



Critical resignation in Latin America: transnational media and young people

Rodrigo Muñoz-González

To cite this article: Rodrigo Muñoz-González (2024) Critical resignation in Latin America: transnational media and young people, *Transnational Screens*, 15:3, 290-304, DOI: [10.1080/25785273.2023.2295171](https://doi.org/10.1080/25785273.2023.2295171)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/25785273.2023.2295171>



Published online: 19 Dec 2023.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 194



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)



Citing articles: 2 [View citing articles](#)



Critical resignation in Latin America: transnational media and young people

Rodrigo Muñoz-González 

School of Communication, University of Costa Rica, Costa Rica

ABSTRACT

Costa Rica is a Latin American country with historical close ties to the United States. This relationship is palpable in the prominence and relevance that content produced in the US has in local media diets. In this article, I analyse how young people in Costa Rica make sense of engaging with transnational media. My goal is to understand the modes in which audiences understand their consumption of foreign media, and how these media operate as a bridge to comprehend broader geopolitical dynamics. For this, I use the theory of cultural proximity to explore the forces that mobilise the reception practices of young audiences and to discern which elements they experience as culturally close. Drawing from a media consumption habits survey, 13 focus group discussions and 35 paired-interviews, I examine the ways in which political and aesthetic evaluations underpin the interpretation of transnational media. Moreover, I show that Costa Rican young audiences adopt a stance of critical resignation: an interpretative operation which entails the acceptance of a geopolitical situation of a perceived submission and inferiority, but a critical awareness of their attitudes towards and acceptance of media texts that come from abroad.

KEYWORDS

Audiences; reception; transnational media; Latin America; Global South; cultural proximities

Introduction

From the United Fruit Company to recent free trade agreements, Costa Rica has shared close ties with the United States throughout the last two centuries (Raventós Vorst 2018; Willis and Seiz 2012). This diplomatic and geopolitical situation is not unique for this Central American nation. Indeed, the Latin American region has been influenced by this global superpower under economic, social and political premises; starting with the Monroe doctrine, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the presence of the United States in the American continent has been palpable in terms of hard and soft power for almost two centuries (Friedman 2003). In the case of Costa Rica, this influence and presence has been subtle: although historically this country has not witnessed direct political interventions like its neighbours, Panama and Nicaragua, it was a satellite for the United States during the Cold War in the conflictive Central American isthmus and remains a loyal ally (Cupples and Larios 2010).

The presence of and engagement with transnational media in Costa Rica must be understood vis-à-vis a national highly privatized mediascape. As Robles and Voorend (2012) point out, this mediascape has been historically characterised by a dependency on foreign content and a concentration of property, caused mainly by an outdated legal framework that favours the private sector. Furthermore, since the 1960s, Costa Rica has experienced an increase in imports from the United States, from television sitcoms to fashion and home appliances (Molina 2002, 98–99). For Harvey-Kattou (2019), the intense presence of U.S. mass-produced goods provided the basis for a popular aspiration to a lifestyle based on material culture, ‘with many people favourably comparing Costa Rican ways of life with U.S. consumerism’ (17).

The highly privatised Costa Rican mediascape makes it difficult to gain access to public data about viewership and engagement practices amongst different audiences – considering that market research firms operate within the regulations of private media outlets. Nevertheless, the US influence in Costa Rica is palpable in terms of offer and consumption when the presence of U.S.-based media and platforms, is inspected. For instance, a survey conducted by Brenes, Siles and Tristán-Jiménez (2023) found that the media diets of the population are marked by a high use of social media – specifically Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, WhatsApp, and YouTube. Furthermore, platforms such as Netflix (Siles et al. 2019) and Spotify (Siles et al. 2020) play an important part in consumption habits and practices of Costa Rican young people (Siles 2023).

In this article, I analyse how young people in Costa Rica make sense of engaging with transnational media. My intention is to grasp how they understand the consumption of media, which is not produced in their country, and how these media operate as a bridge to comprehend broader geopolitical dynamics. Considering the abovementioned historical conditions, I seek to examine young people’s interaction with media texts that come mostly from the United States. In order to accomplish this, I take the theory of cultural proximity, as elaborated by Straubhaar (1991) and collaborators (Straubhaar et al. 2023) to discuss how Costa Rican young audiences navigate the frontier between what is local and what is transnational in their media reception practices. I call their engagement *critical resignation*, an interpretative operation which entails the acceptance of a geopolitical situation marked by a power imbalance, and a critical awareness of their own attitudes towards and acceptance of media texts that come from the United States.

The present work is based upon ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in Costa Rica from March to September 2019. I worked in two educational institutions where I applied a media consumption habits survey and undertook a series of focus group discussions and paired interviews with young people. My aim is to understand these young people as audiences who are interacting not only with media texts, but with complex historical, social, economic, and cultural processes (Livingstone 2019; Livingstone and Das 2013). In this regard, I examine the engagement of an audience with a specific kind of media, instead of focusing on the interaction with the meanings from a single media text.

I start my argument by discussing the challenges of analysing transnational audiences and the main insights of the cultural proximity theory (Berg 2017; La Pastina 2004). After this, I lay out the main methodological considerations of this research, describing my fieldwork in Costa Rica and its data collection and analysis processes. Thus, I proceed to analyse how Costa Rican young people make sense of their engagement with transnational media. I present these findings in three sections which interrogate: 1) how these

young people understand the role of the United States in their country; 2) how despite being critical about this geopolitical relationship they idealise the aesthetic construction of American media; and 3) how they interpret a perceived omnipresence of American media in Costa Rica. I analyse the ways in which different entangled proximities (Wagner and Kraidy 2023) bring together geopolitical, aesthetic, and quotidian factors in the affinities that Costa Rican young people experience towards transnational contents that represent foreign realities. Finally, I conclude by underscoring the necessity of developing a vocabulary for ambiguity and contradiction in the study of transnational audiences.

Transnational audiences and cultural proximity

There is a long-standing tradition that explores the dynamics that take place between transnational media flows and local audiences (Athique 2016; Stone and Freijo 2021; Straubhaar 2022). The study of transnational audiences encompasses a problematisation of globalisation as a multi-layered process in which historical, social, cultural, economic, and political dynamics intersect; in terms of media reception, this brings about complex engagements between local and global meanings (Lomas Martínez 2022; Straubhaar et al. 2023). Initially, the focus on the transnational aspect of media production and interpretation derived from a concern on what was considered a unidirectional – and consequently hegemonic – flow of media texts and products from colonial powers to the rest of the world (Lobato 2019). Amid the context of the Cold War, claims of cultural imperialism became a prime mover of studies that critiqued the inequalities of certain countries vis-à-vis the media production power of the United States and Europe. These studies, despite their political commitment, were not based on empirical examinations of actual audiences (Dorfman and Mattelart 1991; Tomlinson 1991).

Transnational engagements started to be empirically analysed, especially during the 1990s, showing that media reception across cultures is regularly enacted through nuanced dynamics of translation, negotiation, and hybridisation (Gómez-Cruz 2022; Okome 2007; Wagner, Boczkowski, and Mitchelstein 2021). A key concern of the literature on transnational audiences entails the modes in which national audiences may or may not choose to engage with foreign or local media texts (Athique 2005; Rixon 2006). The work of media scholar Joseph D. Straubhaar (2007, 2015) is foundational in this respect, proposing the concept of cultural proximity as an analytical tool to examine the reception of transnational media texts. The theory of *cultural proximity* suggests that audiences will tend to prefer media ‘that are closest, most proximate or most directly relevant to them in cultural and linguistic terms’ (La Pastina and Straubhaar 2005, 273). Under this view, language and local or national cultures are the main factors that play a role in audience preferences; from there, other aspects such as genre, in terms of the media text, and economic and cultural capital, in terms of social dynamics, shape multiple layers of proximity (Berg 2017; Straubhaar et al. 2021). This process is complemented and enhanced by the ways in which media texts are culturally shareable, i.e. texts that have values, images, archetypes, and themes common across diverse cultures (Singhal and Udornpim 1997, 186).

Although the majority of works that draw on the theory of cultural proximity acknowledge multiple spatial and cultural proximities and several limitations – e.g. the limited media production infrastructure of certain countries – (La Pastina 2004;

Straubhaar et al. 2023), they have an important weakness that I must highlight. By proposing different layers in the cultural proximity between audiences and transnational media texts, this approach erroneously hierarchises distinct elements that compose the process of reception. Further empirical studies that have employed this theory to explore transnational engagements underscore how the relationship between local audiences and foreign media is marked by contextual and contingent conditions; hence, on some occasions, language might be a crucial factor for this kind of engagements, whilst, in different instances, other issues might take prominence in this process (Berg 2017, 3428). Iwabuchi (2002) offers a solution to this problem by proposing to consider cultural proximity as a dynamic process derived from specific historical and social conditions. In addition, he warns against identifying cultural proximity as a predetermined attribute of media texts; on the contrary, it should be conceived, he argues, as a dialectical relation between distinct cultural forces articulated around the audiences' agency and individual background, media text structures, and particular contexts (Iwabuchi 2002, 134).

In their study of the reception of Turkish dramas in Argentina, Wagner and Kraidy (2023) propose that, structural factors such as gender, age, class, and ideology interact with culture, language, values, and national identities. This builds on the ideas advanced by Straubhaar and other collaborators (Straubhaar et al. 2019) by suggesting the operation of *entangled proximities*, i.e. aspirational, and even nostalgic, predispositions towards foreign cultures, times, and spaces (Wagner and Kraidy 2023). Indeed, recent research conducted in Latin America highlights how diverse audiences enact complex reception practices, in which social imaginaries and aesthetic assessments intersect, in order to join and enjoy a transnational global media culture (Boczkowski 2021; Siles 2023).

In the remaining parts of this article, I argue that geopolitical, aesthetic, and quotidian factors converge in the affinities that Costa Rican young people experience towards transnational media, especially content produced in the United States. Thus, I exhibit how the engagement of young people with transnational media in the Global South entails complex interpretative operations that entail entangled proximities that bring together historical, social, and cultural forces.

Methodology

The present study follows a *critical cultural studies* tradition of audience research (Hall 1980; Livingstone 1998), a tradition concerned with the unevenness and disparities, in terms of symbolic power, between audiences and media institutions, but also with the multiple possibilities of resistance, negotiation, complicity and collusion that might arise in these exchanges (du Gay et al. 2013). For this, I have followed an *ethnographic sensibility* to problematise how the interaction between a repertoire of meanings and a specific audience transcends the individual terrain – or rather, starts from it contingently – and is unfolded upon certain circumstances and contexts (Higbee and Hwee Lim 2010; Livingstone and Sefton-Green 2016; Radway 1991).

The findings reported in this article are based on a fieldwork I conducted in Costa Rica from March to September 2019. My intention was to gather data regarding the engagement of young people with different kinds of media representations and outlets. During that time, I worked in two educational institutions: Colegio Santa María, a private

secondary school, and Colegio Técnico Vocacional Virilla, a public secondary technical school. There, I worked with young people of 15–18 years.¹

In both educational institutions, I applied a media consumption habits survey. At the private school, I surveyed all the 10th and 11th grades, for a total of 132 students. In parallel, at the public school, I surveyed all the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades, for a total of 88 students. Here, I must note that, in Costa Rica, secondary technical schools have one more academic grade – i.e. the 12th – than their academic counterparts. Moreover, having been recently founded, Virilla Vocational High School has fewer students than other schools in the country. Given that the data gathered in the survey is contextual, this article is mainly based around qualitative data.

During my fieldwork, I conducted a total of 13 focus group discussions (Gilbert 2017; Lunt and Livingstone 1996) – 8 in St. Mary High School and 5 in Virilla Vocational High School. In total, 90 students were part of this research activity – 55 in St. Mary High School and 35 in Virilla Vocational High School. In average, each focus group discussion had 7 participants in both schools. Due to the different conditions of these educational institutions, the discussions had an average duration of 2 hours in the private school and of 1 hour in the public school.

In addition, I conducted 35 paired interviews (Polak and Green 2016; Wilson, Onwuegbuzie, and Manning 2016). These interviews were carried out with students who had participated in the focus group discussions and showed interest in continuing being involved in the project. In this regard, I utilised the conducted paired interviews – 20 in St. Mary High School and 15 in Virilla Vocational High School – to deepen my understanding of the participants' engagement with the media by creating an environment in which they could express more personal opinions and ideas. In both schools, the paired interviews had an average duration of 25 minutes.

All the research activities were conducted in Spanish; I have translated to English all the extracts of conversations included in this article. The focus group discussions and paired interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed. These data were analysed using the method of thematic analysis and the software NVivo for qualitative analysis (Attride-Stirling 2001; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006).

Engaging with transnational media

For Costa Rican young people, an American media production model is the benchmark upon which they value media and other narrative products. Even though the participants admit that they also engage with TV series, films, and music from Latin America, they recognise the central place that U.S. media has in their media diets.²

On this matter, the media habits survey reveals the presence and preference of these young people for U.S. media texts. For instance, the students from St. Mary High School mention a total of 79 different media products in an open-ended question which asked them to write down their favourite TV series. From the total of mentioned TV series, 82% are Anglo-American – that is to say, English-speaking media. Amongst this selection, the most frequently cited TV series were *Grey's Anatomy* (8,1%), *Stranger Things* (5,2%), *Riverdale* (4%), *The Walking Dead* (3,5%), and *Game of Thrones* (3,5%).

On the other hand, the surveyed students of Virilla Vocational High School mention a total of 65 different media products. In this case, 70% of the mentioned

TV series are Anglo-American. The most frequent TV series were *The Walking Dead* (4,3%), *The Simpsons* (3,3%), *Dragon Ball* (3,3%), *Gravity Falls* (3,3%), and *Pablo Escobar* (3,3%). Although there is a lack of public data concerning media engagement and consumption practices in Costa Rica, my fieldwork demonstrates that these young people's media diets are formed by large portions of media produced in the United States.

In what follows, I analyse how Costa Rican young people make sense of engaging with transnational media. I first begin by interrogating how the participants understand the geopolitical relationship between their country and the United States. As I uncover, their critical and pessimistic views of this relationship are grasped through the media, i.e. the hegemony of U.S. media in their nation. This leads me to explore how the participants idealise the aesthetics of American media texts, showing rejection towards national ones. Finally, I explore this contradictory interpretative operation by paying attention to their assessment of the perceived omnipresence of American media in Costa Rica.

Making sense of the United States in Costa Rica

For the participants, Costa Rica has a geopolitical relationship of *submission* vis-à-vis the United States. During my fieldwork, I did not find a young person who had an alternative opinion about this. Indeed, these young people consider that their country is highly dependent on the North American nation. Thus, the participants recognise a 'weak' geopolitical role of Costa Rica, whereas they acknowledge the power dynamics in which their nation is embedded. The following comments made by Violeta helps us to comprehend how the participants grasp the geopolitical role of Costa Rica:

Violeta: Well, I know this is a rather ugly expression, but we are the United States' pet, because everything we consume here comes from there, I mean, we have a lot of American influence. For instance, if you talk with your grandparents about the Cold War, and you mention something about communism, they get scandalised because they were taught that only capitalism is right. That kind of stuff is really ingrained in our culture.

For Violeta, American influence is something 'ingrained' in Costa Rica's culture. She explains this by invoking historical reasons such as the Cold War. The participants have an ambivalent vision of the relationship between Costa Rica and the United States: on the one hand, they are aware of a process of cultural hegemony which operates in different terrains – such as the media –, whilst they endorse the idea that the 'population' actively seeks to imitate the American way of life. On this point, nothing beats the eloquence of Diana and Harold, who explain in the next extract how they grasp this dynamic:

Diana: Actually, I heard this phrase, and pardon my French, which says that we are the 'ass kissers' of the United States just because we listen to everything they have to say, and we want to copy everything they do. And it actually makes a lot of sense.

Harold: The biggest difference between the United States and Costa Rica are the institutions. There, all the hospitals and schools have been privatized; here, you have more public institutions. But, on the other hand, in other aspects, such as laws, I feel that every day we are more similar to them. Perhaps, it's not that easy to notice because it's happening little by little, but if we compare the Costa Rica of the past to the Costa Rica of the present, that's where you see the drastic changes.

These two youngsters exhibit an understanding of agency, which is enacted in the mode in which their country engages with this influence. Indeed, the participants make sense of the presence of the United States in Costa Rica through the media. They understand the influence and role of the United States in their country and in the region based on the high quantity of American media they encounter in their everyday lives.

In this regard, by assessing the origin of the media productions they engage with, these young people generate – and confirm – the idea of a superpower which is present in almost every part of the world. This can be illustrated with Luz, who explains how U.S. media is almost omnipresent in Costa Rica, exerting different kinds of influences:

Luz: I mean, I think everything here comes from the United States. And, besides, I think that lots of stereotypes come from them, because we've been really influenced for many years ... for example, you have this idea that a pretty woman must have blonde hair and blue eyes, so following that, we, Latin-Americans, are not pretty. And stuff like that.

Luz's words exemplify the understanding of the majority of participants regarding the role of the United States in their country. For them, it is an undeniable fact that most of the media they engage with – if not all – comes from this global superpower. In the case of Luz, she underscores the role of U.S. media in setting beauty stereotypes. In her assessment, it is possible to observe a logical challenge: what happens to people, who do not have blonde hair and blue eyes, when the only media they engage with only shows that ideal?

The understanding of these young people towards the relationship between their country and the United States is ambivalent. This understanding is more nuanced and contradictory when the focus is turned to these young people's evaluation of the foreign media they consume. Despite a reflexive awareness in terms of geopolitics and representation, the participants praise the aesthetic values of American TV series, films, and music and lament the perceived low quality of their national media.

Aesthetic idealisation of American media

The participants are fully aware that the United States have a larger power in terms of media production than Costa Rica, both in quantity and quality. For them, the main factor regards the production values of American media, i.e. the aesthetic construction upon which a media product is developed. This idealisation becomes clear when these young people discuss their experiences with Costa Rican films or TV series in terms of production values. This can be illustrated in the next fragment, in which Rocío and Lola explain their engagement with both foreign and national media:

Rocío: I do like them [American TV series] because they are well done, and their stories are ... I don't know how to explain it ... they trigger curiosity, you want to know what happened, making you continue with the series [...] Not because a TV series is from the United States, or any other country, it means that it's good, although almost every American TV series are good. I've seen TV series or films from other countries, and they are not that bad, although not quite as good as the American ones.

Lola: For instance, I started watching this film '*Buscando a Marcos Ramírez*' [a Costa Rican film] ... I don't remember who told me about it ... I think it was on Twitter where I read that it was good. And when I started watching it, I said to myself: 'I will finish it because you never know, it's wrong to judge a book by its cover', but it's super long, like two hours I think, and the first hour and a half is just people talking and nothing interesting happens. So, I believe that too much talking and all of that makes you say: 'Oh no, that's boring'.

For Rocío and Lola, American TV series know how to hook audiences to their stories, whereas national media products can be 'boring'. This contrast is regularly found amongst the participants. For them, U.S. media have more refined production values than media from other parts of the world. Evidently, as I will explore later on, these young people are used to a specific media production model; for now, suffice it to highlight this preference, i.e. the conscious selection of American media over other types by the participants.

The criticism towards Costa Rican media was common amongst these young people. For them, it is not only a matter of aesthetic quality, but of focus. In this regard, the participants consider that national films and TV series are 'too local'; namely, that they are made exclusively for a Costa Rican audience. As Larissa suggests, national media lacks the 'universality' that American media possess:

Larissa: I think that films and TV series made in Costa Rica have a really narrow focus, they are made for just one kind of public, they are not made to be distributed in other places. I mean, if you have an American movie [*película gringa*], literally any kind of public will understand it; on the contrary, probably a Costa Rican movie [*película tica*] will only be understood by Costa Ricans [*ticos*] because they always have Costa Rican slang and local humour, they are not made to be screened outside the country [...].

Larissa's words echo a pattern amongst the participants. For these young people, Costa Rican media – and specially films – are made following certain local tropes. As Larissa illustrates, these young people display a strong dissatisfaction towards the 'slang' and 'local humour' found in some national films. American media establishes an aesthetic standard for these young people by being widely available and present in their quotidian sphere, as they are adamant to point out. Again, let us see how this works with a comment made by Violeta:

Violeta: Since you are very little, you start learning American English, and here you only listen to two types of music: music in Spanish or in English, and that's it. There are many other things to listen to and sometimes people refuse to engage with them simply because they don't come from our bubble. So, if a movie theatre is screening a Russian film and Spider-Man, at the same time, probably almost everybody will want to watch Spider-Man because we feel it closer to us than other stuff.

There is an idealisation directed towards the aesthetics and production values of an American model of media production. Nonetheless, even though the participants are aware of the aesthetic standard they have to consume media, they show a high reflexivity in terms of their choices and the reasons behind them. In a contradictory fashion, they enjoy American media texts whilst, simultaneously, they are dissatisfied with the general geopolitical conditions that make those texts available to them. This idealisation, as these young people notice, is rooted in an extensive presence of this type of foreign media in their country. I analyse how they make sense of this in the following lines.

American media in Costa Rica

For the participants, the hegemony of U.S. media in their country has become a habit. In terms of the multiple aspects of the relationship between Costa Rica and the United States, these young people tend to describe it as a situation that 'you get used to'. Hence, for these young people, American media products are part of their everyday lives. Let us see how Aldo understands the American background of the media he engages with:

Aldo: It does feel like normal because you are definitely used to it, given that it comes from 'America'. So, when you are watching something, to avoid feeling excluded, you say to yourself: 'well, this comes from your continent'. So, you feel like one more. It's not like those indie movies that you watch them, and you are like 'what's this crap?', or the movies from Bollywood . . . I mean, it's that, you start feeling those movies as part of yourself, and you stop feeling isolated.

Aldo recognises that he, as a Costa Rican young man, is not the target audience of diverse media he engages with. In order to rationalise this fact, and to avoid 'feeling excluded', he proceeds to understand the United States as a synecdoche: the country stands for the whole American continent. Furthermore, he explains his experience of disgust towards indie and Bollywood films by noting that they do not represent his 'normal', i.e. they do not follow an American model of media production.

These young people recognise that this situation is fostered in a geopolitical order which favours certain ways of representing the world over others; in short, they know that they play a part in a *dynamic of exclusion*. As I have been highlighting in this article, the participants acknowledge the subordinate role of their country in terms of geopolitics and media production. In this regard, they have rationalised their exposure to U.S. media and the situation of being non-resident audiences, i.e. audiences that 'engage with a media artefact in a context where the diegetic world cannot reasonably be claimed to be "about here and about us"' (Athique 2014, 10). Although they seem to have interiorised this aspect, several participants express their inconformity with the weak role of

Costa Rican media. Antonio illustrates this point by evoking a memory of disappointment from his childhood:

Antonio: To be honest, I can't say I feel something because I am already used to that. But I remember when I was a kid and I was watching TV, I would ask my brother 'is this happening here?', and I always felt disappointed when I started to question why all films are in English, why everything is produced in the United States, and why Costa Rica is such a small country. I've grown used to that, but there's always been something bitter in me, especially when I consider that what is produced in Costa Rica is not that big or it's not so well-received.

For Antonio, the disparity between his country and the United States is 'something bitter' that he has had throughout growing up despite having been used to it. This youngster invokes a powerful feeling of disappointment and displeasure towards the fact that he could not see his everyday life represented on the media. His words illustrate how U.S. media is an inseparable part of the participants' lives; yet they recognise the lack of seeing their realities on a TV or cinema screen or hearing it. With this, I am not implying that they do not access to Costa Rican media; on the contrary, I mean to imply that these young people have been interacting with a global model of media production which 'pushes' specific products from a specific country, and with a weak national model of media production which do not capture their demands.

Discussion: critical resignation in transnational reception

Young people in the Global South are immersed in transnational media. The theory of cultural proximity, as developed by Straubhaar (1991, 2015) and other scholars (Berg 2017; La Pastina 2004; Straubhaar et al. 2019), points out how specific contextual conditions provide cultural coordinates for engagements with transnational media and how meaning-making dynamics are always localised – i.e. reception practices are enacted from the social positionality of audiences. This theory also states that audiences prefer media that is more culturally close to them (La Pastina and Straubhaar 2005). Yet it seems that for Costa Rican audiences, American culture feels like home – notwithstanding the complicated historical forces that are behind this. Although the ideas elaborated by Straubhaar and collaborators (Straubhaar et al. 2021) are fundamental to grasp the role of social categories such as class, age, and gender in transnational media reception, it is crucial to take into account processes of cultural hybridisation and other affective, stylistic, and aspirational factors (Rincón and Marroquín 2019). Transnational media flows and other geopolitical have diffused what is local and what is foreign. When Costa Rican young audiences make sense of an American media text, there a different entangled proximities at work (Wagner and Kraidy 2023). Geopolitical, aesthetic, and quotidian factors converge in the affinities this young people experience towards transnational contents that represent a foreign reality. These proximities operate within an experiential framework which is more complex than a simple separation between what is local and transnational (Alvaray 2023; Athique and Kumar 2022; Constandinides 2022).

For Wagner and Kraidy (2023), transnational reception brings about an experience of *resigned agency* in which audiences engage in creative interpretations of media texts, and

the pleasures of viewing them, but are simultaneously aware of larger social and material dynamics at play. In this case, Costa Rican young audiences construct their media diets based on catalogues offered by transnational media, from traditional television to streaming platforms. It is possible to detect this sense of resigned agency in the modes in which these young people make sense of the presence of US content in their everyday life and the geopolitical relations of their country. They know where their media habits come from and exhibit a strong reflexivity towards the relationship between their own preferences and contexts. However, within their resigned agency, there is a political stance that characterises how they understand their consumption of transnational media. In terms of the participants' interpretation of U.S. media texts, I argue, there is an interpretative operation that I would like to call *critical resignation*.

Following the argument developed so far, this interpretative operation entails the acceptance of a geopolitical situation, but a critical awareness of the accents and absences present in the media texts that come from a 'dominator'. The students from both schools are cognisant of the geopolitical role of their country in the world: it would be hard to contradict their assessment of a Costa Rica tied to a foreign economic power. Indeed, since colonial times, a large portion of the nation's development has been contingent upon often exploitative commercial relations with larger international markets (Cupples and Larios 2010; Molina 2002). Although they regularly criticise the role of the United States in Costa Rica, they do not take a stance of active opposition towards U.S. media texts. On the contrary, these media texts constitute their media diets. But it is not only a matter of quantity and presence, but of preference and normalisation. As I have analysed in this article, the participants consider U.S. media texts as their 'normal', i.e. they configure the base from which subsequent media choices take place. In short, they create an aesthetic referent which is used to evaluate other media, be it national or from other parts of the world. As different young people point out, several aspects of an American 'way of life' are considered to be ingrained in Costa Rica culture. Thus, foreign media texts – or the American media production model – become something 'quotidian', 'local', or are perceived as such.

Here, I am not suggesting that all engagements with transnational media entail a critical resignation of some sort. Indeed, media reception encompass myriad practices that depend on the semiotic resources present in a media text and the socio-cultural background of audiences (Livingstone 2019; Siles 2023). That is why, I submit, considering the ever-changing complex social dynamics that occur around the act of engaging with the media (Livingstone and Blum-Ross 2020; Wu and Bergman 2019), it is crucial to develop a *vocabulary for interpretative contradictions and ambivalences*. The development of this vocabulary would encompass a detailed description and dissection of a negotiated interpretative process, taking into account the diverse textual, social, cultural, political, and economic factors that play a role in the engagement between an audience and a media text.

In the preceding lines, I have been analysing how young people from the Global South make sense of engaging with transnational media. My intention has not been to be media centric nor to display a sort of media determinism: evidently, TV series, films, music, and other products, are not the only cultural resources upon which this understanding is unravelled. However, they are essential for fostering complex positions towards a perceived situation of submission

and inferiority. It is through the availability and interpretation of a specific kind of media texts that Costa Rican young audiences experience the confirmation of power dynamics and a social order. The participants' critical resignation entails an engagement in which critical skills are matched with conformity. They frown upon the role of a foreign nation in their country; yet they prefer the aesthetics of media texts from that 'hegemon' over national iterations; yet they also feel excluded from the perceived omnipresence of American media.

What I call critical resignation is a modest attempt to start developing a vocabulary that recognises that reception is a spectrum characterised by moments of dissonance, rejection, enjoyment, and even complicity and collusion (Hall 1980; Silverstone 2002), moments that might take place synchronously following interactions with media texts, a whole media apparatus, and social-political orders. As Nietzsche (1974) compels us to do, 'above all, one should not wish to divest existence of its *rich ambiguity*' (335; emphasis in the original). I claim that we should take this dictum to heart when we do audience research.

Notes

1. The names of the educational institutions and participants presented in this article have been anonymised. All the research activities reported here were part of my doctoral studies undertaken at The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and were approved by the Research Ethics Committee on February the 26th 2019.
2. By media I refer to symbolic and material systems of interconnected and diverse texts, genres, formats, platforms and technical infrastructures. My discussions and interviews with the participants were concentrated mainly on cinema, television, and music.

Acknowledgments

My sincere appreciation goes to Sonia Livingstone, Nick Couldry, and Lilie Chouliaraki for all the support. I would like to thank Oscar Alvarado, Michele Ferris, José Fonseca, Jorge Zeledón, the anonymous reviewers, and the editors of this journal for comments on earlier versions of this article.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Rodrigo Muñoz-González is a lecturer at the School of Communication of the University of Costa Rica. Taking a critical and contextualised approach, Rodrigo's work focuses on the role of social experiences and identities in processes of media engagement. His research interrogates how dynamics of mediation and mediatisation configure the relationship between people and culture. Currently, he is undertaking different fieldworks that aim to empirically analyse the appropriation of algorithms in the Costa Rican Caribbean and other rural zones, and the modes in which media provides interpretative frames to make sense of the climate crisis. He has published journal articles and book chapters on media audiences, discourse analysis, and media theory both in English and Spanish. He holds a PhD from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

ORCID

Rodrigo Muñoz-González  <http://orcid.org/0009-0003-7253-1599>

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

- Alvaray, L. 2023. "Of How Streaming Platforms are Changing the Audiovisual Space in Latin America." *Transnational Screens* 14 (1): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25785273.2023.2170762>.
- Athique, A. 2005. "Watching Indian Movies in Australia: Media, Community and Consumption." *South Asian Popular Culture* 3 (2): 117–133. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746680500234546>.
- Athique, A. 2014. "Transnational Audiences: Geocultural Approaches." *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 28 (1): 4–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2014.870868>.
- Athique, A. 2016. *Transnational Audiences: Media Reception on a Global Scale*. Cambridge and Malden: Polity.
- Athique, A., and A. Kumar. 2022. "Platform Ecosystems, Market Hierarchies and the Megacorp: The Case of Reliance Jio." *Media, Culture & Society* 44 (8): 1420–1436. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437221127798>.
- Attride-Stirling, J. 2001. "Thematic Networks: An Analytic Tool for Qualitative Research." *Qualitative Research* 1 (3): 385–405. <https://doi.org/10.1177/146879410100100307>.
- Berg, M. 2017. "The Importance of Cultural Proximity in the Success of Turkish Dramas in Qatar." *International Journal of Communication* 11:3415–3430. <https://1932-8036/20170005>.
- Boczkowski, P. J. 2021. *Abundance: On the Experience of Living in a World of Information Plenty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brenes, C., I. Siles, and L. Tristán-Jiménez. 2023. *Nuestras apps de cada día: 1er informe sobre el uso de plataformas digitales en Costa Rica*. San José, Costa Rica: CICOM.
- Constandinides, C. 2022. "Towards a Transnational Turn (?): Success Stories, Transgressive Politics, and Artistic Initiative in Recent Greek Cypriot Cinema." *Transnational Screens* 13 (1): 48–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25785273.2022.2061124>.
- Cupples, J., and I. Larios. 2010. "A Functional Anarchy: Love, Patriotism, and Resistance to Free Trade in Costa Rica." *Latin American Perspectives* 37 (6): 93–108. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X10382101>.
- Dorfman, A., and A. Mattelart. 1991. *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*. New York: I.G. Editions, Inc.
- du Gay, P., S. Hall, L. Janes, A. K. Madsen, H. Mackay, and K. Negus. 2013. *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*. 2nd ed. London: Sage.
- Fereday, J., and E. Muir-Cochrane. 2006. "Demonstrating Rigor Using Thematic Analysis: A Hybrid Approach of Inductive and Deductive Coding and Theme Development." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 5 (1): 80–92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500107>.
- Friedman, M. P. 2003. "Retiring the Puppets, Bringing Latin America Back In: Recent Scholarship on United States–Latin American Relations." *Diplomatic History* 27 (5): 621–636. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7709.00375>.
- Gilbert, K. E. 2017. "Policing Evaluation: Focus Group Interviews as an Embodied Speech Event." *Discourse & Communication* 11 (4): 341–361. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481317717378>.
- Gómez-Cruz, E. 2022. *Tecnologías Vitales: Pensar las culturas digitales desde Latinoamérica*. México: Editorial de la Universidad Panamericana.
- Hall, S. 1980. "Encoding/Decoding." In *Culture, Media, Language*, edited by S. Hall, D. Dobson, A. Lowe, and P. Willis, 128–138. London: Routledge.

- Harvey-Kattou, L. 2019. *Contested Identities in Costa Rica: Construction of the Tico in Literature and Film*. United Kingdom: Liverpool University Press.
- Higbee, W., and S. Hwee Lim. 2010. "Concepts of Transnational Cinema: Towards a Critical Transnationalism in Film Studies." *Transnational Cinemas* 1 (1): 7–21. <https://doi.org/10.1386/trac.1.1.7/1>.
- Iwabuchi, K. 2002. *Recentring Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- La Pastina, A. C. 2004. "Telenovela Reception in Rural Brazil: Gendered Readings and Sexual Mores." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21 (2): 162–181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393180410001688056>.
- La Pastina, A. C., and J. D. Straubhaar. 2005. "Multiple Proximities Between Television Genres and Audiences: The Schism Between Telenovelas' Global Distribution and Local Consumption." *International Communication Gazette* 67 (3): 271–288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0016549205052231>.
- Livingstone, S. 1998. *Making Sense of Television: The Psychology of Audience Interpretation*. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge.
- Livingstone, S. 2019. "Audiences in an Age of Datafication: Critical Questions for Media Research." *Television & New Media* 20 (2): 170–183. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476418811118>.
- Livingstone, S., and A. Blum-Ross. 2020. *Parenting for a Digital Future: How Hopes and Fears About Technology Shapes Children's Lives*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Livingstone, S., and R. Das. 2013. "The End of Audiences? Theoretical Echoes of Reception Amid the Uncertainties of Use." In *A Companion to New Media Dynamics*, edited by J. Hartley, J. Burgess, and A. Bruns, 102–121. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Livingstone, S., and J. Sefton-Green. 2016. *The Class: Living and Learning in the Digital Age*. New York: New York University Press.
- Lobato, R. 2019. *Netflix Nations: The Geography of Digital Distribution*. New York: New York University Press.
- Lomas Martínez, S. 2022. "Dancing Across European and Latin-American Borders: Pili and Mili's Transnational Musical Films of the 1960s." *Transnational Screens* 13 (1): 64–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25785273.2022.2064087>.
- Lunt, P., and S. Livingstone. 1996. "Rethinking the Focus Group in Media and Communications Research." *Journal of Communication* 46 (2): 79–98. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1996.tb01475.x>.
- Molina, I. 2002. *Costarricense por dicha: Identidad nacional y cambio cultural en Costa Rica durante los siglos XIX y XX*. San José: University of Costa Rica Press.
- Nietzsche, F. 1974. *The Gay Science*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Okome, O. 2007. "Nollywood: Spectatorship, Audience and the Sites of Consumption." *Postcolonial Text* 3 (2): 1–21.
- Polak, L., and J. Green. 2016. "Using Joint Interviews to Add Analytic Value." *Qualitative Health Research* 26 (12): 1638–1648. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315580103>.
- Radway, J. A. 1991. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Culture*. Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Raventós Vorst, C. 2018. *Mi Corazón dice No: El Movimiento de Oposición al TLC en Costa Rica*. San José: University of Costa Rica Press.
- Rincón, O., and A. Marroquín. 2019. "The Latin American Lo Popular as a Theory of Communication: Ways of Seeing Communication Practices." In *Citizen Media and Practice: Currents, Connections, Challenges*, edited by H. Stephansen and E. Treré, 42–56. London and New York: Routledge.
- Rixon, P. 2006. *American Television on British Screens: A Story of Cultural Interaction*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Robles, F., and K. Voorend. 2012. "Los dueños de la palabra en Costa Rica en un Contexto de Reforma Neoliberal." *Revista Rupturas* 1 (2): 144–161. <https://doi.org/10.22458/rr.v1i2.166>.

- Siles, I. 2023. *Living with Algorithms: Agency and User Culture in Costa Rica*. Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Siles, I., J. Espinoza-Rojas, A. Naranjo, and M. Fernanda Tristán. 2019. "The Mutual Domestication of Users and Algorithmic Recommendations on Netflix." *Communication, Culture & Critique* 12 (4): 499–518. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcz025>.
- Siles, I., A. Segura-Castillo, R. Solís, and M. Sancho. 2020. "Folk Theories of Algorithmic Recommendations on Spotify: Enacting Data Assemblages in the Global South." *Big Data & Society* 7 (1): 205395172092337. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951720923377>.
- Silverstone, R. 2002. "Complicity and Collusion in the Mediation of Everyday Life." *New Literary History* 33 (4): 761–780. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2002.0045>.
- Singhal, A., and K. Udornpim. 1997. "Cultural Shareability, Archetypes and Television Soaps: Oshindrome'in Thailand." *International Communication Gazette* 59 (3): 171–188. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0016549297059003001>.
- Stone, R., and L. Freijo. 2021. "World Cinema Between the Rock of the Unknowable and the Hard Place of the as Yet Unknown." *Transnational Screens* 12 (1): 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25785273.2021.1873572>.
- Straubhaar, J. D. 1991. "Beyond Media Imperialism: Assymetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 8 (1): 39–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295039109366779>.
- Straubhaar, J. D. 2007. *World Television: From Global to Local*. Los Angeles & London: Sage Publications.
- Straubhaar, J. D. 2015. "Global, Regional, Transnational, Translocal." *Media Industries Journal* 1 (3): 48–53. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mij.15031809.0001.309>.
- Straubhaar, J. D. 2022. "Além do imperialismo da mídia: Os desafios de teorizar fluxos globais de TV." *MATRIZES* 16 (3): 121–136. <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-8160.v16i3p121-136>.
- Straubhaar, J. D., D. Castro, L. G. Duarte, and J. Spence. 2019. "Class, Pay TV Access and Netflix in Latin America: Transformation within a Digital Divide." *Critical Studies in Television* 14 (2): 233–254. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749602019837793>.
- Straubhaar, J. D., M. Santillana, V. de Macedo Higgins Joyce, and L. G. Duarte. 2021. *From Telenovelas to Netflix: Transnational, Transverse Television in Latin America*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Straubhaar, J. D., M. Santillana, V. de Macedo Higgins Joyce, and L. G. Duarte. 2023. "Distinction and Cosmopolitanism: Latin American Middle-Class, Elite Audiences and Their Preferences for Transnational Television and Film." *International Journal of Communication* 17:365–387. <https://1932-8036/20230005>.
- Tomlinson, J. 1991. *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction*. London & New York: Continuum.
- Wagner, M. C., P. J. Boczkowski, and E. Mitchelstein. 2021. "Affect, Curiosity, and Positionality in Context: Watching Television Entertainment in Argentina and the United States." *International Journal of Communication* 15:668–687. <https://1932-8036/20210005>.
- Wagner, M. C., and M. M. Kraidy. 2023. "Watching Turkish Television Dramas in Argentina: Entangled Proximities and Resigned Agency in Global Media Flows." *Journal of Communication* 73 (4): 304–315. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqad001>.
- Willis, E. J., and J. A. Seiz. 2012. "The CAFTA Conflict and Costa Rica's Democracy: Assessing the 2007 Referendum." *Latin American Politics and Society* 54 (3): 123–156. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-2456.2012.00167.x>.
- Wilson, A. D., A. J. Onwuegbuzie, and L. P. Manning. 2016. "Using Paired Depth Interviews to Collect Qualitative Data." *The Qualitative Report* 21 (9): 1549–1573. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2016.2166>.
- Wu, S., and T. Bergman. 2019. "An Active, Resistant Audience – but in Whose Interest?." *Participations Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* 16 (1): 107–129.