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By

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NATIONAL PROGRAMMING IN AN AGE OF GLOBAL TELEVISION

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The essence of national programming is what government and media analysts call the perennial quest for "cultural sovereignty" or "cultural space". It is not an easy one to tackle, given the numerous related issues which has been discussed at length at various gatherings of mass communication specialists. Nevertheless, several key issues warrant reaffirmation:

- The world is getting smaller but is not coming together. Economically and technologically, the world is becoming more integrated. Paradoxically, nation-states are increasingly under pressure to culturally disintegrate. Ethnic, provincial, religious and language reassertions are on the rise—in the former Soviet Union, in the remnants of Yugoslavia, in the tragedies of tribal conflict in Africa, in disputes over water resources in South Asia and the Middle East, and in the territorial disputes over the sea-bed in the South China Sea ;
- More changes have occurred as a result of scientific and technological innovation in the past 50 years than has happened in the preceding 150 years. Globalization is buzzword of the 1990s, as transnationalism was in the 1980s and interdependence was in the 1970s. Corporate managers, rock stars, management gurus, environmental prophets, religious authorities, university students, pedicab drivers—all talk about the impact of global production, global marketing and global financing. All acknowledge the pervasiveness of the American media.
- Richard Barnett in his recent book *Global Dreams* (1994) talks of four intersecting commercial activities: The Global Cultural Bazaar; the Global Shopping Mall; the Global Workplace and the Global Financial Network. They all change the way we eat, drink, wear, enjoy life. The World Bank reports that some 3 trillion dollars a day are transacted through financial institutions, compared to 850 billion traded in goods and services. Never have the power to buy influence and virtually dictate life-styles have been concentrated in so few corporations affect the fate of so many millions across the world.

It comes as no surprise that the very notion of cultural sovereignty, one of UNESCO's great debates in the early 1980s, today should strike as rather quaint and ancient. After all, if the economy of the Ford Motor Co is larger than Saudi Arabia's and the annual sales of Philip Morris exceeds the GDP of New Zealand, what realistic chance can governments have in abating the impact of global television?

Global television___ its scope, impact and intensity___ has enabled new strategic visions across time, space and national boundaries. Television companies, whether American owned, European financed or Asian-based or any other combined formations, have become earth-spanning global empires. They are virtual private imperial corporations that occupy public space and exert profound influence over lives of countless millions and affect the spending habits and national deficits of many governments, irrespective of political identity.

The so-called Global Cultural Bazaar is the focal point of discussion in every national programmer's mind. The American entertainment media is both pervasive and all persuasive that national leaders, including presidents, prime ministers and ministers of information, education and culture have difficulty in the comprehending, much less controlling, these giant corporations despite the number of legislative actions that they periodically issue on behalf of cultural resilience. Because these corporations constantly change and shift in appearances, in their forms of legality and in their modes of intrusion with every technological innovation and attendant copyright implications, there is no national judicial court that can claim the privileges of national sovereignty.

The Europeans in the 1960s attempted at exercising resistance against American hegemony by restricting foreign television serials to 20% of all national television programming. Australia's laws restrict the use of foreign made commercials aired in its television broadcasts. Many Asian governments have attempted at calibrating the proper mixes blending information, education, entertainment and advertising air-time.

At bottom, however, the economics of scale tend to work against the interests of national sovereignty advocates. With perhaps the exception of India and the South Asian sub-continent, here is simply no market large enough in Asia to justify the establishment of a national or region-wide viable television venture. Differing levels of economic development, local tastes, language styles, varieties of market segmentation__all of these factors make it difficult for sustainable and profit-making national and local television. Hence the tendency to opt for buying viewing rights of cheap film and television re-runs from the United States.

Nonetheless, there has been some success at seizing opportunities that come with the law of saturation. As many more middle-class consumers in Asia become inured to the predictable scenarios and scripts of various American shows, a natural reassertion tends to come to the fore. A spurt of cinetronic soap operas produced by local production houses often make a score to offset television serials offered on

the life-styles of the young , rich and pampered in America. The current success of *Si Doel Anak Sekolah*, which depicts the struggle of day-to-day survival facing a fiesty, young and poor Jakarta native comes at the right moment of audience saturation with *Melrose Place*. In music, entertainment, foods tastes___loss of sovereign economy and cultural autonomy breed yearnings for authenticity, for local warmth, for intimate relationships. Place of origin, roots, identity assertion become more important. As affluents in Pondok Indah in Jakarta, Forbes Park in Manila, Chanakyapuri in New Delhi identify with life-styles of the rich in Upper East Side in New York or Avenue Montaigne in Paris, so the poor in Jakarta's kampungs identify with the trials and tribulations of their Latin American counterparts in the telenovella reruns.

"National programming" in essence carries a simple message: where the offerings bring unwarranted intrusions of outlandish life-styles, television programmers must balance between the need for revenues and the imperative to limit conspicuous consumption. Though the workings of the market tend to work in favor of foreign shows, national programmers must closely watch when certain saturation points are reached as each new generation enter into the "MTV age" which began in 1981. Throughout the first half of the 1980s, television commercials were forbidden from being beamed to the eastern half of Indonesia, for fear of cultural devastation and economic distortion. However, with the advent of private Indonesia television, such an attitude would almost certainly be regarded as condescending by most Indonesian nationals living in that part of the country.

National programmers must also be aware that global television has created a "captive market" among the young and affluent in Asia's major cities. The high-tension drama of television serials, with its intricate technical sophistication, makes it difficult for local viewers to appreciate TV drama produced at home but which lack the suspense and immediacy offered by the techniques of special effects perfected by Hollywood's television studios. This gap in technical skills alone makes the struggle for achieving national cultural space more difficult to achieve.

Finally, national programmers must constantly be aware of differing cultural outlooks in the outer areas of the nation. As in many multi-cultural states, the very notion of "national culture" and "national identity" can be a very touchy one. The national television TVRI periodically broadcasts regional cultural programs in rotation, providing 15 to 20 minute feeds of local dance, song and art from each of Indonesia's 27 provinces. In the 1970s these programs complemented the national-consciousness campaign through the depiction of the nation's state symbol at the end of each 7 p.m. broadcast in conjunction with the national song *Garuda Pancasila*..

As Indonesia embarks on its second long-term national development plan and as the pervasive influence of global satellite television intrudes into the hearts and minds of younger Indonesians, the challenges of national programming become even more formidable.****