

Book Review: The Myth of Media Globalization

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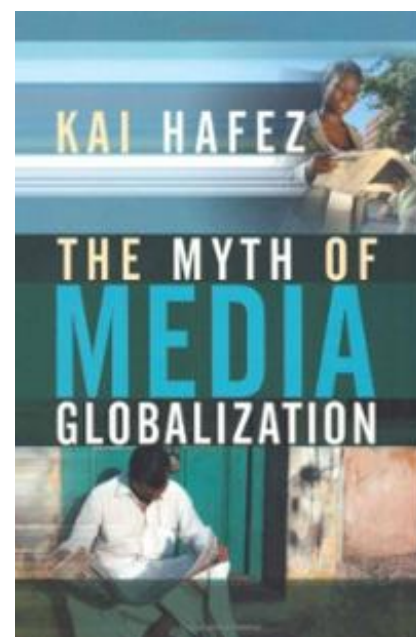
*The ongoing interconnection of the world through modern mass media is generally considered to be one of the major developments underpinning globalization. This book considers anew the globalization phenomenon in the media sphere, with **Kai Hafez** aiming to analyse the degree to which media globalization is really taking place. Hafez's book is an effective and a worthwhile read for those interested in mass media and the grim facts behind its ownership and role in the modern world, concludes **Alexei Anisin**.*



The Myth of Media Globalization. Kai Hafez. Polity.

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The world has become interconnected and global media corporations are reshaping the identities of billions. Arguments of this type are challenged by Kai Hafez in his book, *The Myth of Media Globalization*. Hafez puts forward a statistically backed argument against scholars and advocates of the media globalization phenomenon in a multidisciplinary context by setting out to prove that there is no “world system” in the mass media communication system and that the nation state is still the principal player in shaping discourse and information across the modern world. At the same time, Hafez invalidates the myth of the unstoppable takeover of transnational communicational systems both theoretically and empirically through the deciphering of media coverage, ownership, media economy, film imports and other components of the mass media system. By drawing specifically from a few chapters of Hafez's book, I hope to show that it is clear that this book offers a much needed and valid critique of proponents of the globalization phenomenon, but the rapid change of technology and rise of social media constrain Hafez's book to a period of communications history, that of mass media prior to social media.



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In the initial sections of the book, Hafez reviews various globalization literatures and gives the reader a good idea of the lack of theoretical and statistical backing behind the assumptions of media globalization across media studies, communication studies, political science and other disciplines. Hafez thus adopts systems theory and operates out of this theoretical framework throughout the book, taking the nation state and its media system as units of analysis. Sheer connectivity in the global system does not cause societal change; rather Hafez asserts that independent nation states are the actors with greatest agency when it comes to identity formation, cultural shaping, and other transformative forces caused by mass media. By taking this position, Hafez essentially is delving into the structure and agency debate which is a relevant topic in the philosophy of science. For Hafez, States and governments are assumed to be the main agents and the structural transformation of the worldwide communications system is not responsible for the greatly advocated globalization effect.

In the fourth chapter, “Film and Programme Imports”, Hafez provides interesting examples of the regionalization of mass media and the role satellite television and movie corporations can play in reshaping a given population’s identity formation. Contrary to common intuition, Hafez shows that there is often a ‘modernization’ of national cultures when new ideas are imported through media channels. While such terminology is surely contentious, Hafez provides evidence of his claim through empirical examples. In India, the influence of Western hip hop on Indian youth who take the style of American artists is analysed and Hafez shows that Indian youth adopt a similar linguistic formation to their counter-parts in North America but implement their own contextual flavour onto the music, creating a unique style. Such a phenomenon is prevalent in processes of information spreading with many cultures retaining much of their originality when adopting new forms of social practices from North American and European sources.

The sixth chapter, “Media and Immigration” provides insights into Hafez’s own context, that of Germany and the issue of identity of Turkish migrants. Here Hafez hints that there may be a wide variety of factors at play in influencing the identities of Turks that live in Germany. As every given population is dependent on media in one form or another, Hafez debunks some assumptions behind the nature of media communication and its contribution to immigrant integration by making clear that the Turkish population in Germany is composed of an extremely diverse make up. Noting the diversity of this immigrant group, Hafez illustrates how difficult it can be for social analysts to determine what type of identity will form and how an immigrant group will integrate into a society given the number of different personality types. Above all, Hafez hints that the forces that underpin identity formation are not always only media-based. The Turkish case proves to be representative of the complexity of the processes that influence identity formation for migrants in a new setting. In a similar vein, Hafez shows how the “glocalization” of various ethnic identities within a given society may actually reinforce old nationalistic tendencies, especially in the case of modern Europe. Citing the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, Hafez shows that regional media outlets frequently construct frames that zoom in on a small number of immigrants and articulate specific forms of polarizing and antagonizing stories based on threat and violence.

Overall, Hafez’s book is an effective and a worthwhile read for those interested in mass media and the grim facts behind its ownership and role in the modern world. The rapid change of technological advancement puts the contribution of this book into a specific period of communications history, that of mass communications prior to social media. With this in mind, Hafez fails to provide the reader with any insight into whether special forms of social media communication give rise to new political reactions and behaviour other than the vague noting of the potential formulation of a “global community” in a chapter on internet use. Even though the majority of governments still hold significant control over the context of their national media discourse and many prior globalization assumptions are much too deterministic, the rise of social media over the past few years has created another structural transformation that I would argue to be much stronger than that of Hafez’s highly mentioned satellite television. What happens when citizens gain access to information via other citizens rather than solely by mainstream media on a quantitative level within a given state? Such questions may dictate the future of this field of study as governments’ and mainstream media corporations may lose some of their power in shaping national discourse.

Alexei Anisin is a PhD student in the Department of Government at the University of Essex. His research focuses on the topic of nonviolent civil resistance and social transition through a discourse theoretic approach. In the past, Alexei has worked for tech start ups in Silicon Valley and is also a reviewer for the ESTRO (Essex University Student Journal). You can find Alexei on Twitter [@AlexeiAnisin](#). [Read more reviews by Alexei.](#)