

# Cultural imperialism assignment



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Taking these factors into account as well as drawing from my own examples, I hope to be able to come to a conclusion as to why various instances of cultural imperialism are difficult, if not impossible, to accurately confirm. As a starting point, I feel it necessary to identify the meaning behind the phrase ‘cultural imperialism’ and how it relates to the media industry. When you break the phrase ‘cultural imperialism’ down to its separate components, the word ‘Imperial’, taken from the Latin word *Emporium* (Oxford Dictionaries, 2012), denotes something with an immensity of scale and sheer dominance akin to that of an empire.

In that sense, ‘Imperialism’ is the process such an empire goes through in order to attain and maintain that dominance and influence. In a premodern era, this was more readily achieved through physical, more overt means, such as the use of military force and colonization. Since the advent of new technologies and the emergence of media as a prevailing world industry, the nations that benefited most from their past colonial exploits, mainly the West, had the economic power and widespread influence to be able to broadcast their cultural ideals and values onto other, less prominent nations with the help of radio, television, film, the press and the internet. This is when the term ‘cultural imperialism’ came into the public consciousness; and it was through media that allowed these superpowers, particularly the United States, to broaden their spheres of influence further than ever before. However, this also had the consequence of creating a melting pot of diverse, often opposing, cultures into a single space, where the “foreign culture... [uses its] political and economic power to exalt and spread... [its] values and habits\_\_\_ at the expense of... [the] native culture. (Bullock and Stealyards,

1977, cited in Tomlinson, 1991, p. ) This implies that in every instance of cultural imperialism, people are dominated by a single ‘superior’ cultural ideology, whilst the ‘Inferior’ ones (if there are any) are diminished or even cancelled out completely to make room for it, thus, paving the way for an easier-to-manipulate, homogeneous society. While this may be true of some instances, I hypothesize that, in one form or another; there will always be instances when some choose to actively reject the supposed ; superior influence.

For instance, when looking at this subject from a religious perspective, there are bound to be differences of opinion, particularly when that religion is forcibly encountered with the imposing figure of Western modernity. As Saber identifies in his research on the attitude of Muslims to an increasingly Westernized Morocco, “For most of them. Western modernity is... A kind of sickness, a threat to Islam and its culture, and so a threat to the Moroccan consciousness, culture, and identity. (2010, p. 134-135) This outlines the ever-present struggle one has in maintaining one’s sense between universality and difference”, as Calhoun (1995, p. 6) puts it that places the argument of cultural imperialism into question. Another concern about the argument of cultural imperialism is that it attempts to describe a complex subject, of which there are many instances, in an overly simplistic manner, often leading many theorists to question its evidential validity.

As Tomlinson states, “cultural imperialism’ is a generic concept, it refers to a range of broadly similar phenomena. Because of this it is unlikely that any single definition could grasp every sense in which the term is used. ” (1991, p. 2-3). This is a valid point, as it argues that no two instances of its

occurrence are ever the same. Williams expands on this point, noting that “ It is only in our own time and place that we can expect to know, in any substantial way, the general organization.

We can learn a great deal of the life of other places and times, but certain elements... Will always be irrecoverable. Even those that can be recovered are recovered in abstraction. ” (1961, p. 63). What this essentially means is that any research taken on the subject of cultural imperialism, whether empirical or otherwise, should be looked upon with a degree of skepticism, as what he is insinuating is that it is only through our own personal, immediate experiences of our native environments, or as Williams puts it, our “ structure[s] of feeling” (1961, p. 4), that we can accurately determine the effects of cultural imperialism on individual instances. That by no means concludes that all research conducted in the field is automatically redundant, as each instance that is analysed serves to shed some light on the topic at hand; the underlying problem is that human nature is ever-changing, independent in all instances and at many times introductory when it comes to the choices we make.

As a result, Disjointedness and incoherence’s in thought can materialism. This leads me to my next point: what the individual’s role is when identifying one’s cultural identity in a world of contradictory ideals living in forced unification. We live in a world where the impact of media has irrefutably changed the way we live our lives as well as perceive the ways of life of others. This change has highlighted the concerns many people have in maintaining a sense of self-identity.

As with the example I used previously of religion, this can be broadened to encompass the theme of tradition, or of heritage and how we often struggle to hold onto our sense of self when the opposing force of modernization threatens to take over. Woodward explains that “ the concept of identity raises fundamental questions about how individuals fit into the community and the social world and how identity can be seen as the interface between subjective positions”, like religious views, “ and social and cultural situations. (1997, p. L). Consequently, life becomes a balancing act in which people learn to make room for the traditional, that of religion and heritage, ND the modern ways of life, that of a media-centric, Western-dominated society. This in itself causes difficulties in assessing the true impact of cultural imperialism, for, as Saber stipulates, “ It is the paradox and perpetual oscillation between secular realities lived in the modern... Roll and the beatifications of heritage/tradition that makes the assessment of... [one’s] structure of feeling problematic. ” (2010, p. 1 52) In other words, analyzing the effects of modernity in instances like these can again result in inconsistencies and even incoherence’s in the perceived cultural attitudes of the deals there are depending on the individual (such as different interpretations of religion and the disagreement of some policies of certain political parties over others).

Further analysis of the theme of identity reveal, through Butler (1993), that “ identifications belong to the imaginary; they are phantasmal efforts of alignment, loyalty, ambiguous and cross-corporeal cohabitations, they unsettle the I; they are the sedimentation of the We’ in the constitution of any I, the structuring present of laterality in the very formulation of the I. ”

(cited in Hall, 1996, p. 16) In Butler's view, the whole idea of identity is that it is essentially an invention thought up by society to categorically label people into groups and subgroups, making them easier to classify.

This goes against the innate desire of the individual to be unique, although it can also serve to offer the individual a sense of belonging, of acceptance.

Wooden (2004) goes further by stating that “ in defining their own sense of identity, individuals and groups tend to fix the identity of others, often working within long-established binary modes of thinking that help sustain inequalities, exclusions and oppression. (p. 1 54). In this instance, certain identities or ways of thinking serve to forcefully overpower others for the purpose of attaining supremacy over them.

A good historical example of this is the Nazi Party's idea that they came from a ' pure' lineage of a superior race of Aryans. The Germans were misled to believe, with the help of propaganda through media, that all other races were inferior, and so these other races were cast out, exiled or executed. (History, 2012) Although not on the same level as the megalomaniac ways of thinking that Hitler lived (and died) by, the notion of cultural imperialism preaches a parallel ideal, one in which the modern way of life is one that all people should identify with and aspire to.

The notion of the American Dream and the belief “ that the American social, economic, and political system makes success possible for every individual” (Dictionary 2012) is a pertinent example of this, as it became a way of enticing people from all over the globe, with the help of media and especially

the magical allure of Hollywood, to follow the ideals of the United States of America, a land where all are united no matter where they come from.

The only robber is that there will always be room for questioning this sort of ideal, of rejecting it completely (or attempting to at least) and for other identities to remain in the individual's consciousness. Calhoun (1995) encapsulates this thought perfectly: " We remake ourselves, in response to internal issues as well as external pressures, better or worse, often with more difficulty than we would like. Our knowledge of ourselves and others, thus, is situated not only in relationship to our external contexts but to our internal states and biographical contexts. (Calhoun, p. 294-295) This goes a long way in explaining the duality of attitudes inherent in all individuals – of mentally juggling the modernist identity with the traditionalist one; of unification with independence. Unfortunately for the pro cultural imperialism argument, it goes an even longer way in leaving more questions unanswered, questions that can only partially be answered when one attempts to understand the complexities of the inner workings of the human mind.

In conclusion, I feel that, while unanswerable, the argument of cultural imperialism is still a relevant one. In my view, for better or rose, it is a constant force continually shaping and reshaping the landscape of the modern world. The key thing to remember, however, is that its influential power over according to their internal states, personal preferences and behavioral traits. This outlines the unpredictability of the individual and, as a result, makes the already complex task of gathering any factual data on the issue of cultural imperialism an overwhelming one.