ANTH/SOCI 498A

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Winter Semester, 2020
03 credits
January 15–April 8, 2020
Meeting days and times: Wednesdays, 11:45am–2:30pm
Campus: SGW, H-431
Course Website: https://culturalimperialism.wordpress.com/

“The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force”. ~ Karl Marx, The German Ideology (1845).

“Cultural imperialism rests on the power to universalize particularisms linked to a singular historical tradition by causing them to be misrecognized as such”. ~ Pierre Bourdieu & Lois Wacquant (1999, p. 41).

“What, after all, distinguishes an empire? It is a major actor in the international system based on the subordination of diverse national elites who—whether under compulsion or from shared convictions—accept the values of those who govern the dominant center or metropole. The inequality of power, resources, and influence is what distinguishes an empire from an alliance....Empires function by virtue of the prestige they radiate as well as by might, and indeed collapse if they rely on force alone. Artistic styles, the language of the rulers, and consumer preferences flow outward along with power and investment capital—sometimes diffused consciously by cultural diplomacy and student exchanges, sometimes just by popular taste for the intriguing products of the metropole, whether Coca Cola or Big Mac”. ~ Charles S. Maier, Harvard historian (2002, p. 28).

“For the United States, a central objective of an Information Age foreign policy must be to win the battle of the world’s information flows, dominating the airwaves as Great Britain once ruled the seas”. ~ David Rothkopf (1997, p. 39), US Department of Commerce, first administration of US President Bill Clinton.

“America stands supreme in the four decisive domains of global power....culturally...it enjoys an appeal that is unrivalled, especially among the world’s youth—all of which gives the United States a political clout that no other state comes close to matching. It is the combination of all four that makes America the only comprehensive global superpower”. ~ Zbigniew Brzezinski, National Security Adviser to US President Jimmy Carter, The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives (1997, p. 14).
Introduction

Hamburgers, Coca-Cola, Hollywood, English, pop music, blue jeans, chewing gum, and the dollar. Harvard, Columbia, and Stanford. Rockefeller, Carnegie, Kellogg, and Fulbright. Bank of America, Sheraton Hotels, and AT&T. NBC, General Electric. NATO, neoliberalism. Add to these “McDomination,” “Coca-colonization,” and various ideas about the “Disneyization” of the world, or the “McDonaldization” of society, or “Wal-Martization,” and one begins to get a sense of the compass of critical theories of “cultural imperialism”. Such theories, once prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s, have received new life in the early 21st-century as it became clearer that “globalization” was not an amorphous, multidirectional free flow of culture between equals, but rather a new phase of dominance and inequality, of the production of a hierarchy of values on a global scale. But what does “imperialism” have to do with this?

As the opening quotes suggest, this course is about the combination of culture, knowledge, ideology and power, on a large international scale, as shaped by a powerful state in alliance with, or at the service of, a transnational capitalist class. We begin by focusing on a theoretical approach in the social sciences concerning what theorists call “cultural imperialism”—an approach that is arguably among social science’s most prominent and influential theories, internationally and especially in formerly colonized nations, and one that is still controversial. We shall thus consider the many limitations and criticisms of these theories, while ending the course with an examination of how cultural imperialism has been resuscitated in practice, if not vindicated in theory. While answers to the many questions raised by this course (see section 3 below for a sample) will often be fragmentary, inconclusive, and open to considerable debate, the real value of the course lies in developing the most productive questions about matters which are often removed from question about contemporary political and cultural problems and conflicts.

Theories of cultural imperialism, which arose from sociology and communication studies in the late 1960s and then especially the 1970s, often explained the phenomenon as one that involved the domination of other cultures by products of the US culture industries primarily, as these theories often focused their attention on the US as the leading producer and global distributor of movies, music, news, and commercial advertising. One of the leading theorists, Herbert I. Schiller, defined cultural imperialism more broadly as, “the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes even bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating ‘centre of the system’” (Schiller, 1976, p. 9). However, from the 1980s onward, cultural imperialism began to be used interchangeably with “media imperialism,” “ideological imperialism,” and “electronic colonialism”. Media imperialism focused on the dominance of US-originated media and media content, a dominance that grew from the end of World War II through the Cold War. The media were seen as functioning as systemic mechanisms to propagate capitalism through cultural homogenization. Studies of US-dominated media literacy, US media conventions, and US market domination in media, found the cultural imperialism thesis to still be useful, especially as Hollywood and “the seven majors” continued to dominate the audio-visual landscape of most countries. While acknowledging the significance of “media imperialism” as a phenomenon that is still important, critics within the field felt that it featured too prominently, and they began looking at other ways some cultures attempt to dominate others, i.e., through science, religion, the arts, education, language, and so forth. Indeed, some of the earliest references to “cultural imperialism” in academic journals date back to the 1930s, with reference to the role of Christian missionaries in China.
While heavily focused on the role of mass media and advertising of consumer products, cultural imperialism has commonly been associated with the cultural ways in which capitalism has been spread, and is often associated with the leading imperial power of the present times, the United States, such that this field often bleeds into an exposé and critique of cultural “Americanization”. However, even while acknowledging the key role played by the US, many newer critical theories of cultural imperialism link with studies of neoliberalism and structural adjustment policies that have paved the way for Western media, governance, education, arts, self-interpretation, etc. Thus the scope of study of cultural imperialism now factors in the role of liberalized markets, US-style politics, the influence of US elites on local oligarchies, and the formation of a global network of economic, political, and military leaders.

Critics of the theory of “cultural imperialism” argued that what the proponents of the theory were discussing was not actually imperialism; anthropologists demonstrated that there has been no homogenization of cultures; in the same vein, ethnographers showed active selection, not passive audiences that merely absorbed and internalized whatever came from abroad; while others balked at the slogan-like simplifications and accusations present in writings about cultural imperialism. Others note that the spread of Western cultural products requires that infrastructures, rules, and technical specialists be put in place, and that markets exist for such products, both of which are two very serious contradictions/limitations to cultural imperialism. In response, those defending the theory of cultural imperialism partially revised their work and responded to some of the criticisms: that we cannot isolate the production of meaning from its political economic context, and that coercion still happens; that selective diffusion/reception do happen means that the cultural imperialism thesis needs to be modified, but not necessarily rejected.

Unfortunately, often pushed into the background (if not further), are older anthropological theories of relevance, such as theories of nativism, revitalization, cargo cults, and creolization. This course also inserts anthropological work on “technological determinism,” as a long-neglected approach of possible relevance to cultural imperialism.

The main literature used for this course—both the course text, and many of the journal articles listed as optional reading—examine how political and economic forces shape the content and distribution of ideas, with the end result being ideological hegemony, or the “preponderant influence” of a particular way of thinking about self and the world. In other words, a large part of cultural imperialism has to do with the exertion of power in telling us what to think (e.g. media effects), what to think about (e.g. agenda setting), and even how to think (e.g. technological determinism), in order that we may do certain things (e.g. become loyal consumers and obedient citizens). Currently, cultural imperialism encompasses issues of consumption, governance, education, language, media ownership, media messaging, and the exporting of “culture” via the Western-dominated film industry. More recently, cultural imperialism has grown to include the practice of the US military-industrial complex in producing misinformation, which has led to renewed interest in cultural imperialism in contemporary debates about soft power, Hollywood’s collaboration with the US military, cultural diplomacy, and the dominance of cyberspace.
Some of the Course’s Central Questions

1. What is “cultural imperialism”? Who or what exerts it?
2. Is the study of “cultural imperialism” different from the study of “culture and empire,” or “imperial culture”? If so, in which way(s)?
3. Why did the theories of cultural imperialism emerge when they did?
4. Is the study of “cultural imperialism” different from studies of “acculturation,” “assimilation,” “syncretism,” “cargo cults,” and “creolization”? If so, in which ways do they differ?
5. Saying that “cultural imperialism is old,” or that it “dates back to Spanish and Portuguese conquests,” is an answer to a question. Then what is the question? Is the question an interesting and important one?
6. Does cultural imperialism differ from capitalism, neoliberalism, or globalization?
7. Can you find evidence of cultural imperialism actually existing and succeeding? If so, then why and how does cultural imperialism work?
8. If cultural imperialism successfully worked, then why has military force been used by the US to impose its aims on other nation-states?
9. Do the following examples disprove, or prove, cultural imperialism? Examples: a) South Asian professors in Western universities, writing in English; b) South Asian computer specialists working in Silicon Valley, California.
10. Does the existence of “reverse cultural flows” entail “reverse cultural imperialism”? Examples of such “reverse flows” could include the spread of Reggae to North America, the proliferation of sushi restaurants, and the adoption of Maori tattoo patterns.
11. If preserving “local cultural diversity” is the aim of critics of cultural imperialism, does this presume the existence of untouched, homogeneous cultures and locales that remain apart from the world capitalist system?
12. What makes “cultural imperialism” cultural? Is not imperialism always cultural?
13. What is “culture” for the theorists of cultural imperialism? In other words, with which assumptions about culture—with what culture concept—are these theories of cultural imperialism operating?
14. In criticizing theories of “cultural imperialism,” are anthropologists also abandoning their previously influential theories of assimilation, acculturation, cultural domination, nativism, and invention?
15. Do anthropologists tend to reject cultural imperialism as a suitable theory, while sociologists and members of other disciplines tend to have supported the theory? If so, why might that be the case?
16. How do politics and economics intertwine to shape institutions, ideologies, and social consciousness? What are the consequences, both expected and unintended, of such intertwining?
17. Do the media “capture” people? Is the “brainwashing” role of media not an extreme position to support? What assumptions about people do such positions entertain? On the other hand, what assumptions operate in theories of agency, of the knowledgeable individual?
18. To the extent that some critiques of cultural imperialism are critical of “Americanization,” then who is “the American” in their theory? What does “American” mean in Americanization?
19. If cultural imperialism is not just about media, or not just about “Americanization,” then doesn’t cultural imperialism become too broadly defined to be workable as an analytical framework?
Assignments and Participation

Graded Course Components

- Mid-Term Essay Exam = 40%
- Final Essay Exam = 45%
- Participation = 15%

Total = 100%

Schedule of Assignments

1. Mid-Term Essay Exam: assigned on Monday, February 10. The first essay covers all materials from Sessions 1 through 5 only. It is due on Friday, February 21, at 9:00pm (21h00).

2. Final Essay Exam: assigned on Monday, April 6. The second essay can cover any materials from Sessions 6 through 12. It is due on Friday, April 24, at 5:00pm (17h00).

Overview of the assignments

Lectures and assigned readings are the basis for assignments in this course. Please observe that lecture notes are not provided on the “slides” shown in class—those are simply headings used to organize the lecture, and the occasional quote. Also, the course director never supplies students with lecture notes should they miss class—it is the students’ full responsibility to acquire all course materials.

You will be notified by email when an exam assignment sheet has been uploaded.

Submit all course work by email to:
courses@openanthropology.org

Please note that the only acceptable file formats for papers are either .doc, .docx, .odt, .rtf, or .txt
Do not send a link to or file from Google documents (i.e., .gdoc is not acceptable).
Do not send a PDF copy of your paper.

No acknowledgments of receipt are emailed to students. Instead, in the event that a paper is missing, the course director will contact the individual student directly.

No papers will be accepted late, without medical documentation that clearly indicates that most of the period since the exam question was assigned was the period in which the student was seriously ill. In the case of a death in one’s immediate family (which excludes relatives, friends, etc.), an obituary or similar notice must be submitted. In these two cases, the appropriate extension will be negotiated. In all other cases, a late exam is automatically assigned a grade of zero. A late take-home exam is treated the same as a student not showing up to sit an exam, or not handing in the exam once the exam session has ended.

Extensions are not taken by students, under any circumstances. An extension can only be granted by the course director, in advance of the due date for an assignment, and only under extreme circumstances. No technical reasons are acceptable for late work, therefore identify alternatives that might be needed to complete and submit an assignment.
Papers should be submitted in English; if submitted in French, the instructor’s reading ability is limited, and this could affect the quality of the feedback received by the student.

Incomplete grades (INC) are not granted in this course, under any circumstances.

This course does not allow for Late Completion.

There will be no supplemental work.

Please do not call the main office for course-related inquiries.

**Questions about assignments?**

Any questions about the exams, up to a specified cut-off date, will be accepted by email only. The course director will then send a response to the class as a whole, so that everyone may benefit. The identity of the persons sending in questions will not be divulged.

**For the take-home essays:**

- Use assigned readings and lecture notes.
- Lecture notes do not need to be cited as such in your essay. Omit references to “class notes” and “lectures,” as well as discussions.
- When quoting material from assigned readings, simply end the sentence in which the material appears with a basic reference in parentheses, like this: (Smith, 1998, p. 92). That is the surname of the author, the year of the publication, and the page number where the material appears. Be careful to note that editors of collections with multiple authors, are not to be cited as if they were authors.
- Only if you decide, on your own initiative, to quote items that were not assigned, should you provide a formal list of References at the end of your essay. Please keep in mind that citing outside sources will not, in and of itself, warrant a boost in your grade. When preparing the list of References (if one is needed), follow the basic format shown in this syllabus.

Finally, participation in class discussions is a must. This course promotes active learning, which cannot happen by being withdrawn and without investment in shaping interpretations of the assigned materials. That also entails regular attendance as a prerequisite (though not sufficient by itself). Participants will have questions, comments, and opinions to share. However, if daunted by speaking spontaneously, or feeling that there is a competitive environment where a few voices dominate, participants should approach the course director concerning the option of presenting prepared summaries of assigned readings. In some instances, the course director will instead opt to assign verbal presentations of summaries of readings, for the purposes of review and discussion in the course.

**Academic Integrity and Avoiding Plagiarism**

First, students are required to read and follow Concordia University’s policies on Academic Integrity. See: [https://www.concordia.ca/students/academic-integrity.html](https://www.concordia.ca/students/academic-integrity.html)

On plagiarism, you must read: [http://www.concordia.ca/students/academic-integrity/plagiarism.html](http://www.concordia.ca/students/academic-integrity/plagiarism.html)
**Attendance**

Every semester there is a minority of students who believe that a course can be taken as if it were a correspondence course, or an online course. Instead, regular attendance at lectures is critical to passing this course, and to avoid unnecessary failures the following policy will be strictly enforced:

In cases where a student is absent for most or all of the classes, the student will receive a failing grade for the course.

**Arriving late to class:**

Please make sure to be on time, for the start of class. If late, please enter silently and with an absolute minimum of disruption, especially during film showings. Students who do not respect this rule will have points deducted from their final grade, at the discretion of the course director.

**How (Not) to Succeed in this Course**

- Students will receive a failing grade for this course if they choose to treat it as a “distance education” or “correspondence course,” in other words, by missing most or all classes.

- All assigned readings are mandatory, and represent a minimum amount of reading needed to succeed in this course. In each of your written assignments, you are required to apply what is learned in class from lectures and assigned readings, and to show evidence of having covered these materials by using your judgment in selectively applying them where they are most appropriate.

- As with any course, the rule of thumb is that at a minimum one should be doing three hours of work for each hour spent in class, each week. One should thus budget for between seven and nine hours of study for this course, each week, beyond class time.

- It is usually not advisable to avoid taking notes, assuming you will remember everything, or that all that is needed is what is on the lecture slides (which are not lecture notes). You should also be asking questions in class any time that material presented or assigned as reading is not clear to you.

**Required Readings**

The required reading materials for this course consist of a selection of articles and chapters available in a coursepack that is available for purchase from the Concordia Bookstore.

**Course Policies**

*Office Hours (and Email contact):*

Please see the course director during office hours. If you cannot be available during the scheduled times, then please use email. These are the only two options available. The course director is not available for special appointments on days and times other than those allotted for office hours. Also, please do not attempt to use the minutes after class ends for a rushed meeting.
The course director will not respond to any emails during weekends, or after regular working hours.

**If you are sick, please do not come to class.** In keeping with the University’s aim of creating a safe and comfortable space for everyone to work, it is important to be considerate of others. Therefore, in order not to spread illness, and possibly disrupt class, you are asked to stay away until fully recovered. In extreme cases where this policy is not adhered to by students, the course director reserves the right to exit the classroom, while students will still be responsible for any material that was to be presented.

**If you are facing serious personal challenges during the time of this course,** and are unable to secure an immediate remedy from any of the campus’ services, you will need to seriously reflect on whether to continue with your current course load. It is an unfortunate reality that course directors cannot custom-design special courses to meet the unique needs of individual students.

Incomplete grades are not granted in this course, and no student should expect to receive an INC notation.

There is one major exception to these policies: in the event of a major public health crisis, or events beyond the University’s control, alternative course requirements and grading policies will be developed and used.

**Please do not call the Department’s main office for course-related inquiries.**

**How work is graded**

For all work done in this course you will receive a numerical grade which will be converted to a letter grade when final grades are processed. To translate numbers into letter grades, please consult the following chart, copied directly from a faculty handbook in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. It is vital that you understand that the characterizations below (i.e., “excellent”) are central in guiding the instructor’s evaluation of the quality of a paper.

Work that covers all of the basics, in a reasonably competent fashion, without major flaws, is deemed “satisfactory.” Work that has few flaws, and shows an advanced understanding, writing and research ability is deemed “very good.” Work that leaves little room for improvement (within the context of expectations of a 400 level course), demonstrating that the student has taken considerable initiative, showing sophisticated understanding and ability, is deemed “excellent.”

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**Announcements, E-Mail Use**

In the event of an unscheduled cancellation of a class, the appropriate notice is posted by the University on its website. See the “Class Cancellations” link on www.concordia.ca. In addition, digital billboards on campus will announce the cancellation. You will also be notified by email.
For the duration of this course, please check your email at least once each week, and look for any messages that begin with the course number.

Having said that, please ensure that you have the right email address entered in your MyConcordia student profile. That is the same email address to which course messages are sent.

**Disclaimer**

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.
Schedule of Lectures and Readings

Session Topics:
1. Introduction—Defining Cultural Imperialism
2. The First Debates about Cultural Imperialism
3. Histories of Cultural Imperialism
4. Theories of Cultural Imperialism, Part 1
5. Theories of Cultural Imperialism, Part 2
6. US Anthropology and “Culture Change,” Part 1
7. Anthropology and “Culture Change,” Part 2
8. Canadian Approaches to Empire and Communication
9. Canadian Anthropology and Technological Determinism
10. US Anthropological Critiques of Theories of Cultural Imperialism
11. Media Imperialism and the Revival of Studies of Cultural Imperialism
12. Academic and Scientific Imperialism

NB: with the knowledge and permission of the Chair of the Dept. of Sociology & Anthropology, the first class for this course, originally scheduled for January 8, is cancelled.

Session 1: Introduction—Defining Cultural Imperialism
Wednesday, January 15, 2020
• Overview of the course
• Course requirements
• Lecture: Defining Cultural Imperialism

Readings:
• Please read the course syllabus by this date, in its entirety.

Monday, January 20, 2020
• Last day to add winter-term courses.
• Deadline for withdrawal with tuition refund from winter-term courses.

Session 2: The First Debates about Cultural Imperialism
Wednesday, January 22, 2020
• Lecture: Christian Missions in China and the “White Man’s Burden”

Readings:


Session 3: Histories of Cultural Imperialism  
Wednesday, January 29, 2020  
• Lecture: Cultural Imperialism, the Last 100 Years

Readings:  


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Session 4: Theories of Cultural Imperialism, Part 1  
Wednesday, February 5, 2020  
• Lecture: Neo-Colonialism and a Structural Theory of Imperialism

Readings:  

• Galtung, Johan. (1971). “A Structural Theory of Imperialism”. Journal of Peace Research, 8(2), 81–117. [Please read the first 21 pages only, up to but not including section 8 on page 101]

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Session 5: Theories of Cultural Imperialism, Part 2  
Wednesday, February 12, 2020  
• Lecture: The Ideas of the Rulers, the Ruling Ideas

Readings:  
• Marx, Karl. (1932[1846]). The German Ideology: Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Stirner, and of German Socialism According to Its Various Prophets. Marxists Internet Archive. [Please read the section titled “Ruling Class and Ruling Ideas”]

Session 6: US Anthropology and “Culture Change,” Part 1
Wednesday, February 19, 2020
- Lecture: Some Background on US Studies of “Culture Contact” and “Culture Change”

Readings:

Monday, February 24, 2020: Mid-term break begins.
No class on Wednesday, February 26, 2020.

Session 7: Anthropology and “Culture Change,” Part 2
Wednesday, March 4, 2020
- Lecture: Nativism, Revitalization, and Cargo

Readings:

Session 8: Canadian Approaches to Empire and Communication
Wednesday, March 11, 2020
- Lecture: Imperial Communication Technologies

Readings:
Session 9: Canadian Anthropology and Technological Determinism  
Wednesday, March 18, 2020  
• Film showing and discussion of the film & assigned readings  

Film: Oh, what a blow that phantom gave me! [videorecording]: Edmund Carpenter / Media Generation; a film by John Bishop, Harald Prins, 2003. [54 minutes]  

Readings:  

Optional Readings:  
• Transcript of “Oh, What a Blow that Phantom Gave Me!”  

Monday, March 23, 2020  
• Last day for academic withdrawal from two-term and winter-term courses.  

Session 10: US Anthropological Critiques of Theories of Cultural Imperialism  
Wednesday, March 25, 2020  
• Lecture: American Anthropology and Cultural Imperialism  

Readings:  


Session 11: Media Imperialism and the Revival of Studies of Cultural Imperialism  
Wednesday, April 1, 2020  
• Lecture: Media Imperialism and Soft Power  

Readings:  


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**Session 12: Academic and Scientific Imperialism**  
**Wednesday, April 8, 2020**  
• Lecture: *Imperialism and Academic Knowledge Production*

**Readings:**  