Finding Yourself in the Past, the Present, the Local and the Global: Potentialities of Mediated Cosmopolitanism as a Research Methodology

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Background and Methodology

How do people make sense of themselves in our ever-changing society? These changes are spurred on by media and communications that are deeply implicated in the process of globalization, both as agents of change, and as a result of these changes. Massive and rapid developments alter the balance of power on a macro-scale, and the way we live our lives and interact with our fellow human beings on a micro-scale. Advances in communication technology have led to the erosion of local boundaries and made for interconnection on a world scale, resulting in what Manuel Castells (2000) refers to as the ‘network society’.

A graduate course at The Centre for Communication, Media and Society (CCMS) of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), South Africa explores the fascinating movement of information and communication across the globe. Entitled Media in a Global World, it examines the technical, economic, cultural and political aspects of globalization and provides a holistic overview of the developments in the communication landscape in the twenty-first century.

As part of their assessment, graduate students undertake individual research projects that seek to explore mediated globalization which, through the choice in student topics, can be more appropriately expressed as mediated cosmopolitanism (explained below). The objectives are to provide exercises in creating ‘dialogues’ between the theoretical tenets of mediated globalisation (for example ‘time-space distanciation’, ‘cosmopolitanism’, ‘global identity’, ‘cultural imperialism’, ‘cultural homogenization’ and the concurrent ‘cultural heterogeneity’, ‘digital divide’ among others) and real-world sets of examples (collected empirical data via interviews, observation, recording, coding and cataloguing).

The examples in each project must relate to media, or at least, a single medium, either ‘traditional’ (television, print newspapers/magazines, radio, billboards) or a quintessentially ‘new
medium’, iconic of the period of globalization (internet and its various fora - email, blogspheres, chat rooms, or ‘virtual world’ and communal interaction sites such as MySpace, Facebook, Flickr etc). Other forms of communication, such as telephony in any of its guises (fixed line, cellphone/mobile, Skype, Mixit), are also identified by the project criteria as offering fruitful areas of investigation.

To aid their understanding of this type of global media research methodology, students are introduced to Terhi Rantanen’s (2005) concept of a ‘global mediagraphy’. This is a media ethnography that seeks “to incorporate individuals and their media use in a structured way into a phenomenon we can call mediated globalization” (Rantanen 2005: 15). Rantanen uses mediagraphies in an inter-generational context, to compare the different experiences of mediated globalization among people of different ages within single families; and in a comparative sense, different families from different parts of the world. Her project seeks to pinpoint the multiplicity and complexity of connections, the crucial differences and similarities in life experience. Thus, there is both an inter-generational and an inter-national comparative aspect to her work.

The methodology for the graduate students, however, is outlined in a more flexible manner: to compare any identified demographic with any other. The project criteria require a comparison of either inter-generational responses (vertical comparison), or intra-generational responses (horizontal comparison), to the changing media environment and social processes. In the examples below, the first four studies employed inter-generational approaches, while the last two used horizontal methodology within a single generation.

The student mediagraphies draw on oral traditions and include memories and family histories. Information can be gathered through biographies and/or autobiographies which are to be collected through self- and comparative-introspection and reflective ethnography.
Contemporary ethnographies can be sourced through interviews – either face-to-face, or via electronic communication (emails, blog sites and telephony). Mediagraphies incorporate an approximate ethnographic study, utilizing interviews that are “at the heart of doing ethnography because they seek the words of the people we are studying, the richer the better, so that we can understand their situation with increasing clarity” (Ely et al. 1991: 58). In a thoroughly post-modern turn, one of the students in undertaking his research, recorded the responses of his interviewees on a mobile phone, and then later transcribed his data:

the use of the mobile phone ensured that the participants were relaxed without the intimidation of a pen and pad as the phone is easily forgotten as the interview progresses. The interviews therefore took a conversational tone which allowed for better expression from the participants regarding such a controversial issue (Mthiyane 2010: 175).

The present paper discusses the concerns and findings of six of these projects, written in different years by different cohorts of students, in order to explore the wide and varying ways in which students made sense of this methodology, their preferred topics of exploration, and possible reasons for these choices. Many students took the criteria, expanded them in different ways and pushed the limits according to their own research interest (fashion, heritage, sexuality). The paper, therefore, does not offer insights into globalization per se but aims to expand the range of working methodologies in graduate instruction.

All six of the original projects received ethical clearance from the UKZN Research Office, and all authors have provided written permission for their work to be showcased here. While the authors’ names have been retained, all their respondents have been given pseudonyms.
Globalisation, media and cultural consumption and the construction of the ‘global identity’

The first two studies use the classic inter-generational mediagraphy approach. Natalie Emslie (2006: 1-24) explored the role television played in the lives of three generations of her family, “revealing an intersection between personal and institutional influences”. Emslie’s study argued that “media have a particular role to play in globalization, because media serve a ‘dual’ role within society, as an ‘economic player’ and as a ‘site of cultural production and dissemination’” (Heuva et al. 2004: 97). Her concern went beyond access to and consumption of television to incorporate the patterns of meaning-making by specific people within a specific socio-political context. Here she self-consciously follows Rantanen (2005: 18): “Since globalization is a product of human intervention it is necessary to also analyze how individuals contribute to globalization through their individual media activities, which become social practices”. Emslie was specifically interested to tease out the ways in which the production, distribution and consumption of television programming elucidated issues of globalization: “the immediacy and standardization of time, […] an analysis of place and space, as well as related concepts of de-territorialization and indigenization” before concluding with “an understanding of the development of hybrid identities” (Emslie 2006: 2). The research supports Anthony Giddens’ (1990) proposition that globalization is ‘reshaping’ our lives at a personal and institutional level. The analysis of each generation’s relationship to television revealed globalization as a complex phenomenon influenced by the context in which it is produced and consumed, frequently producing contradictory results. Emslie applied a political economic and cultural analysis approach in order to analyze how economic, political and social/cultural issues intersect at both the personal and institutional levels simultaneously.
Her family sample consisted of her own Grandfather, ‘Johnny’, her mother ‘Annabelle’ and finished it off by including her own perceptions as ‘generation three’. ‘Generation One’, Johnny, was born in Cape Town in 1933. Johnny had a rural childhood without running water or electricity. Eight years of school was followed by a career first as an artisan, and later as a clerk in the Durban High Court. Johnny lived through WWII, when South Africa was still a Dominion in the British Empire; he experienced life during apartheid and democracy. He defines himself in terms of his family heritage as an Irish-Dutch, Afrikaans-English South African.

‘Generation Two’ is represented by Annabelle, born in Durban 1954. She graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce and all her adult life she has been employed in banking, rising to a senior position in one of South Africa’s largest banks. Annabelle grew up during apartheid and democracy and defines herself in terms of Polish and South African inheritances.

‘Generation Three’, Natalie, was born in 1984 in Durban and has lived in only one home her entire life. A masters degree graduate, she is a lecturer in a private college, and a doctoral candidate at UKZN. She lived through the last years of apartheid and now democracy and defines herself in terms of her South African nationality, as well as belonging to “global youth culture” (Emslie 2006: 13).

Emslie’s mediagraphy illustrated the awareness in each generation of globalization’s influence on the immediacy and standardization of time. From the inception of television in 1976 to the introduction of M-Net (the terrestrial subscription channel) in 1984, the national South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) held a monopoly. It was only in 1991 that M-Net migrated to the digital satellite platform offering a multi-channeled viewing environment. These developments were premised on political, economic and technological determinations that had direct consequences for the personal and household routines of viewers. Consequently for earlier
generations television programming, for example ‘the news’, was rigidly scheduled, and family routines were arranged around these times: ‘the news’ was at seven in the evening, and if that bulletin was missed, one had to rely on the radio for news until the news bulletin at seven the next morning. Emslie (2006: 19) notes that “the first and second generation appreciated this immediacy of time much more than the third generation [since] these generations lived through apartheid and remembered how the government controlled and restricted viewing”. Thus political-economic circumstances affected the immediacy of experiencing news events, both through the tight hold on the monopoly of news programming, and through the ideological control of what, and how much information could be released at a specific time. The third generation (Emslie herself) who from the outset of her life enjoyed satellite television’s multiplicity of channels and 24-hour rolling news formats, was “much more aware of the global standardization of time” (Emslie 2006: 2). All three generations appreciated the way in which television is able to diminish and contract ‘space’, to induce a sense of ‘being there’, of distant experiences and cultures into their everyday lives. They “referred to the events of 9/11 […] and how the live news feeds that they watched brought the event into their living space as it happened” (Emslie 2006: 14).

In this way, not only were the categories of ‘time’, ‘place’ and ‘space’ interrogated in a concrete way; but issues of ‘de-territorialization’ and ‘indigenization’, two further markers of globalization, were given explicit form. Each generation understood that television provides potentialities for the representation and negotiation of local and global identities. Despite the claustrophobically isolationist policies of the apartheid government, it was still possible for individuals to interact with global identities through the incorporation of distant events and processes as an important aspect of their personal lives. Yet, compared to those limited apartheid
opportunities, “today each generation has a greater likelihood of interacting with an increased number of global identities” (Emslie 2006: 17). Further, “each generation indigenized these global media products by bringing these into the rituals of life” (Emslie 2006: 18). Imported programming, mostly American (Johnny enjoys Survivor and The Sopranos), was integrated into the family’s daily routines, and they identified with characters that were essentially ‘imported’ into their lives.

An important result of this de-territorialization has been the way in which television has provided “a site where people can negotiate local and global identities simultaneously and in so doing further contribute to each generation’s construction of hybrid identities” (Emslie 2006: 20). This clearly reinforces Mike Featherstone’s (1995: 181) notion that in today’s globalized society local and global cultures are relational. ‘Hybrid identities’, to coin Stuart Hall’s (1996: 277) phrase, occur when individuals compose themselves “not of a single, but of several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved identities”. Hybrid identities possibly undermine the very notion of unified national and cultural identities, especially with increased contact with local and global cultures in television over the years.

Alison Logie’s (2006: 25-56) study focused “on questioning the claim of globalisation leading to the homogenisation of fashion identities, by looking at the experiences of one particular family over three generations”. Logie interviewed her respondents on their early childhood memories of media consumption, choices and sources. She was curious to know whether increased media exposure could be correlated with a greater sense of ‘fashion heterogeneity’, and whether a ‘global awareness’ translated into ‘global fashion identity’. Thus clothing and fashion were used as sociological ‘markers’ of cultural consumption and cultural identity.
‘June’ was born in the 1930s, and brought up in the farming districts of the Natal Midlands, and as with Johnny, rural life was hard and simple: going to school was a horseback ride away and “water had to be collected with donkey carts and then warmed up on the coal stove” (Logie 2006: 37). Media consumption was confined to the shortwave radio whose battery was charged on the farm windmill and weekly newspapers bought from the town hairdresser. There was one communal radio in the home, and the ‘evening news’ was a family ritual. Boarding school brought an increase in media consumption with imported British magazines, weekly visits to the cinema where newsreels were an important element of entertainment, and the family’s first telephone, a wind-up communal party-line run from the local switchboard.

‘Brenda’, daughter of June, was born in the early 1950s and led a relatively itinerant life as her father was an Anglican (Episcopalian) priest and moved from town to village across Natal. Again, radio was the main medium within the household, and the programming schedule dictated much of the family routine, punctuated by specific news, music and entertainment programming, many of which she was able to remember with clarity. Each day her father would buy milk, bread and the morning newspaper from ‘the tearoom’ in town. Her first television set was purchased in 1978, two years after the introduction of television into the country and only after her marriage. Thus both women “lived relatively ‘isolated’ lives, due to the lack of media interference, which Rantanen (2005: 8) cites as crucial to the spread of globalized messages” (Logie 2006: 44). Logie concludes that both women felt the ‘wrath of globalization’ considerably less than the other two family members interviewed. Both experienced media as being “local, autonomous, distinct and well-defined” sustaining a “connection between geographical place and cultural experience” (Tomlinson 2003: 269). Logie (2006: 44) notes that “their media did not
often move past the borders of their towns. The news received was largely localised. In other words, the media was a stable aspect of society, able to stabilise identity”.

Gail and Stuart are Brenda’s children, born in the early 1980s and 1990s respectively. “The younger cohort could not remember a time without television, radio, newspapers and magazines. They remembered always being exposed to ideas which extended beyond their local community. This exposure to a ‘global cultural identity’ experienced by the younger cohort is seen to have influenced their ‘fashion identities’ in many respects. The older cohorts did not remember fashion being of particular importance during their childhood and they did not feel much pressure to dress a certain way, nor did they remember a range of clothes to pick from.

They mainly wore what was available, which meant that they probably looked much the same as most people in their communities. The younger cohorts, since being able to search globally for information, had a wider choice of options about what to wear. They could combine ideas locally with those from other countries (Logie 2006: 49).

Thus the younger cohorts may exist with a far more heterogeneous fashion identity than their older family members, who did not have access to media and different ideas. The media in this case can be understood as a heterogenising force, opposed to a homogenising force, as it is often accused of being. Therefore the generations of today, with the help of media, are able to form identities that extend beyond what is available locally and choose the way they want to ‘look’. Answering her initial question of whether media exposure promoted a homogenization of fashion identity, Logie is ambivalent, drawing attention to the complex processes in childhood fashion sense, and suggesting that media exposure is only one of the many components at work in a fashion identity.
De-territorialization, Immigration and Mediated Cosmopolitanism

The two families presented in this section are similar in that they are both diasporic and are Muslim, but differ in many ways. The focus of each student’s analysis is also different.

Abdi Ali Seid produced a trans-national and trans-generational picture of four generations of his family, beginning with his grandmother and ending with his daughter, facing different challenges in different socio-political circumstances and provided with different media choices. Seid’s mediagraphy illustrates the way in which they traversed these changes in the face of globalization by intertwining the family member’s personal, political and media-policy influences. Representatives of the four generations are his daughter’s matrilineal great-grandmother, ‘Mysha’, born in 1919 in a rural area outside Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) where she now lives; grandmother ‘Rawah’ who was born in 1942 in Addis Ababa where she still lives; mother, ‘Nailah’, who was born in Addis Ababa in 1962 but now lives in Lusaka (Zambia); and ‘Isha’ herself, born in 1997 who moved from Addis Ababa to Lusaka when she was six years old. At the time of writing the mediagraphy, Seid lived away from his family as he was in South Africa studying.

Sana Ebrahim’s trans-national and trans-generational analysis presents an investigation of everyday mediated cosmopolitanism across three generations of the ‘Dawud’ family with two members per generation. They include: her patrilineal grandfather, ‘Dawud’ (born in 1930); her grandmother ‘Rabia’ (born in 1925) who were both born in the Indian Village of Janghar and now reside in the Seychelles. Generation Two includes her parents, ‘Wasim’ (born in 1951 in the Seychelles) and ‘Maryam’ (born in 1953 in South Africa) both of whom reside in South Africa. Generation Three consists of Sana herself (born in 1985) and her sister ‘Amal’ (born in 1990). Both women were raised in South Africa.
Whereas Ebrahim’s study links more clearly with the discussion of mediated cosmopolitanism, Seid’s study is important as, like Ebrahim’s, it speaks to the relationship between immigration and media globalization.

The mutual interaction of immigration and those old and new media that can be used all over the world is giving rise to a new complexity...As one generation replaces another, differing styles of media use and production tend to develop, which may bolster both ethnicity and multi- or transculturalism (Hafez 2007: 129).

Due to a prevalence of programming from countries of origin via satellite, immigrants “can make themselves at home more effectively than ever before in the old world of their culture, ethnicity and religion” (Hafez 2007: 130). Two assumed effects of this de-territorialization within immigrant communities are: i) integration within an immigrant’s new environment is aided thus creating global cultural change; or ii) integration with the new environment is hindered reinforcing fragmentation and ‘ethnicization’.

However, both Seid and Ebrahim’s mediographies illustrate that these two ‘extreme’ frameworks do not completely account for the processes at play, a point which is reinforced by Marie Gillespie’s (1997) study with Indian Immigrants to England. Different generations of immigrants sometimes perceive the range of television programmes and other media offerings, from their country of origin and the country in which they now reside, in dissimilar ways, as is illustrated in Seid’s (2006) study.

Great-grandmother, Mysha, does not place value on either local Ethiopian or foreign media programmes. She tells Seid (2006: 74), “Now I am too old to follow media. Even when I was adult, I was always busy with my day-to-day activities and I felt sorry for people who listen to radio and watch television and waste their time”. However, for her teenage great-granddaughter,
Isha, living in Zambia, digital Satellite television and Arabsat programming are part of her everyday activities. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Black Angel* and *Charmed* are amongst her favourites. Mysha’s negative reaction to these American fantasy programmes highlights her religious and moral standpoint:

> She believes that most television messages are the work of Satan. She sometimes scolds her grandchildren, wondering how they can spend their time sitting and watching such ‘trashes’ and gives commands in the house to switch it off especially during prayer times or Ramadan (Seid 2006: 73).

Like Mysha, Rawah, as the second generation lives in Addis Ababa, her country of birth. Rawah remembers listening to the news and programmes that were broadcast over the government loudspeaker in Abune Petros Avenue. “Most of the time the news was about the palace and as kids we were happy to hear about the situation of the country. I like also listening to Roman Work’s programme for women which was about hygiene, health related issues for women, how to raise children and how to cook” (Rawah in Seid 2006: 65). Media consumption was therefore more the norm compared to when Mysha was a young woman, since the first time she listened to the radio was in her mid-twenties. During Rawah’s youth the media agenda was based on politics (nationalism) and health education for females who generally did not have access to high levels of education (at age 14 Rawah stopped attending school when she got married). Over the years Rawah learnt Arabic. As a result she no longer reads newspapers but focuses her reading on the Holy Qur’an, therefore, revitalising her religious identity. She does still, however, listen to/watch current affairs and health programming on the radio or television. She regularly watches local Ethiopian news and also places value on foreign news complaining that:
Ethiopian television is unable to present foreign news like the old times. She is interested in foreign news because her children are in different parts of the world, and as a result, she wants to know what is going on in the other parts of the world in general (Seid 2006: 67).

However, when she went to visit her daughter in Yemen “she usually watched Lebanese and Saudi channels for religious purposes” (Seid 2006: 67). Her sense of connection when away from home was therefore maintained through television.

Nailah, representing the third generation, was also born in Addis Ababa and like her mother consumed media that focussed on building a sense of nationalism and “sexual health issues of young people at the time” (Seid 2006: 13). Nailah recounts how she also used to listen to “Bible stories despite her Muslim background” – this may be the result of her attending the Norwegian Evangelical School (Seid 2006: 69). As a political activist during the Durge regime she media consumption was heightened. Between 1978-1983 Nailah was imprisoned and she used this time to complete her secondary education and engaged with classical and modern literature and philosophy by western writers. While in prison her situation was similar to immigration in that she was not surrounded by her typical environment. Nailah used the media to stay connected not only to Ethiopian society but also the world at large: “These readings helped me to understand the outside word and prepared myself to get ready for facing my future life after prison” (Nailah in Seid 2006: 69). Nailah clearly values the de-territorialization of information and ideas brought along with the globalization of media. She recounts her experience of the 1980s and 1990s in Addis Ababa:

Our sources were limited not only for international issues even for the local ones; the only sources were government newspapers and other government media. If you need reliable domestic and international news, you have to ask somebody who has access to travel abroad to get for you
\textit{Newsweek, Times, The Economist} or \textit{Reader’s Digest}, but now thanks to information and communication technology and to the freedom of information, we have various kinds of media access from alternative sources. We can see some light. I guess this is not only true of Ethiopia but of most African countries’ (Nailah in Seid 2006: 69).

Since she immigrated to Zambia in 2004 her media consumption has been a mixture of both local (Zambian) and foreign (BBC, CNN, SKY News, SABC Africa) news. Nailah demonstrates how local news consumption can aid in integrating oneself in a new cultural milieu: “It is appropriate to follow local news as long as I am a resident of this country. I have to know what is happening on an everyday basis” (Nailah in Seid 2006: 70).

Isha and Nailah demonstrate high levels of media consumption but their choice is dependent on social context. As a teenager in Ethiopia during the Durge Regime in the 1970s Nailah was imprisoned and read ‘politically subversive’ material. As a teenager in Zambia in the new millennium with more exposure to international media Isha spends most of her time engaging with American programming, a far cry from her mother’s political inclination at the same age. Seid (2006: 72) notes that this programming has influenced her way of life – not only on how she receives the media but “[h]er toys, utensils and other equipment are related to the information that she gets from the screen”. Seid (2006) concludes that in terms of media consumption the concepts of time, place and space seem sensitive to the religious, gender and other related factors associated with the different generations of the family.

The usual question with regards to media de-territorialization is – does it result in homogenization or heterogenization? The answer to this question cannot simply be reduced to either/or, either ‘homogenization’ or ‘heterogenization’ similarly put forth by Hafez (2007: 130) as either ‘globalization’ or ‘ethnicization’. If a range of programmes are ‘read’ by different
immigrants in different ways, “then it will become ever more difficult, as one immigrant
generation is replaced by another, to speak of a uniform […] ‘ethnicization’ by the media”
(Hafez 2007: 131). Nevertheless, while immigrants may consume international media it does not
necessarily mean that their loyalty to their country of origin / heritage / traditional culture
diminishes.

Through ‘media and communications’ (Rantanen’s first zone of everyday
cosmopolitanism), “issues of global concern are becoming part of the everyday local experiences
and the ‘moral life worlds’ of the people” (Beck 2002: 17) which globalization literature argues
connects people. Both Ebrahim and Seid, recount how their families have been positively
affected by the evolution in communications. From Dawud’s use of telegram in his youth to
write to his family in Janghar and to conduct business, to Wasim’s written marriage proposal to
Maryam via post, to Rabia’s delight at receiving Wasim’s emails sent to Dawud’s email address
– telling her news about her family.

Although great-grandmother, Mysha dismissed the value of television she is nicknamed
Kemet Ashker (Seated Servant) as she relies on her telephone to stay connected to her family. In
general the telephone usage in Seid’s family is high “since family members live in different
continents of the world and there is a very strong family bond which withstands long distances
and geographical variation” (Seid 2006: 73). This points to the fact that as media and
communications are rapidly developing and there is an ever-constant celebration of ‘the new’,
the basic impulses to use these media have remained the same and this is to communicate on a
basic level – to find out how loved ones are or to conduct business. The technology is ‘new age’,
but the reasons people engage with them are not.

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Contemporary global developments, notably global migration, greater intercultural contact and interconnectedness, globalizing cities [...] higher levels of education, and of course increased cultural flows, all have the potential to generate cosmopolitan dispositions (Hopper 2007: 177).

The way in which Ebrahim’s family consume and use global media points to different trends: i) the construction of virtual communities; and ii) the promotion of multi- and transcultural developments. Ebrahim (2008: 88) reflexively writes:

Proud to be a cosmopolite, I have adopted a hyphenated ‘Muslim-South African-Indian’ identity [...] My father, Wasim, considers himself a ‘Muslim-South African-Seychellois-Indian’. Actually, I lie. My dad regards himself an Arab because the Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was of Arab lineage. I think the fact that he studied at Al-Azhar University (Cairo, Egypt) and can hold a conversation with an Arab in the Arabic language also leads him to believe this.

The Dawud family identity can, therefore, be described as trans-cultural by which is meant coexisting cultures that undergo synthesis to form something of a ‘third culture’ (Hafez 2007), including hyphenated identities such as Italian-American or British-Asian (Hopper 2007). Although Ebrahim is aware of this interpenetration as illustrated in the hyphenated trans-nationalities she mentions above, she is also attentive to the distinct traits of each of these nationalities in her family members; she draws on their uniqueness with a sense of pride, believing they add to her family’s overall cosmopolitanism.

Ebrahim’s conclusion that her family hold a heightened cosmopolitan identity is demonstrated using Rantanen’s (2005: 123-130) five zones of everyday cosmopolitanism; i) media and communications, ii) learning another language, iii) living/working abroad or having
family members living abroad, iv) living with a person from another culture, and v) engaging with foreigners in your locality.

Wasim holds the strongest cosmopolitan identity within the family. He is representative of many countries choosing instead not to define himself according to the nation in which he was born but rather his allegiance to Islam; he is proficient in six different languages; has travelled to forty different countries and has a high level of education culminating in obtaining a masters and doctoral degrees in Religion from Temple University, Philadelphia.

Hafez (2007: 131) speaks of how “national publics form within the diaspora”. Although Ebrahim herself is not an emigrant but rather her family are diasporic, having originated in Janghar, her ‘virtual community’ or ‘public’ is not based on her family’s country of origin, rather on her religion which has resulted in her fostering a ‘global public’ based on Islam. On various trips she has made, she interacted with people she met using familial greetings: a Kenyan woman in Grahamstown is ‘my sister’, while a travel guide in Goa is a ‘cousin-brother’. “Perhaps it was due to the fact that since childhood, I have always been alerted to the plight of my Muslim brothers and sisters in other parts of the globe (the ummah)” (Ebrahim 2008: 6).

Despite the fact that she places most emphasis on the Muslim aspect of her hybridized identity she is still ‘proudly South African’, demonstrated in the familial project of learning two of South Africa’s official languages - isiZulu and Afrikaans. Ebrahim’s mediography demonstrates that:

the individual developing a cosmopolitan perspective will retain some allegiance to particular groups, such as families, friends and communities, and will have to balance a combination of demands and concerns – the universal and the particular/local – throughout their lives (Hopper, 2007: 176).
Both Ebrahim and Seid’s families are living proof of Paul Hopper’s (2007: 48) assertion:

Contemporary globalizing tendencies are considered to be disrupting the linkage between culture and territory, ensuring that our cultural experiences, identities and practices are becoming separated from the places we inhabit […] Indeed, cultural deterritorialization is especially associated with migrant and diaspora communities, many of whom will employ a range of strategies to preserve and adapt their cultures to new conditions, including utilizing some of the developments that are contributing to globalization, such as advances in transportation and communications technology.

Cosmopolitanism: The Relationship of the Local (Durban) to the National and the Global via the Media.

Durban, home to three and half million people and the third largest city in South Africa, by international standards is a small city. It has many of the accepted criteria and attractions of a cosmopolitan city. A large and strategic harbour; the balmy subtropical weather and famed ‘Golden Mile’ beachfront, augmented by new ‘Sun Coast’ casino to the north and the ‘U-Shaka SeaWorld’ leisure developments to the South, a state of the art International Convention Centre and four world-class sports stadia offer holidaymakers and citizens alike all the accoutrements of a global metropolis.

With more than two million isiZulu-speaking people, Durban is at the heart of the ‘Kingdom of the Zulu’ – a marketing slogan that epitomises the dominance of Zulu culture in both the province of KwaZulu-Natal the city of Durban. This group is seen to be conservative, traditionalist and male oriented. The ‘White’, post colonial population of approximately 350 thousand people is largely professional and artisanal. Generations of social isolation have resulted in staid and conservative middle class values that are at the same time marked through with streaks of urbane and worldly privilege, and both are juxtaposed with the stain of fear and
resentment at the threat or reality of lost privilege, economic and cultural uncertainty. The remainder of the population is of Indian extraction, descendants of 19th century indentured labourers and the significant groupings of professional and mercantile people who came to serve their needs. It is from this latter group that the Dawud family, discussed above, originated.

Despite its cosmopolitan aspirations or pretensions, Durban is relatively constricted in terms of the available repertoires of cultural expression. The local life-worlds of University of KwaZulu-Natal of students are circumscribed to a large extent by their location within the city of Durban. The great majority of these students have not travelled beyond the city, for many ‘the world out there’ can only be imagined and grasped through mediated experiences. While some of the graduate students mentioned in the sections above were content to use Durban as a springboard – a point of departure – for exploring wider, international and cosmopolitan terrains, others felt it constricting in the kind of opportunities it presented. Male sexual identity is just one such area in which opportunities for wider expression is seen to be rather limited. It is against this background that exploring identities, particularly sexual or gendered identities, that do not conform to the ‘heteronormative discourses’, can be challenging. Two male students chose to use the mediagraphy assignment to uncover aspects of their sexual politics as a self-identified gay man and a ‘metrosexual Zulu man’ respectively.

The first study in this section on global explorations of alternative male sexual identities was undertaken by Nkululeko Mthiyane who used the work “to investigate how ‘metrosexuality’ is emerging in Zulu culture and how it is negotiated in a mediated globalised context” (Mthiyane 2010: 184). Mthiyane interviewed two young Zulu men from Durban, self-identified as having a “metrosexual masculine identity”. These interviews investigated how the participants conceptualised masculinity and how it related to metrosexuality, the media and Zulu culture.
‘Sabelo’, is a 23 year old marketing student and ‘a budding entrepreneur’ by day, who works as a bartender in a premier Durban nightclub. Andile, also 23 years of age, resides in an established and economically comfortable suburban area, is a graduate of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and is employed as “an events-organiser and a stylist” (Mthiyane 2010: 175).

‘Metrosexuality’ and its practices are seen as inherently cosmopolitan, and those “who practice metrosexuality therefore acquire cosmopolitan traits automatically” (Mthiyane 2010: 184). The study investigated a macro-phenomenon on a micro-level. The particular study investigated the link between this phenomenon and its mediation through internationally franchised magazines. Following the precept from Rantanen that “mediagraphies offer a way to understand how individuals […] not only are influenced by globalization but also contribute to it” (Rantanen 2005: 29), Mthiyane (2010: 174) set about investigating “how young Zulu men navigated through men’s lifestyle magazines to inform their metrosexual identity”.

Discussing the concept of ‘masculinity’, Mthiyane takes as his point of departure the dominant, if somewhat stereotypical perception: “if you ask someone what a ‘man’ is like, you often get a series of adjectives such as strong, independent, logical, dominant” (Kahn 2009: 47). These perceptions of masculinity provide little help for Mthiyane’s informants, who experienced difficulty in pinning down precisely what they understand by the term. As Sabelo simplistically explained: “Masculinity refers to the traits and behaviour of men at a given period of time” (Sabelo in Mthiyane 2010: 175). This behavioural conception of masculinity is buttressed by his second interviewee, Andile, who states that “for me masculinity in the traditional sense is what society deems masculine” (Andile in Mthiyane 2010: 176). There remains a set of “dominant ideals of masculinity” (MacKinnon 2003: 3), however, different cultures have varied expectations and beliefs about masculinities (Kahn 2009). The highly constructivist nature of
masculinity takes on resonance when dealing with a particular, concrete situation – that of Zulu male identity. In a highly patriarchal society, any show of ‘weakness’ or ‘femininity’ is taboo. “I know with Zulu culture *awusiyo insizwa* (you’re not a man) unless you carry yourself in a certain way and if you allow a more sensitive side to come through, your masculinity comes into question” (Sabelo in Mthiyane 2010: 176). Masculinity in contemporary Zulu culture, as in any cultural setting, is practiced through relationships. As with all understandings of culturally based identities, masculine gender identity is never stable and as with any gender identity is constantly in a process of re-negotiation. While many of the older rites of passage have been superseded and “traditions such as stick fighting are no longer practiced”, a man is deemed to be a man “by how he carries himself and the respect he commands” (Sabelo in Mthiyane 2010: 176). Central to this playing out of roles is the patriarchal nature of Zulu culture and behavioural expectations towards women and girls, illustrated in Sabelo’s account of his own familial experience: “my Gran, she believes that *umkhulu* (grandfather) should have his own plate, his own spoon, and chair”. Andile concurs: “even now in 2010 you’ll find a man will beat his own wife, because, traditionally the man speaks and the woman listens and woman’s role is in the kitchen and the man is authoritative and the man is the decision maker” (Andile in Mthiyane 2010: 177). He goes on to say:

I come from a Zulu family and they do traditional things. Because I’m the first born and I don’t have a father or grandfather, I’m ‘the man’. So the fact that I’m still quiet young is not the issue; because I’m the eldest I have to play the role of the man in the home. Its tradition, in the African culture it has always been like that, that the man is responsible for certain things, the man is the one that goes to the sacred space or *umsamo* to speak to the ancestors (Mthiyane 2010: 177).

Mthiyane (2010: 177) concludes that:
These responses illustrate that in Zulu culture your degree of ‘masculinity’ is also measured by the respect you command from your female counterpart. This is due to the culture’s patriarchal nature. Men who place their female counterparts on an equal level to them are seen to have been emasculated.

Despite this dominant Zulu worldview, masculinity’s conceptual fluidity suggests that these ideals can change over time. Sabelo’s self-perception is more urbane than that seemingly dictated by his position in Zulu culture: “I am taking a step away from what our fathers thought it should be, where a man never cried, never showed emotion and all those things” (Mthiyane 2010: 177). Though not concretely defined, ‘metrosexuality’ is understood by his respondents as a man who’s in touch and not afraid to embrace a more feminine outlook on things but not saying that he’s not truly masculine. He is able to take both sides into account and conduct himself accordingly, able to walk that fine line in between where you need to be sensitive and feminine on the one side but you also know that you’re pretty masculine (Sabelo in Mthiyane 2010: 178).

Metrosexual expression is closely related to the behaviour and appearance of men. Mthiyane uses this position to explain the ways in which his respondents practice their self-proclaimed metrosexuality: “the general practices of metrosexuals are focused on presentation and can include plucking or tweezing eyebrows, doing manicures, hand and face scrubs. These are some of the behaviours of metrosexual men which can be traditionally considered feminine” (Mthiyane 2010: 180). Metrosexual men are also distinguished by their fashion sense: “My fashion sense is influenced by – I would say – Italy. Most of the influential designers come from Italy today and most of the big fashion houses are from Italy” (Andile in Mthiyane 2010: 182). When asked to comment on what influences transformation in the representations of masculinity,
the participants responded by stating: “the media is the biggest influence, I mean if you look at it, it has moved away from the likes of your hairy men with hairy chests, to clean, waxed and shaven men and its all the media’s doing” (Sabelo in Mthiyane in 2010: 178). Andile suggested that media, such as television and magazines, portray men in specific ways according to the prevailing fashions, the ‘in-thing.’ This constructed vision of the ‘new man’ or ‘soft masculinities’, often described in contradistinction to traditional masculinity, have always existed. What has changed with the years is how they are packaged and mediated, presented as a fashionable and acceptable social construct of ‘metrosexuality’ (MacKinnon 2003: 13). For the respondents in this study, the characteristics of this ‘new man’ have been gleaned from the pages of glossy, ‘lifestyle’ men’s magazines. At first glance this appears to be a highly cosmopolitan idea, Mthiyane’s respondents agree on the popularity of international franchises such as Men’s Health and GQ (Gentlemen’s Quarterly), magazines that they buy on a monthly basis. Andile (in Mthiyane 2010: 179) goes further by stating that his ‘style’ is copied from these magazines: “through media and magazines you find that the perfect man is always being portrayed like on the cover of Vogue. You find that the perfect man is on the cover, very well taken care off. I buy a lot of GQ, lifestyle magazines”.

The globalizing effects of media, in this instance, men’s magazines, can be attributed in part to their interconnectedness as commodities produced by multi-national media corporations, and distributed internationally with local editions of the same magazine-format in different countries. The magazines are slightly altered to cater for the host country but the values of the country of origin are still inherent. The wide distribution of these media results in a sharing of information, ideas and experiences which is characteristic of globalisation. On the South African market, men’s lifestyle magazines are usually based in European or American countries with
branches elsewhere in the world. *GQ* magazine, for example, is based in the United States of America but has a South African edition. Thus, for the ‘global South’ this kind of ‘globalisation’, as Anthony Giddens (2000) reminds us, looks very much like ‘westernisation’. For Mthiyane, this illustrates the influence that western countries have on the world. Although the practice of metrosexuality is not premised on masculine ideals of any specific culture, its values are largely western and European, and thus frequently interpreted as an example of the concept of cultural imperialism.

While in global terms personal grooming and respect for female partners may not seem very transgressive, living an openly gay lifestyle takes even more courage. Matthew Beetar, a self-identified white, urban, middle-class gay man living in Durban, used his own experiences to initiate his assignment on the use of the web by four fellow gay men (Craig, Mick, Scott and Steph), in Durban. Drawing partly on his own reflective experience, together with one-on-one in-depth interviews followed by a focus group discussion, he explored “the perceptions of Durban city, […] the context of this space and place” and how “mediated globalisation affects the lived experiences of my subjects” (Beetar 2008: 148). Beetar begins his study by noting that in “a national context of Constitutional protection and the seeming advancement of gay rights in the form of the Civil Unions Act it is easy to become seduced by a perception of security and tolerance” (Beetar 2008: 149). While South Africa has become a major international tourist destination for gay men and women on the basis of Constitutional antidiscrimination provisions the daily lived experiences of gay men in Durban, given its variety of seemingly oppositional cultures, traditions and religions, remains challenging. All of Beetar’s (2008: 149) participants “revealed a distinct discomfort within Durban”. While all the responds were ‘out’, all recounted wariness around fully expressing their sexual identities. There are only two openly gay spaces in
Durban - a club called The Lounge and a bar/restaurant called Bean Bag Bohemia. Outside of these spaces the participants have been met with hostile and dehumanizing behaviour.

Clearly, these constraints are not unique to Durban, they are part of a wider set of “globalised hegemonic heteronormative discourses and ideologies”. Beetar (2008: 151) notes:

The politics surrounding gay identity are thus complicated in a context of globalisation: the national and international discourses of intolerance are countered by the cosmopolitan quality of Durban as a city space, and the lived realities of these white urban gay men.

For the four respondents, the Web has played, and continues to play, an important role in the exploration of homosexuality and the formation of an individualist subjectivity. Usage of the Web allowed them into a transnational ‘gay space’, free from the physical and ideological constraints of their everyday Durban existence. All four participants have used the Web to explore questions and unfamiliar feelings, largely due to the lack of such avenues of subjectivity formation in the ‘reality’ of Durban life. Scott, who described his high-school years as an emotionally trying period, balancing the expectations of heteronormativity placed on him as high-achieving scholar and student leader (he was head prefect at a prestigious boys-only school) and a provincial sportsman, utilised the Web to help him come to terms with his attraction to men. As he reflected,

the Web allowed me to find out information about gayness. When I realised I was attracted to men I didn’t feel I could tell anyone. So I searched the Web for this information. It was the only resource I had – I didn’t have any gay friends. I specifically looked for a way to meet South African gay boys. I also looked for what kind of medical conditions were associated with anal sex – I thought there were many (Scott in Beetar 2008: 151-2).
The liminal tensions between his ‘expected role’ and the lack of available resources prevented him from fully exploring a sense of self. All four shared similar uses for the Web in the past: they used the Web to discover information that was not easily available to them in Durban, including where to meet other gay men; what it “meant” to be gay; the experiences of gay people around the world; how to “cure” homosexuality; and how to “come out”.

More generally, the Web has provided a crucial platform to explore health related concerns, allowing them to question gay-related HIV questions, with Steph’s reason being that he “was too embarrassed to speak to [his] parents” (Steph in Beetar 2008: 152). Whilst Craig did not explicitly pursue such questions on the Web, he acknowledged that his participation in numerous chat rooms, whilst he was at school, contributed to his understanding of what it ‘meant’ to be gay. In a moment of candid reflexivity, Beetar notes that he personally was able to reflect on the importance of the Web in my own life, where I wrestled with religious anxieties and questions of my sexuality by engaging with the seemingly other-worldly discussions between gay Reverends from America, ‘gay churches’ in the United Kingdom, and gay marriage across the globe. Both my and the participants’ understanding of what homosexuality encapsulates, and the scope for change, have been profoundly influenced by information available on the Web (Beetar 2008: 153).

All the participants have, in the past, created Web-based ‘profiles’ on social networking sites and have international Web-based ‘friends’ or contacts on sites such as Facebook and MySpace, or services such as Mig33 (a Web-based programme, similar to Instant Messaging), whom they have never met, yet are friends with for the primary reason of sharing a sexual orientation. Scott’s first boyfriend, whom he genuinely perceived to be in a relationship with, was a man he had met Online but had never met, nor did they ever meet, in person. Other websites frequented
by Beetar’s respondents include *Mamba* and *Gaydar*, international websites specifically created for gay men and women. *Gaydar* was favoured for its anonymity, for the possibility of connecting openly with other gay men and yet hide his ‘real’ identity.

In considering whether the use of the Web by his informants adds to the heterogeneity or the homogeneity of their experience, Beetar is ambivalent. On the one hand, he points out that the combination of the participants’ utilisation of the Web to explore aspects of their identities and the ultimate translation of such exploration to a level of lived experience, whether through Mick’s use of the Web to deal with a broken relationship or Scott’s use of the Web to meet his partner of nearly three years, speaks to the localising of global gay experiences, or “glocalqueering” (Lim 2005: 383-405) and reflects a liberating and heterogenising quality of mediated globalisation: it can diversify restricting macro identities to include the availability of suppressed and oppressed liminal identities (Beetar 2008: 155).

However, an irony of the their Web use is that Beetar’s respondents know more about global, cosmopolitan gay cultures than they do about local South African variation: “None of the participants are aware of other South African homosexual identities, which includes a history of “black youths from the townships, white mineworkers, lesbian sangomas”, rich white ‘entertainers’ from the suburbs, coloured moffie drag queens, cross-racial working-class couples, political prisoners and sex workers” (Gevisser & Cameron 1994: 3). The formation of identity for the participants is based firmly on a Western mediation of homosexuality. This lack of knowledge, and more tellingly, lack of interest, in local expressions of gay culture is in stark contrast to the identification with cosmopolitan expressions. The connectivity into the ambit of a gay male culture is premised entirely on the concerns of Western white gay men, and speaks to
the maintenance, if not construction, of existing localised concerns, and undermines the heterogeneity they cherish.

Concluding thoughts: the local, the globalization, the cosmopolitan and research methodology

All the assignments were conducted in the city of Durban, and indeed, Durban and its surrounds features almost as characters in the narrative of many of the micro-studies. While the much vaunted ‘death of place’ may have become theoretical buzz words when discussing the consequences of globalization, the reality remains that for the vast majority of the world’s citizens, they will never move far from their home city, and their experience of ‘globalization’, for the most party, will be an imaginary, mediated one. Despite the much vaunted opportunities offered by ‘new technologies’, for most, global consciousness is lived as local consciousness.

The potentialities of the Web and mobile telephony platforms and networks including Skype, the highly hyped Facebook, Twitter, Mixit (a very popular South African variant) and numerous others, provide opportunities for greater interaction. Debates on the role of the ‘new media’ have set the tone of the globalization debate since the 1990s resulting in the ‘old media’ largely being ignored. However, by focusing specifically on the technology, we often lose sight of the fact that it is people who communicate with other people in one way or another. Mediographies are a useful methodology that can bring the role ‘old media’ have in the world today, back into the picture. This is where personal media histories are illuminating.

Since the initial projects showcased here were inspired by Terhi Rantanen’s work, it is appropriate to close this paper by going back to her. A central theoretical precept in her writing is that of ‘cosmopolitanism’, a term she extends from the commonly-held understanding as being
“familiar with or representative of many different countries and cultures - having an exciting and glamorous character associated with travel and a mixture of cultures” (Pearsall 1999: 322), and traditionally seen as the preserve of wealthy elites to a concept “on the move”, redefined as “everyday cosmopolitanism” (Rantanen 2005: 124). A cosmopolitan identity cannot be achieved as something cohesive and complete. Rantanen (2005: 124) argues that “people can develop cosmopolitan qualities” through exposure to different ‘zones’ of everyday cosmopolitanism. Together, these form a scaffolding for many of the assignments presented here. While global exposure is important, our cosmopolitan outlooks emerge from synthesizing a range of influences, many – but not all – of which will originate out of our socialization (Hopper, 2007: 176). Thus mediagraphy provides a methodology of global mediagraphy useful in exploring “not only how individual [family members] in different locations were affected by globalization, but also how they contributed to it”. The approach of juxtaposing “‘big’ overarching theories with ‘small’ individual life histories and seeing whether they fitted together” is both inventive and topical (Rantanen, 2005: 141).

It is not the purpose of this paper to explore various theoretical aspects of globalization, as these have been well rehearsed elsewhere. Our purpose is to elucidate a methodological intervention through which researchers – in this case, our students – are able to explore everyday issues around globalization. Primary among these has been the relationship between cultural change, cosmopolitanization and globalization.
Notes

1 The period 1977-1978, during this regime, was known as the “Red Terror” led by Mengistu Hailemariam. This period saw tens of thousands of politicians, intellectuals and other ‘enemies of the state’ tortured and murdered. This began as Mengistu attempted to transform imperial Ethiopia, with its ancient Christian heritage, into a Soviet-style worker’s state.

2 Unmah = A Hadith (tradition) of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) compiled in Sahih al-Bukhari. Kitab al-Adab. Vol. 3, p12 states: The believers, in their love and sympathy for one another, are like a whole body; when one part of it is affected with pain the whole of it responds in terms of wakefulness and fever.

3 Traditional healers and diviners.

Bibliography


