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Instead of the image of "the West" at the centre dominating the peripheral "Third World" with an outward flow of cultural products, we see the world as divided into a number of regions which each have their own internal dynamics as well as their global ties. Although primarily based on geographic realities, these regions are also defined by common cultural, linguistic, and historical connections which transcend physical space. Such a dynamic, regionalist view of the world helps us to analyse in a more nuanced way the intricate and multi-directional flows of television across the globe.

New Patterns of Television Flow

Public discourse about television and the media-studies literature are both replete with anxiety about the supposed cultural effects of the global spread of programmes like *Dallas* or, more recently, *Beverly Hills 90210*. The unquestioned basis for this anxiety is expressed in the orthodox critical paradigm for analysing the connection between international power relations and the media, the thesis of "cultural imperialism", or more particularly, "media imperialism". According to this view, world patterns of communication flow, both in density and in direction, mirror the system of domination in the economic and political order. Thus, world centres like New York, Los Angeles, London, and Tokyo are major nodes for international telecommunications traffic, as well as for other kinds of flows, such as television programmes. The media imperialism perspective more particularly sees that the major world sources for programme exports are located in the USA and secondarily in Europe, mainly the UK, and that these centres act as nodes through which all flows of cultural products must pass, including those from one peripheral part of the world to another.

The *locus classicus* of the cultural imperialism thesis is found in the work of Herbert Schiller. As recently as 1991, in an article tellingly entitled "Not Yet the Post-Imperialist Era", he has restated his position in the following way: "The role of television in the global arena of cultural domination has not diminished in the 1990s. Reinforced by new delivery systems – communication satellites and cable networks – the image flow is heavier than ever. Its source of origin also has not changed that much in the last quarter of the century". The classic study for UNESCO by

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newsprint and through visa policies, import restriction, and many other procedures. "Some governments find it natural to assume total control over the content of information, justifying themselves by the ideology in which they believe. Even on purely pragmatic standards, it is doubtful if this system can be called realistic."

Democratization of communication

Surveying the "spectrum of communication in modern society," the commission found that it almost defies description because of its immense variety. Barriers could readily be seen: monopolistic controls, technical disparities, restrictive media practices, exclusion of disadvantaged groups, blacklist, censorship. Nevertheless, a tendency toward democratization seemed to be taking place – for example, in the growing role of public opinion. Governments throughout the world were becoming increasingly aware that they must take into account not only national opinion but "world public opinion," because today's media are capable of diffusing "information on international questions to every part of the world." Occasionally opinion crystallizes on some issue with enough force to compel action. This happened, as the commission saw it, on the issues of colonialism, apartheid, and nuclear proliferation. But a meaningful process of opinion formation will in the long run require richer media fare, development of widespread "critical awareness," assertion of the "right to reply," the establishment of "alternative channels of communication," and public participation in decision making on media policies. The goal, the commission felt, should be that everyone would be both "producer and consumer of communication." [...]

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Nordenstreng and Varis in 1974 documented the dominance of the USA in world television programme exports at that time. Television programme flows became an integral issue for the New World Information Order movement and its debate within UNESCO. As this continued into the 1980s, the cultural imperialism view of international domination stood challenged only by those who were seen as apologists for the USA and its demand for a "free flow" international regime for trade in cultural products. Neither critics nor apologists questioned the oft-quoted factoid that entertainment is second only to aerospace as an export industry for the USA.

Indeed, as long as the flows of television programme exports seemed to continue along the "one-way street" from the West (and the USA in particular) to the rest of the world, the critical discourse of cultural imperialism was a plausible theoretical response, at least in its more subtle variations, notably that of "cultural dependence" and "media imperialism". In an essential respect, the cultural imperialism perspective was the then-current neo-Marxist analysis of capitalist culture projected on to an international scale: the "dominant ideology" thesis writ large. As such, it had the all-embracing appeal of a comprehensive theory, and also provided the high moral ground from which the international activities of USA networks and the ideological content of their television programmes could be analysed, and then denounced.

However, by the mid-1980s it became evident that the cultural imperialism discourse had serious inadequacies, both as theory and in terms of the reality which the theory purported to explain. Actual transformation of the world television system made it less and less sustainable on the empirical level, and shifting theoretical paradigms, including postmodernism, postcolonialism, and theories of the "active" audience, made its conceptual foundations less secure. To take the empirical aspect first, Jeremy Tunstall had long since pointed out that the "television imperialism thesis" of such writers as Schiller and Wells was based on the quite incorrect assumption that the high levels of USA programme imports into Latin America in the 1960s were a permanent condition rather than a transitional stage in the development of television in these regions. The other empirical development which ought to have given pause to theorists of cultural imperialism was the research reported by Varis as an update of the original "one-way street" project, in which he noted "a trend toward greater regional exchanges", in spite of continued USA and European dominance in television programme flows. This finding was reinforced by other studies around the same time which, although absurdly exaggerated in their estimation of how far the flows had formed new patterns, were able nevertheless to document just how one such regional market was taking shape, in the case of Latin America.

Thus, even in Latin America, virtually the cradle of the theorization of cultural imperialism, USA imports were prominent only in the early stages. As the industry matured in Latin America, and as it developed "critical mass", USA imports were to some extent replaced by local products, a pattern that can be found repeated many times over around the world, and which is currently shaping Europe's new privately owned services. Of course, not all countries in Latin America have the capacity to develop sizeable indigenous television production industries. Rather, the pattern in Latin America, as in Asia and the Middle East, is that each "geolinguistic region", as we shall call them, is itself dominated by one or two centres of audiovisual production – Mexico and Brazil for Latin America, Hong Kong and Taiwan for the Chinese-speaking populations of Asia, Egypt for the Arab world, and India for the Indian populations of Africa and Asia. The Western optic through which the cultural imperialism thesis was developed literally did not see these non-Western systems of regional exchange, nor understand what they represented. Yet by the late 1980s,

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... could observe that the "very general picture of TV flows... is not a one-way
... rather there are a number of main thoroughfares, with a series of not unim-
... smaller roads".
We have noted how, as theory, the cultural imperialism critique tended to iden-
... the USA as the single centre of a process of mediacentric capitalist cultural
... which emanated out to the rest of the world in the form of television
... programmes. It also assumed that these programmes had an inevitable and self-
... ideological effect upon their helpless audiences in the periphery. Although
... established a theoretical connection between US television programmes
... "consumerism", it did not address the question of just how such a mechanism
... effect might work, nor how it could be observed in action upon actual audiences.
... the discourse of cultural imperialism, the mystique of television entertainment's
... appeal for its audiences, and how specific audiences responded to it, were
... on the agenda.

Other shortcomings arose from the theory's emphasis on external forces from
the USA, and the corresponding disregard for the internal sociological factors
within the countries seen to be subject to them. In its eagerness to hold US com-
panies, and behind them, the US government, responsible for regressive social-
cultural changes in the "Third World", the cultural imperialism critique neglected the
internal historical and social dynamics within the countries susceptible to their
influence. This left out of consideration the strategic social structural position of the
individuals and interest groups who benefited from facilitating US market entry or
even from taking their own initiatives. Some of these have subsequently built up their
own international media empires, such as Mexico and Brazil. Other players have
more recently joined the game, such as some Saudi investors, while investment in the
new channels in India by expatriates shows that media entrepreneurship also can
be widespread on a small scale. The cultural imperialism theory failed to see that,
more fundamental than its supposed ideological influence, the legacy of the USA in
world television development was in the implantation of its systemic model for tele-
vision as a medium - the exploitation of entertainment content so as to attract audi-
ences which could then be sold to advertisers. American content may have primed
this process, but as the experience of many parts of the peripheral world shows, it is
not required to sustain it.

We should also note that with its dichotomized view of "the West" versus the
"Third World", the cultural imperialism theory was unable to give an adequate
account of semi-peripheral societies such as Australia and Canada, where the
experience of colonialism, and postcolonialism, has been quite distinct from that of
nations in other former colonized zones, a distinctiveness manifest in the television
systems which they developed.

The basic assumption of Western domination via television is worth further
comment. Paradoxically, even though the cultural imperialism thesis has been artic-
ulated in the name of defending the "Third World" against domination by audiovi-
sual products from the USA, it is more inclined to reinforce Western cultural influence
by taking it as given, when it should be challenging it. A more postcolonial per-
spective in theory has forced us to realize that USA domination always was limited,
either by cultural or political "screens", or both. A related weakness or "blind spot"
of the cultural imperialism thesis has been its over-emphasis on the significance of
imported *vis-a-vis* local television. Television has always been more of a local than a
global medium, and remains so, although the increasingly multichannel and global-
ized nature of the industry may alter the balance at the margin in the longer term.

According to figures from 1989, the volume of purely domestic material in national markets is twenty-nine times higher than that which is traded. Television is still a gloriously hybrid medium, with a plethora of programming of an inescapably and essentially local, untranslatable nature.

Although US programmes might lead the world in their transportability across cultural boundaries, and even manage to dominate schedules on some channels in particular countries, they are rarely the most popular programmes where viewers have a reasonable menu of locally produced material to choose from. And even where there is imported content, it is no longer acceptable to read off from that fact alone any presumed effects of a cultural or political kind. Hamid Naficy captures this vividly in his brilliant study of television amongst Iranian exiles in Los Angeles. Describing how his exclusively English-speaking Iranian daughter, Shayda, and his exclusively German-speaking Iranian niece, Setarah, communicated through the Disney film *The Little Mermaid*, he goes on to comment:

The globalization of American pop culture does not automatically translate into globalization of American control. This globalized culture provides a shared discursive space where transnationals such as Setarah and Shayda can localize it, make their own uses of it, domesticate and indigenize it. They may think with American cultural products but they do not think American. [. . .]

“Gatekeepers” and Cultural Industry Factors in Television Flows

Many cross-cultural studies emphasize the diverse, localized character of international audience responses, and are imbued with a sense of the viability and integrity of the cultures of peripheral or “small” nations. So it is somewhat ironic, because of the dominance of American programmes at highly visible though only provisionally premium places in schedules, that such studies should focus on US programmes almost exclusively. As Ellen Seiter argues strongly with regard to the theoretical field from which this position draws, “in our concern for audiences’ pleasures . . . we run the risk of continually validating Hollywood’s domination of the worldwide television market”.

Far more than for the USA, the success or otherwise of peripheral nations’ exports is contingent on factors other than those captured by established modes of audience study. This explains why so little audience reception research has been able to be conducted on their products in international markets, and why we need instead middle-range analysis to do so. In the middle range between political economy approaches and reception analysis, a number of factors are mediating. How are programmes acquired overseas? Who engages in their appraisal and acquisition and what perceptions have they formed of peripheral programming? This “primary audience” is the major source of informed “gatekeeping” which regulates (in the widest sense) the flow of peripheral programming in international markets. And what are the characteristics of the major territories which influence the success or failure of such programmes internationally? All these mediating factors embody legitimate, indeed central, aspects of cultural exchange, as virtually all the significant research on non-dominant nations’ television production and reception indicates.

The actual structure of major international television trade markets is central to middle-range analysis. There is an ever-wider variety of modes of contracting for international programme production and exchange: offshore, co-production, official co-production, co-venture (including presales), and straight purchase of territorial

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rights for completed programmes in the major trade markets such as MIP-TV and MIPCOM. These run on annual cycles suited to the programming and scheduling patterns of the major northern hemisphere territories, but a notable shift in the part-terms of global television traffic was indicated in 1994 when the first MIP-Asia was held, a trade market specifically for the Asian region. At such events, programming is often bought (or not bought) on the basis of company reputation or distributor clout, in job lots and sight-unseen. Very broad, rough-and-ready genre expectations are in play; judgements may seem highly "subjective" and arbitrary.

Universalist explanations may prove useful in accounting for the international successes of historically universal forms like US series drama, but there is solid evidence that cultural specificities, along with other middle-range industrial factors, are unavoidable and, at times, enabling factors for international success in peripheral countries' export activity. Studies which compare viewers' engagement with US as against other sources of television programming confirm that there tends to be a more distanced realm of "pure entertainment" within which US programmes are processed – as markers of modish modernity, as a "spectacular" world – compared to more culturally specific responses made to domestic and other sources.

The capacity for peripheral countries to export their programmes across diverse markets is to some extent based on their substitutability or non-substitutability for US material, although this also depends in part on the type of channel they are purchased for. Australian productions have provided useful models from which the protocols of commercial popularity may be learnt in rapidly commercializing European broadcasting environments, but the fact that Australian programmes are perceived as imitations of US formats constitutes a problem for both commentators and regulators in Europe.

To be sure, the structure of content and the form of internationally popular serial drama in particular are widely shared and may even be "borrowed" from US prac-

tice, as the *telenovela* was decades ago. But the "surface" differences, nevertheless, almost always are consequential, and contribute to the acceptance or rejection of non-US material, depending on whether the "primary audience" of gatekeepers and the viewing audience respond positively or negatively to those differences. As Anne Cooper-Chen has shown, even that most transparently internationalized of television formats, the game show, contains significant differences in the widely variant cultures in which it is popular. After looking at popular game shows in fifty countries, she and Mehdi Rad show that the Japanese programme *Oshin* found acceptance in Iran because its values of perseverance and long suffering were compatible with cultural codes prevalent in what might appear a distinctly different society. The evidence for arguably built around textual factors based on projections and intensions of Australian "life-style". Australia has served in many ways as a kind of "other" to Britain – the younger, more upstart and hedonistic vision of how the British might like to see themselves.

The "export of meaning" is not just a matter of viewer reception. Many nations, both core and peripheral, place special importance on the international profile they can establish with their audiovisual exports. These are fostered both as a form of cultural diplomacy, and for intrinsic economic reasons, although national cultural objectives and audiovisual industry development are not always compatible, as

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International Television Flows

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Australia and Canada have long been aware, and some Asian countries are now learning. In the case of the Middle East, one commentator has observed that the popularity of Egyptian television exports in the Arab states has a number of cultural and even political "multiplier effects". This popularity was preceded by the success of Egyptian films, and carries with it a potential acceptance and recognition of Egyptian accents and performers that can operate as "a soft-sell commercial for Egyptian values" which then carries over into indirect political leverage. While it might be difficult to isolate and measure them, it is not unreasonable to infer cultural, trade, and political multiplier effects from what can be seen of peripheral nations' products on the world's television screens. [...]

Even amongst the globalization theorists, it is becoming a commonplace to observe that the globalizing forces towards "homogenization", such as satellite television, exist in tension with contradictory tendencies towards "heterogenization", conceived pessimistically as fragmentation, or with postmodernist optimism, as pluralism. Thus, "identity and cultural affiliation are no longer matters open to the neat simplifications of traditional nationalism. They are matters of ambiguity and complexity, of overlapping loyalties and symbols with multiple meanings". To the extent that we can assume that television is in fact a source of identity, and that audiences for the same programme derive similar identities from it, it becomes possible to think of identities which are multiple, although also often contradictory, corresponding to the different levels from which the televisual environment is composed in a given market. An Egyptian immigrant in Britain, for example, might think of herself as a Glaswegian when she watches her local Scottish channel, a British resident when she switches over to the BBC, an Islamic Arab expatriate in Europe when she tunes in to the satellite service from the Middle East, and a world citizen when she channel surfs on to CNN. [...]

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