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*Roy Stafford*

## Globalisation and Hybridity

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## What to teach?

At the start of the 21st century, it is clear that the two terms which should be at the centre of media education work across a broad range of topics are 'hybridity' and 'globalisation'. These two concepts are central to the way our popular culture is changing, as well as our sense of identity, both national and personal. In this introduction **Roy Stafford** explores the concepts and suggests some tentative approaches to media education with a more avowedly internationalist outlook. In the interviews which follow Jane Brake looks at how some of these ideas might be followed up.

Hybridity and globalisation are two terms which have filtered down to media education at A Level and possibly at GCSE/KS4. The first has remained a theoretical term and on that basis probably remains remote and inaccessible. The second is also a current 'buzzword' tossed gaily about by sundry pundits and thus in danger of losing any useful meaning at all. Both terms are too useful and too important to be left in their respective predicaments.

## Re-defining black and ethnic minority communities in Britain

*...Traditions co-exist with the emergence of new, hybrid and cross-over cultural forms of tremendous vitality and innovation. These communities are in touch with their differences, without being saturated by tradition; they are actively involved with every aspect of life around them, without the illusion of assimilation and identity... Stuart Hall (1999)*

## Hybridity

Hybrid is a term which in the last ten years has begun to change its meaning dramatically. Originally from biology and referring to the selective breeding of plants to produce new varieties with specific qualities of improved performances, its initial use in wider discourse was as a stigma in association with colonial ideas about racial purity and a horror of miscegenation. In the colonial experience the children of white male colonisers and female 'native' peoples were assigned a different (and inferior) status in colonial society (a society which refused to even consider the possibility of white women with black men.) They were often shunned by both the coloniser and colonised. The same process is evident with language, food and other aspects of culture. The term 'creole' was used, initially in the Spanish and French Caribbean, to describe 'mixtures' of European and African culture and again this was deemed inferior. The fear of hybridity and creolisation can also be found in the metropolitan centre when the postwar migration of people from

Africa, the Caribbean and Asia began to reach Europe. Consider the now notorious language of Margaret Thatcher when she spoke of the fear of being 'swamped' by the culture of immigrant communities. Even more insidious is the successful campaign to return to 'English' history at the expense of learning about the rest of the world.

These attempts to maintain the purity of English culture are both disturbing and futile. 'Englishness' is essentially a social construction based on a reality of cultural mixing over centuries. Hybridity is visible everywhere in 2000. Popular music since the 1950s has been energised by the merging of folk or roots styles from Europe and Africa to create virtually every new music from rock 'n roll to contemporary dance culture. The street language of Europe and North America has developed similarly and if you are what you eat, the English are no longer roast beef, but chicken korma. These seemingly flippant observations disguise what is an important shift in cultural habits for much of the population in the last 25 years. But the modern *celebration* of hybridity and creolisation is something else.

Hybridity is a fundamental feature of what is now commonly termed 'the postmodern condition'. Every media teacher will be familiar with the argument that there are no single genres of film, television etc. today, only hybrids. This is most pronounced for teachers tackling documentary. How do we explain the concept of a 'docu-soap'? Where do we find examples of 'pure' documentary forms, or come to that, 'pure' westerns, musicals, gangster films etc.? Hybrid genre forms are not always more interesting, but generally they are not inaccessible in their Hollywood or mainstream modes.

Hybridity in terms of personal identity needs a slightly different approach but also deserves to be celebrated.

## **Who are we?**

Some teachers and indeed some education advisers argue against work on identity with adolescents on the grounds that being 14 is difficult enough already without having to analyse who you are and how you see yourself as part of a formal curriculum requirement. It may also lead to the possible isolation of some students whose identity is not appreciated by others in the class. Such analysis may indeed be dangerous, but then education has to be dangerous or it would not be worthwhile. Ignoring issues of identity

runs the risk of reinforcing dominant culture and sending out the message that 'difference' is best not noticed. The opponents of the repeal of Section 28, for instance, would rather that young gay people were never offered the opportunity to hear another young person present a different view of sexual orientation.

But it's hard to avoid questions about identity in the current political climate. Debates about the European Union and devolution for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have all prompted questions about 'Englishness' and 'Britishness'. There are some interesting contributors to this debate including both first generation and second generations members of African, Caribbean and Asian communities in Britain. For a first generation Caribbean migrant like Stuart Hall, a recent guest on Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs*, the possibility of considering himself as 'black' and 'British' is welcome. 'British' in this context being a relatively neutral term, not associated with the alien culture of the middle-class 'English' he met at university. For second and third generation black people, growing up in the UK, however, the definitions may be different. 'British' refers to a state they may not feel much affection for, but 'England' or perhaps more likely 'London' or 'Birmingham' refer to identities of 'home' and family. For my own part, and especially when I'm abroad, I admit to being 'English', since that is my culture and it is evident for all to see in the way I behave. I write 'UK' on those forms which ask for nationality ('British' is meaningless as a legal term) but I have no allegiance to the nation state. My loyalty is to my region, to Lancashire and Yorkshire, and its peoples and cultures. Roll on a Federal Europe of the Regions! The debate is certainly live, but there is the growing sense of the possibility of an 'and' identity or a 'hyphen' identity in the UK. Thus somebody could be British-Asian or 'English and Indian'. Either way it is a recognition of two identities or a 'mixture' of identities – but certainly a refutation of 'assimilation' into a dominant culture. This raises two further questions – is Britain (and Europe) heading for a hyphenated culture like the United States with its communities of African-Americans etc. and secondly how does this realisation about the changing nature of Britain relate to the issue of refugees and asylum applications?

## Refugees

If National Curriculum History should teach any 'facts' alongside the skills of the historical method, it should be that the population of the UK is, like practically everywhere else in

the world, genetically and culturally mixed as a result of centuries of migration, war and travel. The British Isles may not have been invaded since 1066, but a thousand years of trading and overseas conquests has had a major impact not properly emphasised in traditional histories. At the end of the 18th century as a result of the slave trade, there were 10,000 black people in England and Wales – a significant number in a population of 9 million (see Fryer 1984). The history of slavery in the British colonies had an impact on every merchant family in these islands and our diet developed according to those trading patterns. The wealth of Britain has been created through trade and conquest. Far from being based on a 'pure' culture, the success of the Industrial Revolution was based on the most 'open' society in the world in the 18th century. Britain has benefited from every group of refugees who have come to this country, whether they were 'religious' like the Huguenots who developed the textile industry or 'economic' like the Southern Italians who gave us ice cream and coffee bars. And of course, the vast majority of those who came to the UK as migrants were officially invited to fill the labour shortages after the Second World War.

## Globalisation

The current usage of this term emphasises 'new technologies' and new economics. In media studies the focus has tended to be on the development of global media brands such as the recent Time Warner-AoL merger and the marketing strategies and 'delivery systems' which support them. When not being 'wowed' by the new technology and the power of the brand, some media teachers also find time to attack the corporations and accuse them of 'cultural imperialism'. Globalisation in these terms is difficult to teach well and is often a turn-off for students. It is noticeable that there has been a retreat from such work in A Level exam syllabuses generally. In *The Media Students Book* (Branston and Stafford 1999), Gill Branston recasts the above arguments in terms of 'global and local'. What this does is to bring the issues down to levels that affect ordinary people, but at the same time emphasises that the process of globalisation – something which has been developing for several thousand years since the first traders began to export their culture – becomes recognisable as a power relationship. It isn't just a case of big corporations and new technology that is either good or bad, depending on which side of the fence you are sitting. In a world of hybridity and digital communication, new products and new

cultural practices can develop and it is rather patronising to assume that every country that buys American products does so in a passive way.

It's worth thinking through a few examples. If we promote the idea of 'uses and gratification' as a model of audience behaviour, we should consider that audiences across the world will not sit in front of American sitcoms and soap operas and absorb American culture like sponges. They will react differently and sometimes ideas in the programmes will prove progressive, just as sometimes they may be damaging. The same technology which puts a Madonna cassette into every market place across the world may also help circulate the songs of Romanies in Eastern Europe or Berbers in North Africa. Whenever my heart sinks at the sight of another pair of Golden Arches desecrating the horizon in Asia, I think happily about the television pirates in India stealing Rupert Murdoch's satellite signals and distributing them free around their tower blocks. And despite what we may think about the content of Star TV (Murdoch in Asia) or CNN, the existence of satellite television has had a major impact, not only in individual countries but across the world in terms of how international audiences learn about internal conflicts. War will never be seen in the same way again.

What I hope to have demonstrated or at least pointed towards are a number of arguments which reveal a long standing power relationship between global media corporations and local producers and consumers. What our students need is the understanding and the skills development in order to develop their own ideas about the inequalities of the power relationship and how they wish to engage with them.

## **Learning activities**

The interviews which follow on pages 14-19 look at an installation which traces the importance of migrations in the development of 'local' culture in Oldham and at the way in which communications technology enables us to have a range of ideas about life in any area of conflict like Belgrade. Both interviews suggest ways of introducing students to global and local issues.

The Oldham installation prompts a couple of lesson ideas which could be developed at any level, but might work best as cross-curricular activities at KS3. There are also ideas

that could be developed in relation to syllabus areas of GCSE and A Level like Marketing and Documentary:

## **1. You are what you eat and drink**

This is a simple idea introducing students to the globalisation of culture through trade. You can begin by taking the traditional 'British' notion of the teatime snack. The tea break, or the coffee break for that matter, was based around beverages which formed the basis for colonial trade, tea from India, coffee from East Africa. Cakes and biscuits used Caribbean sugar, wheat from Canada, spices from the East and West Indies and cocoa powder and cocoa butter from West Africa.

A media studies exercise might look at the advertising campaigns developed by some of the companies who have dominated this trade: Liptons, Twinings, Cadbury, Fry, Rowntree etc. How did they change over time? How much have they Anglicised the product and how much do they retain of the country of origin in the image of the product? In a wonderful irony, Tetley Tea has just been bought by Tata Corporation of India – I wonder if this will change the marketing of Tetley Tea in India? And in this context, what do students make of the chimps in the PG Tips adverts?

Two further activities can be developed from this. First students might look at the attempts to reverse some of the damaging terms of trade in tea and coffee and promote the 'Fairtrade' brand, which guarantees a bigger return to farmers in the countries of origin. Various Fairtrade brands are now in the supermarkets, but only two have been supported by major advertising campaigns. Students could be asked to plan a generic Fairtrade campaign which educates consumers about the need for a change in trading patterns. Information on Fairtrade can be acquired from: The Fairtrade Foundation, tel 020 7405 5942, <http://www.fairtrade.org.uk>. Of course, British food culture is being supplanted by American food ideas: coke for tea, 'global' candy brands for British sweets (Snickers, Starburst etc.). Students could investigate how the campaigns for these products are developing and what kinds of global/local compromises are being made. On the other hand, Irn-Bru is taking on America. How on earth will it be advertised?

## 2. Our hybrid culture

Secondly, it would be good to see every school and college openly celebrating the hybridity of local culture. On the face of it schools and colleges in rural areas may seem at a disadvantage next to those in the culturally diverse inner city, but everywhere in Britain has been subject to the migrations, trade and war that changed our food culture. A joint exercise project involving history, geography and PHSE could uncover the global/local links in local culture. Media students could research in local libraries, undertake interviews, investigate the genealogy sites on the internet and present findings. A certain amount of sensitivity will be required in relation to some of our historical ancestors (I'm not sure how I would feel if I found out my ancestors were slave traders), but the value of such an exercise is undeniable.

## 3. Documentary follow-up

The emotive issue of asylum seekers is an excellent study topic in terms of representations in news and current affairs and 'balanced' reporting. *Panorama* on BBC1 filed a report entitled 'Human Traffic' on 7 February 2000 investigating how asylum seekers are being dispersed throughout the country. There is now an excellent *Panorama* website and if you missed the screening, you can now download:

- the transcript of the programme
- the trail in 'real video' format
- a selection of comments from viewers (some quite terrifyingly racist, others showing great humanity). This is a wonderful resource and points the way towards how digital communication can link television and the internet (Channel 4 and the American Public Broadcasting System have similar internet links). BBC World Service is another source of useful material on global/local issues. The BBC websites have numerous domain names and hundreds of linked sites. The 'Human Traffic' site is at:  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/events/panorama/newsid\\_416000/416262.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/events/panorama/newsid_416000/416262.stm)  
Elsewhere on the Panorama site you can check up on next week's report.

## 4. The following item appeared in The Human Rights

Education Newsletter, Autumn 1999:



## **The Human Global Village**

If we could shrink the world's population to a village of precisely 100 people, with all the existing human ratios remaining the same, the village would look something like this:

57 from Asia, 52 women/girls

21 from Europe, 48 men/boys

14 from the Americas, 70 non-Christians

8 from Africa, 30 Christians

6 people own 59% of the entire village's wealth between them, and all of them are from the US.

80 people live in sub-standard housing

70 people are unable to read

50 people suffer from malnutrition

1 person is dying

1 person is about to give birth

Only 1 person has a college education

Only 1 person has a computer

### **Questions for media students based on these figures:**

Faced with these market conditions, what kind of media would work best in the village?

How would existing UK media need to change in order to adapt? What benefits to the village do you think the development of media technology and media forms might offer?

What regulations on the media might you set up?

(Based on figures by Dr Philip M Harter, Stanford University School of Medicine, 1999 and put together by The British Humanist Association, contact Marilyn Mason on 020 7430 0908 or email: [education@humanism.org.uk](mailto:education@humanism.org.uk))

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