

not yet live in a post-Westphalian 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 that 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 geopolitical 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, 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 John Hobson and Joseph Schumpeter historically, and in the present period Niall Ferguson and Michael Mann, have addressed the issues involved from a variety of intellectual standpoints and political positions (Ferguson, 2003, 2004; Hobson, 1902; Mann, 2003; Schumpeter, 1951). Schiller, 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 theory of imperialism (Callinicos, 2009; Kemp, 1967).

As we saw above, one of the key characteristics of the way in which imperialism was conceived by Schiller and others was in terms of the relations of the “center and periphery,” with the center in question being the United States. This approach still dominates contemporary discussions, most influentially in the work of Panitch and Gindin. They argue that only

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 United States, and the international trade in these commodities is undoubtedly much more complex than was previously supposed: both Bollywood (India) and Nollywood (Nigeria) produce more movies each year than does Hollywood, and TV Globo (Brazil) is a major source of television fiction. There clearly are sub-national cultures and media organizations, such as Basque and Catalan broadcasting in the Spanish State and Cantonese-language broadcasting in southern China. 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.

Although it is important to correct the overemphasis on the state that marked the concept of cultural imperialism, it does not follow that the state is no longer a significant actor, a position exemplified by Bauman'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” (Bauman, 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 United States, 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 United States, are indeed capable of sustaining themselves in all three of the domains identified by Bauman. 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

the U.S. 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 (Panitch & Grimdin, 2004).

There is clearly a great deal of evidence to support this view. The United States is by far the 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 U.S. commentator put it, "We have a quarter of global GDP (gross domestic product) and 46 per cent of defense spending" (McGregor & Dombey, 2011). Although it seeks allies and supporters for its use of these forces, it is capable, where necessary, of acting independently. By contrast, other large and heavily armed states, like the United Kingdom, have found it impossible to use their armed forces against the will of the United States, at least since the Suez crisis in 1956, and in practice have tended to be a loyal and subservient ally to the United States. In this account, as with earlier versions, the essence of "imperialism" is the domination exerted by large, developed states (the center) 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 center, and helps to ensure that the majority of their people are deprived of 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 non-Marxists like Schumpeter, focused on conflicts within the developed world. While they were acutely conscious of the ways in which the developed countries dominated and plundered their colonies, they faced the urgent task of explaining why Europe was experiencing the horrors of the First World War. The theory of imperialism was developed to explain how conflicts between imperialist states arose; in other words, they agreed with the liberal Hobson that "the leading characteristic of . . . modern Imperialism [is] the competition of rival Empires" (Hobson 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 they increasingly tended to enlist "their"

states in these competitive struggles. As Nikolai Bukharin 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" (Bukharin, 1972, pp. 123–24).⁵ In contemporary versions of this theory, advanced by, among others, Alex Callinicos and David Harvey, it is the existence of a number of competing large, developed, states that is the condition for imperialism (Callinicos, 2009; Harvey, 2005).

Empirically, this seems a better way to account for the history of the last century or so than does the "unipolar" 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 United States and the Soviet Union which lasted up until 1991. It is true that, throughout this period, the United States was overwhelmingly the more powerful of the competing states, and this was the motor of its ultimate victory, but it nevertheless faced real opposition and military competition from the Soviet bloc. The period after the collapse of the Soviet Union has indeed been one in which the United States has been the unchallenged dominant player but this has been a relatively brief, and atypical, interlude. The relative decline of the United States 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 United States and China over currency, between the United States and Germany over the political economy of economic recovery, between the United States and Russia over the war in Georgia, are all cases where other states have demonstrated independence from the desires of the U.S. 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 marked feature of the coming years: we are returning to a period in which a powerful incumbent is challenged in its international dominance by new and emerging powers. As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told the U.S. 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 realpolitik" and illustrated her point with reference to a contest over rights to natural gas deposits in Papua–New Guinea (Dombey, 2011). More generally, the influential U.S.

magazine *Foreign Affairs* devoted a large section of its March/April 2011 issue to a series of essays grouped under the theme "Will China's Rise Lead to War?" Charles Glaser opens his contribution with the question "Will China's ascent increase the probability of a great-power war?" (Glaser, 2011). Fortunately for most of us, he gives an optimistic answer that such an event can be avoided, provided that the United States makes concessions such as surrendering Taiwan to the People's Republic of China. It is, however, plain that the economic and military development of China, although still immeasurably weaker than the United States, 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 imbricated 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 that 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 Schiller. The driving force in producing imperialism is the conflicts between large-scale capitalist enterprises, allied with "their own" states, seeking to improve their competitive position. Instead of there being one center, there is an array of competing and conflicting states of different sizes and power, in some at least of which there is a co-ordination of political and economic power. The consequences of this competition involve a struggle for control of weaker and less developed countries, partly for reasons that are ultimately economic but also for geo-strategic ones as well.⁶ At the start of the twentieth century, this normally involved formal annexation and the construction of rival colonial empires, but during the last century this has shifted almost entirely to what Harry Magdoff called "imperialism without colonies" (Magdoff, 1972). The sub-

ordination of less developed countries often involves brutal exploitation and military violence, but this is not the defining characteristic of imperialism. It is the struggle between developed countries that is the driving force. Within that framework, certain factors will be properly labeled "imperialist" (in a world war, almost all social activities) but others will represent forms of economic competition conducted more or less independently of the state.

Reframing Cultural Imperialism

This revised theory of imperialism has three immediate consequences for any revision of the concept of cultural imperialism. First, it does not rest upon the notion that there is one center: on the contrary, the condition for the modern form of imperialism is that there is competition between different states. Second, it is this competition between the states of the developed world that is the central axis of imperialism, not the domination of the developed over the developing world. Third, it is important to scrutinize very carefully the evidence of international cultural exchanges to determine whether they are simply economic transactions or if they depend upon the exercise of one form or another of state power: only the latter would properly fall under the heading of imperialism.

Following from the fact that it is international competition that is the motor of imperialism, we would expect to find that international trade is characterized by a multiplicity of sources rather than just one: in other words, the theory of imperialism predicts not a single center but a range of different producers competing in the world market. Cultural production does not map directly onto economic strength, but given that economies of scale are to be expected in the production of cultural goods as much as in any other industry, we would expect to find that the serious competitors are among the larger economies as measured by GDP. The United States is by far the largest economy, ranked first in both Nominal GDP and GDP at Purchasing Power Parities (1/1).⁷ Those countries that are often cited as sources of alternative flows of cultural material are also quite substantial: Japan (3/3); India (4/11); Brazil (7/8); Mexico (11/14); South Korea (12/15). Since the U.S. economy is, on either measure, around three times the size of the Japanese, and between three and ten times the size of India's, the dominance of the United States across a broad spectrum of cultural production is hardly a surprise. Measured over time, however, the position of the United States, for nearly a century to incumbent power both in eco-

nomics and culture, is being eroded and its dominance is being challenged (Tunstall, 2008, pp. 360–412).

The international trade in cultural products is dominated by large producers who have distinct "national" home markets. Their trade is primarily within the developed world, as predicted by the theory of imperialism. According to the most recent figures available at the time of writing, News Corporation, probably the most "global" of the global media corporations, remains very heavily focused on the developed world. In 2009, 94 percent of its revenues came from North America, Australia, and Europe (News Corporation, 2009, p. 95). The same applies to other major media corporations: 90 percent of Viacom's 2009 earnings came from the United States and Europe (Viacom, 2010, p. 106); 93 percent of the Walt Disney Company's 2009 revenues came from the United States, Canada, and Europe (Walt Disney Company, 2010, p. 71); for Bertelsmann, 95 percent of 2009 revenues came from Europe and the United States (Bertelsmann, 2009, p. 57); 87 percent of Pearson's sales were in the United States, Canada, and Europe in 2009 (Pearson plc., 2009, p. 97).

None of these facts mean that the penetration of the media products of the developed world into the developing world does not exist, nor that it does not have important consequences, but it does place them in proportion. The companies cited here, and their peers in Europe and the United States, have dominant positions in their home market and compete vigorously in other markets, primarily in the developed world. These are the conditions that give rise to the modern form of imperialism.

The third issue, the degree to which international cultural exchanges actually constitute cultural imperialism, is much more difficult. There are some forms of cultural exchange that clearly fit almost any definition of cultural imperialism: the Voice of America, the BBC World Service, the British Council, and so on, are evidently organizations funded by imperialist states with the specific aim of promoting the ideas, beliefs, and values of their home country. On the other hand, there are many cultural exchanges that do not properly fit into any notion of imperialism: the international sale of a format by a production company is a more or less straightforward example of a trading relationship that does not presuppose state intervention any more than would the sale of the television set upon which the final version of the program will be viewed. In between such extremes lies a variety of cases that require concrete analysis in order to classify them accurately. In making such a classification, seven important points need to be borne in mind:

1. Neither the concept of imperialism nor the concept of cultural impe-

rialism supposes any consciously aggressive policy on the part of any state or any conspiratorial alliance between top-hatted capitalists and bowler-hatted civil servants. The conflicts that can and do arise originate in the "normal" economic competition between rival capitalist companies and they become imperialist conflicts to the extent that states are drawn into resolving them. States can claim, perhaps sometimes with justification, that their policies are aimed at a "peaceful rise" or at spreading "freedom and democracy," but they can still find that pursuing these ends brings them into conflict with other states.

2. Cultural imperialism can be both offensive and defensive. Discussion has usually turned on the offensive aspects of the phenomenon, for example the drive to negotiate treaties opening audio-visual markets to free trade. There are, however, equally clear examples of the use of state power to prevent foreign entrance into cultural production: the United States, for example, prevents the control of U.S. television stations by foreign nationals by barring them from owning more than 25 percent of the shares. Similarly, the European Union insists on quotas of European production for broadcasters of general channels in the EU.

3. If, as is argued here, imperialism refers to the recruitment of the state to intervene in international relations primarily in order to facilitate economic development, then there must be the demonstrable presence of state action in any international cultural exchange for it to qualify as cultural imperialism.

4. It follows from this that the "imperialist" dimension of cultural imperialism is determined by the presence of state action, not by the nature of the cultural artifact in question. It is not the intrinsic characteristics of a television program, or a language, that make it "imperialist" but the use to state power to ensure that it gains currency. The media are not in themselves "imperialist" even when the conditions specified by Boyd-Barrett actually apply, as for example they have done, historically, in Ireland (Corcoran, 2004, pp. 15–16). There is a long history of British cultural imperialism in Ireland, but the spillover of U.K. signals into the Republic is not part of it.

5. It is essential to distinguish between what may properly be termed "cultural imperialism," which may be briefly defined as the use of state power in the international cultural sphere and the fact that some cultural exchanges are closely connected with imperialism. The international status of the English language is a good example of this. English is not, in itself, an "imperialist" language. Its spread in a number of areas, Ireland most obviously, was indeed closely associated with imperialist policies, but its

the kinds of criticisms that were applied to Schiller's version. It once again becomes a viable project to investigate the ways in which state power and cultural power are intertwined in the production and circulation of cultural artifacts. The second consequence is that the term "cultural imperialism" will be used in a narrower set of circumstances than was the case in the past, although the category of the cultural consequences of imperialism is likely to be quite large.

We can illuminate what this means by considering some of the issues that were at the center of contention during the ascendancy of the concept in the 1970s and 1980s. As we noted above, whatever the motives of many of the participants, the struggle over the New World Communication and Information Order was caught up in the inter-imperialist rivalries between the United States and the Soviet Union. Some of the items of contention, for example the close and open alliance between the U.S. State Department and the Motion Picture Association of America in ensuring that trade treaties guaranteed free access to national audio-visual markets, clearly fall within our revised category of cultural imperialism. Others, for example the character of the reporting of Africa, fit better into the category of the cultural consequences of imperialism, both in terms of the social terrain that was being reported and many of the assumptions upon which reporting was (and too often still is) based.

In the future, these concepts will come to have ever greater relevance. Direct economic rivalry between the U.S. incumbent and a new challenger is an obvious feature of the contemporary world, and we saw above how the U.S. secretary of state has begun to formulate that rivalry in terms of strategic conflicts. As China, and other new economic powers such as India, grow stronger so we will see increasing competition and conflict between them and with the Western powers that have dominated the world for two centuries. The analogous situation is with the established and apparently "natural" domination of the British Empire experiencing challenges from Germany at the end of the nineteenth century, and later from the United States and the Soviet Union. Our concern is with the media, not with the general geopolitics of the contemporary world, so we do not have to speculate as to whether this rivalry will have the same consequences as the earlier conflicts: we can simply express the fervent hope that the outcomes this time will be different and much less horrifying.

In media terms, however, we can anticipate at least six possible ways in which these more general economic and political changes will lead to debates and conflicts:

contemporary global reach is a product of the fact that for the last two centuries the world's dominant imperialist power has been predominantly English speaking: first the United Kingdom, then the United States. The presence of English in India is not due to the characteristics of the language but to the fact of the long British imperial rule in India: it is not itself cultural imperialism, but rather one of the cultural consequences of imperialism.

6. It is not a necessary condition for cultural imperialism, or for the cultural consequences of imperialism, that they have a particular kind of impact upon their audiences. In some cases, cultural forms that evidently originate in imperial centers are enthusiastically adopted by the population of subject territories: the sport of cricket in India, where it commands a far more central place in the dominant culture than it does in its English place of origin, is an obvious example, and the control of the sport, once located in London, today lies in India. In other cases, cultural phenomena might have quite different meanings in different places, being popular in one and not another, or being reworked into hybrid forms, and so on. The extent and nature of the impact of any cultural phenomenon is a matter for empirical investigation and is independent of the question as to whether that phenomenon occurs as the result of state action or through simple economic exchange. The consequences that earlier theories of cultural imperialism assumed as being intrinsic to the nature of the trade in cultural products are in practice only one possible set of outcomes among many.

7. Not only is the assertion as to the existence of homogeneous "national cultures" extremely difficult to sustain empirically but the theory of cultural imperialism has no place for such a concept, given that most Marxist-inspired theories of the modern state system see it as the result of historical struggle between different class interests rather than as the natural expression of a people. There is no reason to suppose that either the agents (large capitalist corporations and powerful modern states) or the objects of cultural imperialism (states and societies endowed with less economic, political, and military power) are ethnically or culturally homogeneous. There are dominant and subordinate cultures within both the imperialist states and those states that experience their attentions.

Consequences

The first result of applying the above criteria is that it is possible to advance a viable and coherent concept of cultural imperialism that is not subject to