

# Resurrecting media imperialism assignment



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Even those writers who credit it with some lingering importance in that it did identify RA disparities in the provision of cultural resources internationally spend much of their time discussing its shortcoming (Morley, 2006). In part perhaps this the consequence of more general intellectual and political shifts during the period, but it also reflects a theoretical re-alignment of the field. Much of TFH work on international communication in the last two decades has been dominated by theories that stress regional markets, complex flows, and the relative unimportance to the state in international communication. The dominant current of thinking, globalization, has tended to discount the role the state in favor of the relations between the global and the local. To the extent that the state has been recognized as a significant factor in cultural exchanges, it is through the lens of “ soft power” rather than “ imperialism. ” This chapter questions whether it is possible to recover anything valuable from the ruins of the cultural imperialism edifice. In order to do that, it first revisits the classical formulations Of the theory and considers Some aspects its defining characteristics.

It then reviews some of the main criticisms that were leveled against the theory and which were responsible for its loss of influence. In order to reestablish a workable theory, the underlying concept imperialism is reconsidered and an alternative account to that prominent during the sass and 1 9805 is offered. Building on this, the scope of a redefined theory is advanced. Finally, reasons are given as to why current international developments mean that the concept is likely to become more and pertinent in the coming years.

Cultural imperialism Culture imperialism, as has often been pointed out, is an imprecise category one of its most severe critics argued that rather than see it as a coherent body of thought, “ a better way of thinking about cultural imperialism is to hint of it as a variety of different articulations which may have certain features in common, but while may also be in tension with each other, or even mutually contradictory” (Tomlinson, 1991, p. 9). This judgment is certainly correct: many writers with quite different intellectual positions employed the term to a variety of ends.

There were, however, “ features in common” uniting writers with approaches as diverse as TANSTAAFL, Matter and Smith, notably in their stress upon the importance of the USA in world media markets (TANSTAAFL, 1 977; Smith, 1 980; Matter, 1979). Despite this methodological, and indeed political, variety, however, from a theoretical point of view there can be little doubt that the main current was of Marxist inspiration and that it was the work of Herbert Schaller that formed the central reference point for the development and diffusion Of the concept (Maxwell, 2003, up. 8-41). He developed the concept most famously in his *Communication and Cultural Domination* and it is worthwhile repeating the definition of cultural imperialism he gives there i: .... The concept of cultural imperialism today best describes the sum of the recesses by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system. Schaller, 1976, This brief statement contains both the core of the concept and the key to some of its weaknesses. We can identify four distinct elements that have

been central to discussions of cultural imperialism: 1 . This is a very broad conception of the issues at stake (Lee, 1980, up. 41-2). Taken literally, it would include all sorts of pressures, for example structural adjustment programmes developed by the MIFF-, which do not naturally fall within ambit of culture but which certainly involve pressure to shape social institutions to fit the dominating centre of the system.

This broad concept of cultural imperialism is! Sometimes contrasted with the much narrower claim of media imperialism, which Oliver Boyd-Barrett defined as: “ the process whereby the ownership, structure, distribution or content of the media in any one country are singly or together are subject to substantial external pressures from the media interests of any other country or countries without proportionate reciprocation of influence by the country so affected” (Boyd-Barrett, 1977, p. 17). In practice, this distinction has proved hard to sustain. Obdurately included both of the Schaller texts cited here in his catalogue of scholars working within the scope of media imperialism and Chiller’s own work tended to be highly focused on the international trade in information products, notably television programmes (Schaller, 1970). 2. Schaller operates with a core-periphery’ model of imperialism (Schaller, 1976, p. 14).

The system as a centre, and it is clear both from the remainder of this text and from Chiller’s other work that this centre is the SACS. He recognizes that in the past the USA was obliged to struggle with and defeat the earlier imperialist centre of Britain and France, notably in the field of international news but also more generally: ; Under the banner of the “ Free Flow of Information” US media products came to dominate the world’ (Ibid, IPPP-38).

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Similarly, Schaller is clearly speaking of a peripheral' country when he discusses the ways in which a society is brought into the modern world system. This conception of imperialism as fundamentally a relationship between the rich, developed world and the poorer, underdeveloped, world was, and is, one of the theoretical and practical foundations of most, if not all, existing theories of cultural imperialism. 3.

Chiller's account makes two distinct claims: first, the media and cultural apparatuses of the ASSAI, aided by the government, dominate the international trade in media, notably in television programming, which newly established broadcasters in developing countries need in order to fill their schedules still remaining within their budgets; second, that the result of the continual consumption of this US-made material is effective propaganda for the ideas and values of the ASSAI, turning the local elite away from the needs of their own populations and facilitating absorption into, or at least collaboration with, US enterprises. These two propositions relate to two different enquiries. The first is concerned with the political economy of the international trade in television programming and the ways in which that dovetailed with the policies of the IIS state.

The second makes a claim about the effect of the consumption of this programming upon its audience in a peripheral country, which can only be answered by an investigation into the realities of watching such material. 4.

A fourth point, not present in the TEX quoted above but elaborated later in the same book, was the argument for the development of national communication policies. While he operated with a more complex notion of the problems of cultural domination, recognizing that these existed within

countries as well as between them, Chiller's stress on national communication policies in practice came to mean the efforts of elites in the developing world to renegotiate their relationship with the developed world. V If the current arrangements, centered on the free flow of information around the world, were leading to the world-wide domination of US culture at the expense of the national cultures of developing nations, there one way to counter this was to develop national communication policies designed to limit the inflow of alien messages with their damaging effects on the "cultural integrity of weak societies" (Schaller, 1970, p. 109). Just as it was central part of the industrialization process of countries like the USA to rooter infant manufacturing industries until such time as they were sufficiently developed as to be internationally competitive, it was necessary t find ways to protect the cultural life of developing nations. This, Schaller thought, could best be achieved through "responsible international regulation of television programming", most likely through policy changes in UNESCO (Schaller, 1970, p. 25). This overall position inspired an avalanche of books, articles and reports, both general and scholarly. In addition, it provided a theoretical basis for a protracted campaign, focused on Unesco, that purported to change the lance of world communication and to foster national communication policies. Criticisms and Alternatives The various critiques of cultural imperialism are extremely well-known, and there is little need to recount them exhaustively here. It is, nevertheless, worth sketching four Of the more important Objections since they provide an insight into the some of the issues for which any new theory will have to account: 1 .

The tendencies towards regional production noted by Boyd-Barrett and TANSTAAFL were identified as important growth points in the world market for media artifacts. In particular, the developing national television industries of Brazil and Mexico, and later of Japan and Korea, were seen as drivers of regional markets based upon cultural proximity (Structural, 2007; Sinclair, 1999). While the world market for some media artifacts - high budget films for example - remains dominated by US products, there are many other areas of cultural exchange that have a much more complex structure. 2. The assumption that there was, or could be, a single national culture that could defended against IIS values proved untenable.

Every existing society, even in the most successful and developed modern states, exhibits a plurality of cultures, very often themselves a combination (earlier influences from ; outside. 'The ; national culture' of every society is TTT-u culture of the dominant group and it is one of the mechanisms by which its hegemonic role is consolidated. The UK provides an obvious example of these tendencies: the national language itself is an accretion of different influences the diverse population enjoy a variety of different cultures; the norms of "national" culture are unquestionably the norms of the dominant, white, male, metropolitan middle classes. To defend 'national culture' is to defend the position of an elite group, not of a whole people.

In some cases, it may be that imported texts articulate suppressed elements of a national culture and allow audiences to celebrate an aspect of their own cultural experience that the broadcasters dominated by the official culture are unable to address (Miller, 1995). 3. The turn towards a conception of the active audience, most markedly in the traditions of cultural

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studies but also in more empirically oriented research, demonstrated that texts do not have one single reading that will be absorbed by an entire audience either within or across national boundaries (Nag, 1991; Lobbies & Katz, 1990). Readings of texts are variable depending upon the cultural resources of their consumers: people watching a US series may absorb US values or may interpret the same text in a radically different way.

The conditions for the success of an imported program or series depends in part at least on domestic factors, ranging from the established local conventions of broadcasting through to scheduling decisions that influence the size of the available audience. 4. The attempt to organize a political struggle around opposition to cultural imperialism took the concrete form of a struggle for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). A great deal of effort went in to attempting to influence UNESCO, and into building alliances with the representatives of many unsavory despots who were only too happy to curb the media and impose cultural uniformity on their unfortunate subjects.

NWICO became embroiled in the Cold War and it went down to defeat along with the Stalinist allies it had accumulated in its attempt to win acceptance (Hamlin, 1997). One could both amplify and expand this list of objections: taken together the evidence against the concept of cultural imperialism advanced by Schaller is simply overwhelming. The new orthodoxy in the study of international communication began from the complexity both of media production and of audience behavior. There are many studies documenting the production and circulation of television program,



cinema films and other artifacts originating far outside the range of Hollywood.

Similarly, there are detailed studies of the ways in which audiences, or at least sections of audiences, within the developed world utilize these non-US media artifacts to construct their own cultural frameworks and identities.

Underlying this plethora of studies has been one or other variant of theories of globalization, which replace the concept of imperialism as the organizing element in this framework of thought. This is a notoriously protean group of concepts but we can note one central element which is common to many of the variants: it systematically marginalizes the role of the state. This normalization is clearly present in the pervasive slogans of "the global and the local", "globalization," "think global, act local" and so on. The missing term in all of these formulations is precisely the state.

Unless the term local really means "national", as indeed it does when one interrogates many of these celebrations of the "local", then the claim is that the poles of contemporary cultural (or indeed almost any other) life are to be located regionally, and thus below the level of the state, and globally above the level of the state. Unlike the national, neither the local nor the global are equipped with the full apparatus of state power which coerces and regulates social life, culturally and economically. On the contrary, they are much more the field of the free play of economic competition. Complexity and freedom become the central organizing categories of studies of international communication.

There is no doubt that the work that has taken this as its starting point has illuminated some important dimensions of contemporary media and cultural experience. There clearly are many other centers of production of cultural artifacts than simply the USA and the international trade in these commodities is undoubtedly much more complex than was previously supposed: both Bollywood and New Hollywood produce more movies each year than does Hollywood and TV Globo is a major source of television fiction. There clearly are sub-national cultures and media organizations: Basque and Catalan broadcasting in the Spanish State, Cantonese-language broadcasting in the south of China, and so on. It is clearly also the case that different social groups, indeed different individuals, increasingly use the resources of new media to construct diets of media consumption that are independent of the programming policies of any broadcaster - local, national or global. All of these are good reasons for correcting the emphasis on the role of the state.

It is important to correct the overemphasis on the state that marked the inception of cultural imperialism, but it does not follow that the state is no longer a significant actor, exemplified by Banyan's claim that in the epoch of globalization "the military, economic and cultural self-sufficiency, indeed self-sustainability, of the state - any state - ceases to be a viable prospect" (Banyan, 1998, p. 64). This view may have exerted a superficial attraction in the period after the fall of communism, when rivalry between states seemed no longer to be a serious prospect in the age of *Pax Americana*, although even then the claim that the conclusion applies to "any state" seems much too strong. The fragments of the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Somalia, later Afghanistan and a dozen other 'failed states' might have been incapable of "

self-sustainability," but surely that term could never have been applied to the USA, or China and India for that matter? Today, should anyone make such a claim it would be immediately rejected as quite incredible.

It is more convincing to argue that there is amongst states what we may call a hierarchy of competences. Some states, pre-eminently the USA are indeed capable of sustaining themselves in all three Of the domains identified by Banyan. Some states, for example the failed states, are clearly not capable of the same sort of self-determination. Others fall between these two poles. Japan, for instance, is economically very powerful and culturally increasingly influential, but politically much weaker. We do not yet live in a post-Westphalia age, and all but the failed states have, to varying degrees, unique characteristics that mark them off from both the local and the global.

Specifically, they have the power to coerce (what Max Weber classically described as a monopoly of the legitimate use of violence) which they can employ both to control their own population and to settle conflicts with other states. If the critique of the classical formulation of cultural imperialism must lead one to reject it, attempts to construct alternatives which do not begin from the centrality of the state system to an understanding of the contemporary world, and see available resources – economic, political and cultural as distributed in a fundamentally and systematically unequal way between these states, have proven equally unsatisfactory.

Imperialism reconsidered Settling conflicts with other states has, of course, been one of the main political features of the last twenty years or so. Under a variety of guises, large, powerful states have used their power, political,

economic and military, to coerce other, weaker, states: Serbia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Georgia, Libya, and others have all experienced direct military interventions. These Uses Of the armed might of the state to achieve its ends has given rise to the vigorous contemporary debates about imperialism, and any attempt to reconsider global patterns of cultural life must begin from a reconsideration of what is meant by imperialism in the present period.

Discussions of imperialism have never been exclusively Marxist in inspiration: writers like Hobnobs and Schumacher historically, and in the present period Ferguson and Mann, have addressed the issues involved from a variety of intellectual standpoints and political positions (Hobnobs, 1 902; Schumacher, 1951; Ferguson, 2004; Ferguson, 2003; Mann, 2003). Schaller, and others who developed the concept of cultural imperialism, did however work within a broadly Marxist tradition and that has been, since the early years of the last century, the intellectual current most centrally concerned with developing a hurry of imperialism (Kemp, 1 967; Collisions, 2009).

As we saw above, one of the key characteristics of the way in which imperialism was conceived by Schaller and others was in terms of the relations of the “ centre and periphery,” with the centre in question being the LISA. This approach still dominates contemporary discussions, most influentially in the work of Panic and Ginning. They argue that only the US state is today genuinely imperialist, in that it dominates over the rest of the world state systems, and lesser states are essentially clients of Washington, lacking the capacity for independent action (Panic & Ginning, 2004). There is clearly a great deal of evidence to support this view. The USA is by far the

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largest economy in the world, and it has a military apparatus that is vastly more powerful, and expensive, than any other in the world.

As one US commentator put it: ; we have a quarter of global GAP [gross domestic product] and 46 per cent of defense spending' (McGregor & Doomed, 2011). Although it seeks allies and supporters for its use of these forces, it is capable, where necessary, of acting independently. Contrast, other large and heavily armed states, like the (J, have found it impossible to use their armed forces against the will of the USA, at least since the Suez crisis in 1 956, and in practice have tended to be a loyal and subservient ally of the SACS. In this account, as with earlier versions, the essence of " imperialism" is the domination exerted by large, developed states (the centre) over poorer and weaker states (the periphery).

This domination, exercised by persuasion, bribery and coercion, circumscribes the political freedom of developing nations, subordinates their economies to the needs of the centre, and helps to ensure that the majority of their people are deprived f the benefits of development. There is, of course, ample evidence that this kind of behavior takes place. Despite the strength of the evidence, however, there are both theoretical and practical grounds for doubting the validity of this view. In its original formulations, the classical Marxist theory, and indeed contemporaneous formulations by Nan-Marxist like Schumacher, focused on conflicts within TTL developed world. While they were acutely conscious of the ways in which HTH developed countries dominated and plundered their colonies, they faced HTH urgent task of explaining why Europe was experiencing the horrors of the First World War.

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The theory of imperialism was developed to explain how conflicts between imperialist states arose; in other words, they agreed with the liberal Hobnobs that 'the leading characteristic of... Modern Imperialism [is] the competition of rival Empires' (Hobnobs, 1902, p. 19). This political and military competition, which in that epoch took the form of the annexation of territories and the construction of colonial empires, arose from the increasing scale of capitalist production, and of the capitalist firm. As firms came to have a dominant role in their national markets, they more and more faced international competition from capitalists originating in other states, and TFH increasingly tended to enlist "their" states in these competitive struggles.

As Buchanan put it: "When competition has finally reached its highest stage, when it has become competition between state capitalist trusts, then the use of state power, and the possibilities connected with it begin to play a very large part" (Buchanan, 1972, pp. 123-4) v. In contemporary versions of this theory, advanced by, among others, Collisions and Harvey, it is the existence of a number of competing large, developed, states that is the condition for imperialism (Harvey, 2005; Collisions, 2009). Empirically, this seems better etc account for the history of the last century or so than does the "non-pilaf theory of imperialism. The first half of the twentieth century was dominated by a struggle between the British Empire as the incumbent dominant force, and the emerging German empire.

Out of the mutual exhaustion of the contenders arose a competition between the USA and the USSR which lasted (up until 1991). It is true that, throughout this period, the USA was evangelically the more powerful of the competing states, and this was HTH tutor of its ultimate victory, but it

nevertheless faced real opposition and military competition from the Soviet bloc. The period after the collapse of the USSR has indeed been one in which the USA has been the unchallenged dominant player but this has been a relatively brief, and atypical, interlude. The relative decline of the US, and the growth of new economic powers, are evidence of the ending of this period.

Particularly since the 2008 economic crisis, there is certainly evidence that other states are able to follow policies contrary to the wishes of Washington: arguments between the US and China over currency, between the US and Germany over the political economy of economic recovery, between the US and Russia over the war in Georgia, are all cases where other states have demonstrated independence from the desires of the US government. The shift in the balance of world economic power means that these demonstrations of independence, and the international conflicts that they provoke, are likely to become a more marker feature of the coming years: we are returning to a period in which a powerful incumbent is challenged in its international dominance by a new and merging power.

As Hilary Clinton told the CSS Senate Foreign Relations Committee: ' We are in a competition for influence with China; let's put aside the moral, humanitarian, do-good side of what we believe in, and let's just talk straight realities' and illustrated her point with reference to a contest over rights to natural gas deposits in Papua-New Guiana (Doomed, 2011 More generally, the influential US magazine Foreign Affairs devoted a large section of its March/April 2011 to a series of essays grouped under the theme " Will China's Rise Lead to War? " Charles Glaser opens his contribution with the question ' <https://assignbuster.com/resurrecting-media-imperialism-assignment/>

WI China's ascent increase the probability of a greater war? " (Glares, 2011) .

Fortunately for most of us, he gives an optimistic answer that such an event can be avoided, provided that the US makes concessions like surrendering Taiwan to the PRE. It is, however, plain that the economic and military development of China, although still immeasurably weaker than the USA, is beginning to pose an increasing challenge to Washington's domination of world affairs. Inter- imperialist conflict is once again a possibility. We should, however, be clear as to what inter-imperialist conflict means and what it does not mean. It is certainly true that conflicts between developed states can take the form of military conflict, but there are many other less catastrophic ways in which the power of the state is used in inter-state competition.

Trade and currency policy, intellectual property protection, safety and design standards, international economic aid and so on are all ways in which the state is inebriated in protecting and advancing the economic interests of businesses located within its own border. On the other hand, there are many forms of international economic competition which do not involve significant state intervention, other than the necessary international agreements that must be present to allow lawful trading in the first place. If the term " imperialism" is to have any precise and useful meaning, then it must be used to describe actions of states, rather than what are essentially private economic activities. The theory of imperialism that emerges from these considerations, and which fits better with the empirical record, thus differs markedly from that which informed writers like Schaller.