted with the existential and logistical challenges of displacement, learning, and adaptation that arise from contact with the ‘foreign’ Other. Indeed, qualitative research methods may constitute an especially rigorous, academic-professional protocol for the performance of what is otherwise. . . intercultural communication. As a result, several authors in this special issue note that qualitative researchers of intercultural communication are themselves culturally-situated and -implicated knowers. In order to uphold the ethical and political commitments of contemporary cultural theory (e.g., towards “coexistence and social justice in a multicultural world”; Aneas & Sandin, 2009, n.p.), these researchers must continuously monitor the influence of their primary acculturation (e.g., as nationalism, ethnocentrism, or racism) on their evolving understandings of – and relationships with – research participants (Aneas & Sanden, 2009; Otten & Geppert, 2009; Trahar, 2009).

This imperative of reflexivity articulates with an ontology emphasizing the phenomenal qualities of mediation, partiality, fluidity, multiplicity, simultaneity, interdependence, and emergence. These conditions only intensify as qualitative intercultural communication researchers engage “the social fact of rapidly changing patterns of global mobility and the emergence of [highly ephemeral] transnational / transcultural spaces” (Otten & Geppert, 2009, n.p.; see also Schroer, 2009). Such developments problematize key conventions of intercultural communication research, such as the comparison of apparently distinct national cultures, the classification of researchers’ positionality in relation to their chosen sites (e.g., as “insider” or “outsider”; Sheridan & Storch, 2009), and the preference for studying speech over media cultures (Hepp, 2009). For Hoffman (2009, n.p.), these developments have effectively collapsed conventional boundaries between the topic and context of intercultural communication research, with unfortunate consequences for methodological integrity. “Global trends in structural change involving higher education, international migration, academic mobility patterns, interdisciplinary trends and demographic changes in the populations of many countries,” Hoffman argues, have all converged to undermine the strength of “national, institutional, disciplinary or even departmental traditions regarding research design, comparative methodology, and instruction in the use of research methods.”

Our second theme in this case study involves the implications for tracing the global circulation of qualitative *communication* research methods posed by the interdisciplinary profile of these contributors. That is, if this special issue depicts the relevant identities of British and European researchers claiming some ownership of the study of intercultural communication, it is clear that there is no exclusive correspondence between this research program and the discipline of communication. Instead, we see that the complex dimensions of this topic (e.g., psychological, social, political, etc.) and its tendency for related phenomena to manifest in particular institutional spheres (e.g., of business, education, politics, etc.) have historically invited scholars from implicated fields and disciplines to invest in its research. Conflating these two categories with a third category of “perspectives,” Otten and Geppert’s list of the provenances of intercultural communication research (2009, n.p.) includes psychological and cognitive anthropology; symbolic and interpretive anthropology; sociolinguistics and ethnog-

raphy of communication; post-colonial theory and critical-cultural studies; and social practice theory. As a result, note Otten and Geppert (2009, n.p.), intercultural communication “can be considered as a specific sub-area of the cultural and social sciences” writ large. Sheridan and Storch (2009, n.p.) note similarly that, in studies of transnational phenomena, “there is an *interdisciplinary dynamic in which theories from social science* still set the larger framework [for studying] processes of cross-cultural adaptation and intercultural communication” [emphasis added]. Clearly, the communication discipline is not depicted here as a primary or dominant “home” for this topic.

Our third and final theme concerns the ways in which this corpus displays the overlapping cultural conditions of British and Western European academics, whose work subsequently depicts some shared traditions and concerns. We hesitate to proceed here, because this framing may suggest that our discussion is regressing to reduce and essentialize these authors, as if the significance and implications of their work is determined by our attribution of a particular (inter-)national profile. Instead, we seek to use the concept of geopolitical affiliation to explore the potential significance of this artifact for our guiding questions. We are clear that any such proposed explanation must remain sensitive to the variety of – and interaction between – identity formations which may influence configurations of methodological and disciplinary discourse. That said, these articles display concerns and influences which may be characterized as distinctively Western European – and particularly, German.

A seemingly trivial example here involves patterns of sources cited in these articles. U.S. and Anglophonic readers may be struck by their extensive citation of German-only publications (both journals and volumes; see Bua, 2009), as well as their relatively infrequent citation of journals published by leading North American professional groups such as the National Communication Association, the International Communication Association, the Broadcast Education Association, or the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. A more significant phenomenon suggested by these patterns is the role of particular figures and sources who may serve as locally-preferred portals to the international universe of academic knowledge on a given subject. Take for example the following excerpt from Kruse’s (2009, n.p.) discussion of the ethnomethodological concept of indexicality:

Garfinkel’s work refers extensively to the work of Karl Mannheim, which was unable to find any reception in Germany for a long time. It was only through the work of Ralf Bohnsack, which refers in its discussion of the documentary method to the work of both Garfinkel and Mannheim, that Mannheim was able to be recovered.³

For our purposes, the significance of this passage lies in its development of a particular relationship between its author, text and readers. Through this relationship, the concerns of a particular regional group of scholars (i.e., 20th and 21st-century German sociologists) are foregrounded as a frame for conceptualizing the relationship between intercultural communication and qualitative research methods.

Reading the articles through this lens, other distinctively German institutions emerge as potential mediators of this relationship, including: disciplinary research traditions (e.g., of *Bildungsgangforschung*, or empirical study of learner development in education; Evers, 2009); methodological techniques [e.g., “structure formation,” derived from 1980’s-era German educational psychology (Weidemann, 2009) and degree programs (e.g., the *Diplomwirtschaftshispanistik*, whose curriculum joins the study of business, culture, and foreign languages (Berkenbusch, 2009)).

Another dimension of this theme involves the persistent concern of these researchers with the situation of international immigrants and refugees, particularly those from the nations of the Middle East (Thielen, 2009), and the global South and East (Sheridan & Storch, 2009). This concern may be characterized as distinctively Western European in that the dense proximity of nations in this region, their (for several) historical status as former empires, and the recent rise in economic migration, asylum-seeking, and ethnic tensions associated with the formation of the European Union, have all converged to prioritize this issue for European communication scholars (McQuail, 2008). These dynamics create unique research sites [such as “reception classrooms” in primary school systems in the Catalan region of Spain (Vera, et al., 2009)]; recurring methodological issues (such as the reluctance of members of formerly Communist cultures to sign informed consent forms; Sheridan & Storch, 2009); and distinctive patterns of findings (e.g., that multi-lingual immigrants choose which language to speak in a given context based on its ability to accomplish relevant social purposes; Temple and Koterba, 2009). Additionally, these articles display the unique character of geopolitics associated with complex national histories in this region. That is, for U.S. readers, some of whom remain desensitized to the significance of imperialist history and subnational sovereignty movements, overt discussion in these articles of post-colonial responsibility (Trahar, 2009) and of complex entities such as cross-border universities (Hiller, 2009) and jointly-governed, autonomous regions (Bua, 2009) may feel distinctly “foreign.”

6. Case Study II: Moroccan Media Audience Studies

Our second case study focuses on the adaptation of the global discourse of qualitative research methods to studying Moroccan audiences for transnational television. A relevant backdrop for analyzing this case are the institutional challenges of studying media audiences in the Arab world – challenges which reflect the low priority accorded the social sciences generally in the Middle Eastern academy. Chief among these challenges are the meager funding for research activity; an insufficient base of research infrastructure (e.g., library collections and journal subscriptions, computing capacity, data networks); faculty and staff that are chronically underpaid and poorly trained, by Western/Northern standards; academic freedoms that are absent, lax, or only intermittently protected; and burdensome government regulations that often slow down, if not impede, the conduct of certain types of research, such as public opinion polling, that may be considered too politically sensitive (Amin, 2008).

The long-term accumulation of these deficits has had systemic impacts throughout the region (Amin, 2008; Matar & Bessaïso, 2012; Sabry, 2008). These include: the stifling of innovation and intellectual entrepreneurship; the lack of media research that aims to critique (or help reform) the unequal relations of power, rights, and resources in the societies; and the still-unfulfilled quest for legitimacy of the idea of independent inquiry. Such conditions undoubtedly shape indigenous notions of what it means to be a scholar in the Arab context, particularly in relation to the Western normative model of scholarly actors functioning effectively and semi-autonomously in the public sphere, with an “invisible college” of peers providing significant input and supervision regarding the quality of their performance.

The legacy of imperialism imposes further challenges for the emergence of qualitative communication research – a legacy that can be traced through a long period of U.S.-dominated agendas of research programs and methods. As Amin (2008) notes, the Western re-

search expertise imported into the region during and after the post-independence years of the 1960's and 1970's aligned closely with the nation-building concerns of Middle Eastern governments. The pragmatic, capital-intensive business of constructing broadcast systems and measuring their audiences left little room for the "luxury" of communication theory (p. 71). Even today, among those regimes that encourage the training of faculty and graduate students in audience research techniques, the intent is to "[push] research into narrow channels . . . media research that promotes politically established goals of national development and national unity" (p. 70).

Given the background reviewed here, it is perhaps unsurprising that knowledge of qualitative methods – and their theoretic counterparts of cultural, critical, feminist, and post-colonialist studies – were virtually unknown in the Arab world until recently (Abdel Rachman, 1998; Amin, 2008; Matar & Bessaïso, 2012). A few intrepid media scholars have since gone into the field in certain Arab countries (e.g., Kraidy, 2003), and cultural anthropologists increasingly advocate for ethnographies of the lived experience of Arab media audiences (Abu-Loughod, 1997; Zayani, 2011). In addition, rapidly emerging signs of modernity throughout the region – viz., liberalized media regulations; the rising popularity of transnational media content articulating secular values and alternative political viewpoints; and the volatile (and still ongoing) transformation of civil societies following the populist Arab uprisings of 2011 – are creating more favorable opportunities for the study of globalization and media.

As discussed earlier in this paper, the project of expanding knowledge of the range of methodological possibilities for locally defined purposes is critical to securing stakeholder involvement in, and support of, the qualitative research enterprise. This project is illustrated in Douai's (2010) effort at retrospectively making sense of the uses of qualitative methods within the particularities of the Moroccan cultural milieu. Written at a moment defined by "a growing need for Arab media researchers to outline some of the opportunities and challenges facing audience research in the region" (p. 80), Douai conceives the goal of his analysis as "[helping] move the burgeoning field of Arab media studies and research forward by sharing the insights gleaned from field research." This article is in fact one of the first explicitly "methodological" analyses of its kind to be addressed to the core membership of this subfield.

Pursuant to his stated goal, the author first enacts an overview of the major audience research traditions from the 1940's to the present, and concludes the section by arguing that a commitment to employing any of the theoretical approaches to the media audience – but especially those that privilege the localized, social negotiations of textual meaning – requires an alert, reflexive awareness of how study participants understand and react to the visible signs of the research process and the tactical actions and perceived motives of investigators. Douai then introduces two field research projects conducted in Morocco in 2002 and 2008. The first project concerned Moroccan adolescents' motivations for viewing non-Moroccan television programming, while the second focused on the perceptions of international broadcasts, most prominently the U.S.-sponsored station Al-Hurra, by a more general Arab audience. Performing the roles simultaneously of principal investigator and native culture member (describing himself as "of Moroccan origin [with] strong family and friendly connections in the country"; p. 82), Douai generated data from more than 700 participants through a combination of survey questionnaires, focus group interviews, and personal interviews.

Douai's account of the practices he deployed in the two studies is initially striking for its faithful rendition of the traditional, instrumental narratives of qualitative research. The article reconstructs a series of familiar rituals for normalizing the research intervention, such as: the

systemization of a “recruitment process” involving a “contact person” from the community and the gradual development of a “diverse pool” of participants; the identification of neutral (or benign) “sites” for meeting with participants (e.g., coffee *cafes*); the use of a script designed to “educate” focus group members in a preferred social “etiquette” for engaging each other; the tactical gambits (well-practiced explanations, queries, gestures, etc.) used during meetings with participants to achieve their “empowerment” and assure their “comfort.” That these rituals succeeded so well in accomplishing their instrumental purposes may be testament to the cross-cultural durability and malleability of the methods, to the disciplined resourcefulness of the author, and just as importantly, to the willingness and ability of Moroccan people to yield that specific performance of themselves which Douai was seeking to capture.

However, the author also depicts on-the-ground encounters with the cultural members that disrupted, or otherwise called into question, the efficacy of the canonical, globally circulating narratives of qualitative research. With respect to the issue of *time*, Douai recalls a “serious problem” occurring during several of the focus group interviews, in which some participants would arrive late, sometimes very late, to their appointments. Late arrivals, he explains, often unduly prolonged the length of the meeting, to the detriment of the others, and “tend to subtly disseminate a spirit of chaos, disorganization, and even rebellion among the rest of participants” (p. 83). Trying to reconcile the Arabs’ customary “relaxed attitude” toward punctuality, with the imperative of focus group time management, Douai opts for the middle ground: Emphasizing the virtues of arriving on time, while preparing for “a good deal of flexibility . . . when dealing with study participants.” Globalization, he notes, is gradually shifting Arabs’ behavior away from the traditional “polychronic” sense of time, but apparently not enough at this point to reformulate the group interview in a more culturally-fitting manner.

Douai describes his struggle to recruit Arab women and thus capture their discourse concerning the U.S.-supported news channel Al-Hurra. Here Douai admits that all of his initial contacts were men until he began to realize that the participant pool consisted almost entirely of men; he then tried using a female contact to recruit women, “but this strategy failed too” (p. 84). Douai attributed the failure to two phenomena. First, he discovered through anecdotal sources that Moroccan women generally prefer light entertainment shows over watching news channels, and therefore a solicitation to talk about Al-Hurra television was of no interest to them – “a significant finding in itself since it bespeaks of how patriarchy and traditional and cultural mores persist in Morocco probably in defiance of modernity” (p. 84). Second, the intended *café* settings for interviewing women proved to be problematic due to widespread cultural codes that couple attributions of “loose, unwonted behavior” (p. 85) with public places like coffee houses. Douai asks, “Why talk about *cafés* as a site of research?” He answers this question by way of a digression about the distinctive roles played by the *café* in the geography of Moroccan life, as a dark, cool refuge for pausing during the day, sipping a drink, socializing, viewing television – and as such, for the author, “observing what people are watching in a *café* simulates perfectly their daily media routines.” Be that as it may, Douai actually provided an answer to a different question: Why talk about a site of research as a *café*? To that question, qualitative researchers spend their entire careers learning and relearning a simple truth: Social scenes will eventually yield their secrets to us, and will do so without our bidding, but only if we take our time, pay our respects, and are willing to lose ourselves for a while.

Finally, under the rubric of *cultural* issues, Douai considers the threat of confrontational participants. Antagonism expressed toward the United States – aroused by Douai’s questions

about Al-Hurra – occupied many of the interviews and often forced the author into a defensive posture, but doubts about the legitimacy of the project also provoked pointed questions with broad implications for doing qualitative research in the region. The topic of the interviews (popular media) and the method itself (structured conversation), struck many of the Moroccans – particularly those unfamiliar with the traditions of social science – as too quotidian and too socially intrusive, respectively. Reflecting on why they harshly challenged the value of the study and his own motives, Douai (2010) cites a “culture of suspicion” that tends to thrive in a repressive regime. Douai writes, “A political culture that mostly does not value these respondents’ votes in elections is largely to blame for encouraging an unprecedented level of cynicism regarding the serious contribution of research to society in general” (p. 85).

7. Discussion and Conclusion

The project developed in this paper cannot escape a paradox which pervades the study of globalization. This paradox is created as researchers instinctively call on social science traditions to explain large-scale patterns, all the while knowing that doing so may misrepresent local forces which facilitate and materialize the otherwise nebulous phenomena of globalization. The concept of glocalization, of course, has been developed precisely to hold this dialectic of universalizing and particularizing influences in contemporary cultural activity. We rely now on this concept to reconcile the impulses displayed in this paper: Leveraging existing research to tentatively model the global circulation of qualitative communication research methods, and testing this model through the exploration of case studies. This invocation permits us to proceed with a discussion of the results, focusing on principles which may be derived from this test, and their implications for further research of this topic. Four seem especially relevant.

Our first principle involves the difficulties posed by working only with textual materials. While recent sea changes have expanded the permissible formats for methodological reflection, much public discussion of qualitative research continues to conform to its traditional purposes: reinterpreting foundational texts; reporting findings; advocating for particular procedures, etc. Outside of *FSQ* journal projects exploring the “centers and peripheries” of international qualitative research which we discovered in conducting this study (see Mruck, et al., 2005; Puebla, et al., 2006), we have not yet found robust forums devoted to discussing the geopolitics of qualitative communication research methods. As a result, we are left to speculate about a particularly reflexive use of qualitative methods which may compensate for these limitations. Specifically, we envision the development of an interview protocol which could be used with communication researchers to elaborate the convergence of topical, national, and disciplinary identifications which influence their practice of qualitative research.

Our second principle emphasizes the tensions of glocalization that are especially depicted in the case of the *FSQ* thematic issue. Considering the forces of expansion and dislocation it displays, we note how interdisciplinary claims on the ownership of communication topics enlarge the scope of traditions, concerns, and techniques that stakeholders consider appropriate for their qualitative study. Additionally, we see how the international implications of a communication-related topic increase the geographical range of its stakeholders, and the complexity of their total national identifications. Nonetheless, as displayed in the generically Western European and specifically German features of this case, the potential resources em-

bodied in this context can only be activated by speakers grounded in local cultures and histories. This contingency ensures that the globalization of communication research methods will likely proceed as something of a conversation between strategic projects that reflect the specific purposes of specific groups engaging specific conditions. No single voice, it appears, can emerge to speak either as or for all of the stakeholders of this process, and no single group can legislate its future.

Third, these case studies offer sobering reminders about the influences that are inevitably exerted by the state on the global circulation of qualitative communication research methods. While images of the state in these case studies initially appear quite different, deeper scrutiny suggests another claim. That is, while the *FSQ* case suggests the virtues of liberal democracy (e.g., its ostensible commitment to supporting academe as a resource for developing institutional reform) in facilitating both interpretive and critical study of intercultural communication, and the Moroccan audience studies case suggests the negative power of the authoritarian state in poisoning citizen trust of legitimate inquiry, the state maintains its power in each. That is, whether state power orients in a productive/enabling or coercive/constraining manner toward the conduct of qualitative communication research, its globalization will remain tied to expressions of state power – e.g., as the infusion of funding, the attribution of legitimacy, etc.

Finally, these cases illustrate how the co-constitution of contemporary globalization and qualitative communication research occurs simultaneously on at least two levels. This condition arises from the fact that qualitative communication research engages communication both as a topic and a method. That is, communication researchers employ qualitative methods to gain greater knowledge of communication-related topics, but the modes of that usage are inherently symbolic, discursive, and interactional (e.g., in researchers' ongoing negotiation with cultural members of access to and inclusion in important scenes of activity). As a result, "globalization" – with its attendant legacies of Western imperialism and counter-hegemonic social movements – is an especially sharp condition for qualitative communication researchers, who must engage those legacies through embodied micropractices such as designing and conducting interviews, and reconciling relations between various sources of data. In this way, we may anticipate that interpretive and critical research of globalization by communication scholars will continue to be inflected by this persistent reflexivity, vivid immediacy, and obdurate materiality.

In conclusion, while this modest effort cannot exhaust the significance of these cases (let alone completely answer our larger questions), we hope it will inspire continued discussion and study of these issues. We are convinced that doing so can generate significant benefits for the advancement of both a global communication discipline, and its practice of qualitative research.

Notes

¹ Austria; Finland; Germany; Ireland; Spain; Sweden; and the United Kingdom.

² Applied Research; Communication and Media Studies; Cultural Studies; Education; Engineering; Health Sciences; International Affairs; Legal Studies; Languages (e.g., Modern and Romance); Linguistics; Management; Psychology; and Sociology.

³ This excerpt reflects the first author's rendering of a garbled translation of the original German passage generated by Google software (i.e., embedded in its proprietary Chrome web-browser, as well as on-line at: <http://translate.google.com/?hl=en&tab=wT>). While space does not permit further discussion of the significance of this software for either the production of this essay, or the globalization of qualitative communication research methods, the topic is worth pursuing.

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