Session 4
Media Imperialism
**Some Basic Questions about “Media Imperialism”**

“The actual phenomenon of media imperialism, on the other hand, has never disappeared or ceased to be important. I shall propose that this field of study is sustainable, has evolved, and has never been more relevant than in the current, so-called digital age” (Boyd-Barrett, 2015, p. 8)

→ critical analysis of alleged media globalization
→ critical analysis of media localization

→ US (and then Japanese) firms: 67% of the top 25 companies, 66% of the top 50, and 67% of the top 100
→ major US movie studios garnered a 62.7% share in 2013 of worldwide box office revenues
→ 2014 US companies backed the top 20 performers at the world box office every year for the last five years
Media:

Neocolonial imperialism:

a) dominance of media in everyday life, paramount impact of communications technology? i.e. Harold Innis on the physical properties of communication systems and their relationship to power;

b) foreign media taking over, displacing, preventing the rise of local media?

c) Imperialist messages conveyed via media?

Media and Imperialism:

Media as agents of imperialism: “where they exercise business practices in ways that suppress the viability of media in countries other than their own, or suppress the viability of smaller media in their own countries of origin so that the diversity and inclusiveness of creative voices and expression in the media are diminished or that access to those voices is reduced” (Boyd-Barrett, 2015, p. 14)—oligopoly
Media as agents for imperialism: “Media become agents for imperialism when they frame their narratives in a manner that presents imperialistic activity in a positive or benign light, when they prioritize the voices, justifications and discourses of imperial actors over the voices of victims, dissidents and alternatives, and when they omit or marginalize details and perspectives that would serve to critique imperial power” (Boyd-Barrett, 2015, p. 14)

Media Imperialism vis-à-vis Cultural Imperialism

(1) Describing, not explaining, and the problem of the culture concept:

“the sum of processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating structure is attracted, pressured, forced into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even to promote the values and structures of the dominant center of the system”
(2) Blurred boundaries:
→ Imperial Culture; Imperialist Culture; Cultural Imperialism

(3) No boundaries:
→ broad holism, or narrow specialization—problem with using the culture concept
→ “all imperialism is cultural”?

Media Imperialism is Cultural Imperialism?

“’media imperialism’, ‘cultural imperialism’ and ‘communication imperialism’. The academic discourse in the study of unbalanced international communication has been obfuscated by an absence of consensus in the use of these concepts” (Lee, 1988, p. 69)
(a) “the global export of the **capitalist/commercial form** of the US media system,
(b) “the **economic and ideological domination** of the global communication system by US corporations, and,
(c) “the **homogenization and integration** of the world with the social relations and **cultural values** of a globally expanding yet American-led capitalism” (Mirrlees, 2006, p. 200)

→ Effects?

(a) new audiences, new consumers
(b) no autonomous media self-representation
(c) Struggles for cultural autonomy: undermined
(d) cultural dependency
(e) reduction in cultural differences (Mirrlees, 2006, pp. 200-201)
To be meaningful, a theory of cultural imperialism should...

Ideas, Images, Identification

**PERSPECTIVES ON MEDIA IMPERIALISM**

Oliver Boyd-Barrett (2015):
(1) “that processes of imperialism are in various senses executed, promoted, transformed or undermined and resisted by and through media”
(2) “the media themselves, the meanings they produce and distribute and the political-economic processes that sustain them are sculpted by and through ongoing processes of empire building and maintenance, and they carry the residues of empires that once were”
(3) “there are media behaviors that in and of themselves and without reference to broader or more encompassing frameworks may be considered imperialistic” (Boyd-Barrett, 2015, p. 1)
Herbert Schiller:

a) OWNERSHIP & CONTROL

b) CONTENT

Consequences of US ownership & control (adapted from Herbert Schiller [1992(1969)]):

(a) serve the US military-industrial complex;
(b) business models: global extension of US political and economic dominance;
(c) promoting commodities via advertising, and by demonstration, through entertainment
Boyd-Barrett (1977) media imperialism as,

“the process whereby the ownership, structure, distribution or content of the media in any one country are singly or together subject to substantial pressure from the media interests of any other country or countries without proportionate reciprocation of influence by the country so affected”

→ transference of communication technology, export of professional models, flow of transnational data
→ common concerns: 1) hardware and software; 2) infrastructure; 3) cultural impact
= production, distribution, consumption
Ownership & Control, with Deleterious Effects:

communication imperialism defined as,

“the process in which the ownership and control over the hardware and software of mass media as well as other major forms of communication in one country are singly or together subjugated to the domination of another country with deleterious effects on the indigenous values, norms and culture” (Lee, 1988, p. 74)

Effects:
“media imperialism shall be used in a broad and general manner to describe the processes by which modern communication media have operated to create, maintain and expand systems of domination and dependence on a world scale” (Fejes, 1981, p. 281)

Theoretical Origins:
Focus, and exclusion:
→ focus on transnational corporations, powerful states, collusion of local elites
→ not just external imposition; not just recent; not simply about contact, exposure to foreign television products

**CAPITALIST MEDIA TNCs (1970s)**
→ News and entertainment TNCs, tied to US government, multiple investments: automobiles, planes, tires, aerospace, food and beverages, etc.

→ the “big five” (Paramount, 20th Century Fox, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Warner, RKO) and the middleweights (Columbia, Universal, United Artists)
→ Paramount productions now includes the Gulf & Western Industries: financing and insurance, a tobacco goods factory, automobile parts, natural resources
→ RKO was a subsidiary of the General Tire and Rubber Co. (producer of tyres and planes)
The other fraction of the old MGM - Loew Banking- the Loew’s Corp.: entertainment (117 cinemas and theatres), consumers’ goods (Lorillard, producers of Kent cigarettes), construction, international hotel chain

United Artists, Transamerica corporation: banks, airlines, insurance companies, consumer credit agencies, car-rental agencies, moving firms, 30 other divisions. Universal Pictures was part of Columbia Savings & Loan

how do you hold the powerful to account, when the media are owned and controlled by them?

regulated access

1) promoting American products and American styles
2) promoting the political ideology of the US
POST-WWII: THE ADVENT OF MEDIA IMPERIALISM

- dominated by developments post-WWII

“Our aim in the Cold War is not conquering of territory or subjugation by force. Our aim is more subtle, more pervasive, more complete. We are trying to get the world, by peaceful means, to believe the truth. That truth is that Americans want a world at peace, a world in which all people shall have opportunity for maximum individual development. The means we shall employ to spread this truth are often called ‘psychological.’ Don’t be afraid of that term just because it’s a five-dollar, five-syllable word. ‘Psychological warfare’ is the struggle for the minds and wills of men.” — President Dwight Eisenhower

- Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty
- Voice of America
- Radio Martí and TV Martí
- Pentagon’s Africa Command (AFRICOM): Magharebia
→ CIA and the Congress for Cultural Freedom
→ CIA and MoMA
FURTHER READING


Hoad, Phil. (2013/1/2). “Hollywood’s Hold over Global Box Office – 63% and Falling”. The Guardian (UK), April 2.


