Indigenous cultures in the era of globalisation: a case against cultural imperialism theory

ABSTRACT

Advocates of cultural imperialism theory have continued to argue that indigenous cultures, especially of African societies, are daily eroded in the age of globalisation. Their argument is based on Schiller's debatable notion that a society is brought into a modern world system when its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, cajoled and sometimes bribed into accepting its traditional system and values as inferior, outdated and mundane; and shaping such system and values to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system.

This paper submits that this argument is no longer tenable in the age of globalisation. This is because the major arguments of the cultural imperialism theory now strike a discordant note with global-village and media-convergence tunes. Second, the theory - as suggested - builds on mass-society and magic-bullet perspectives that have long been discredited both in media practice and in scholarship because they do not acknowledge audiences' ability to process information and interpret cultural messages differently based on their cultural environment. The paper therefore concludes that cultural imperialism theory needs a re-examination in line with the contemporary realities of today's world as a global village made possible by the advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs).

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INTRODUCTION

The global village, as envisaged by McLuhan (1964), came with cultural challenges that have continued to affect most African societies. This has been attributed to the low participation ability of these African societies in global issues, and exacerbated by their inability fully to appreciate globalisation matters. This may also be because cultural debates that revolve around globalisation are always controversial and poignant. However, we must acknowledge the fact that national cultures are very important to most citizens and their leaders, and that protecting said cultures is a highly sensitive, emotional? and politicised issue.

The second reason why such debates have remained controversial and been ever present in this century is because both the impact of globalisation on culture and the impact of culture on globalisation merit discussion. This is why the advocates of cultural imperialism theory have continued to argue that globalisation has exacerbated the cultural challenges of most African societies. Is this position empirically supported or is such a view mere conjecture based on personal experience? Can cultural imperialism in the 19th and in the 21st century be mentioned in the same breath? In other words: Is cultural imperialism theory still relevant in the age of globalisation? These questions will occupy our attention in this paper. But first, what is it in culture that makes it so charged with emotion whenever it is discussed?

Culture, as defined by UNESCO (1994) is regarded as including the whole complex of distinctive, spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterise a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs. Culture is also the totality of human endeavours in a given time and place. People are constructs of their culture. Culture gives people their identity and dignity. It is both every day expression and future aspirations. Culture and development are intertwined because culture underpins development and reinforces it. That is why it is often said that a community without a culture is a community without a future or a destiny.

In 1998, UNESCO, in defining culture as follows, again attempted to reconcile different conceptions:

> In the largest sense culture today can be considered as a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group that it encompasses, in addition to arts and literature, lifestyle, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs. Culture gives humanity the capacity to reflect on itself. It is culture that makes us specifically rational, critical and ethically engaged human beings. It is through culture that we perceive values and make choices…through it that human beings express themselves, are conscious of themselves, perceive themselves as unfinished projects, call their own creations into question, look tirelessly for new meanings and create works that transcend them.

Globalisation, on the other hand, has become a cliché in the 21st century. Though the concept is widely used in almost all fields of human endeavour, it does not lend itself to precise definition.

The controversy over the meaning of *globalisation* has therefore created more hype than insight. As an economic ideal and as a social condition, globalisation is hotly contested. Even as a word, *globalisation* is rather hazy. You know it when you see it, but how would you define it? And would others share your definition? Scholars have, however, put forward some broad descriptions of this term: "increasing global connectedness", "a complex range of processes, driven by a range of political and economic influences", and "the…flow of capital, people, and ideas, across national borders" (Imhonopi & Urim, 2004).

Broadly speaking, globalisation refers to transborder interconnectedness in all spheres of the economy, politics, trade, culture, industry, services and communication. It indicates a world in which complex economic, political, social and cultural processes operate and interact without any influence of national boundaries and distance (Joseph, 2006: 97). The concept implies that development in any part of the world can also have far-reaching consequences in other parts of the world. According to Held (1992 as cited in Joseph, 2006: 97), globalisation implies a distinctively new 'international order' involving the emergence of a global economic system that stretches beyond the control of a single state (even of dominant states); the expansion of networks of transnational linkages and communications over which particular states have little influence, and the enormous growth in international organisation, which can limit the scope for action of the most powerful states (Joseph, 2006: 97).

The cultural implications of globalisation in African societies raise an interesting debate and also pose a challenge to 21st-century scholars of media/cultural tradition. Scholars such as Hamelink (1983), Schiller (1992), and Huntington (1996), are of the opinion that globalisation trends are gradually eroding local cultural values and replacing them with alien values, while Reich (1992), Wang (1996), Wilson (1998) and Zwizwai (1999) and others are of the opinion that globalisation has actually enriched local cultural values with positive foreign influences. Both sides have always provided facts to argue their cases and the controversy generated by them remains fluid.

The controversial nature of these issues cannot be isolated from their peculiar influence that affects peoples' lifestyles and their total way of life-culture. Technology has now created the possibility and even the likelihood of a global culture. The Internet, fax machines, satellites, and cable TV are sweeping aside cultural boundaries. Global entertainment companies shape the perceptions and dreams of ordinary citizens, wherever they live. This spread of values, norms, and culture, no doubt tends to promote Western ideals of capitalism, yet to regard this as cultural imperialism in the 21st century may sound overly simplistic. This is because the disappearance of indigenous cultural values of a society for a more flexible global norm may be self-inflicted and development oriented - especially when such indigenous values no longer support either the individual or the societal goals of that society. Second, empirical evidence abounds to support the argument that most media audiences of the 21st century are active participants in any communication process. They therefore have an active reading of any communication signal or message, which consequently interprets the signal or message to fit within their own cultural environment.

Will indigenous cultures, therefore, inevitably fall victim to said global "consumer" culture? Will English, for instance, eradicate all other languages? Will consumer values overwhelm peoples' sense of communal living and social solidarity? Will indigenous cultures become more flexible in the wake of globalisation to accept positive alien influences? Will it be fair to regard such acceptance or integration into the global community as Westernisation, Americanisation, ideological imperialism or cultural imperialism? Or, on the conversely, will a common culture lead the way to greater shared values and political unity encapsulated in a global culture?

An attempt to answer these questions in the age of globalisation driven by ICTs raises doubts in respect of the major tenets of cultural imperialism theory. This paper attempts just that and it therefore re-examines the major tenets of cultural imperialism theory in line with the contemporary realities of a borderless world as envisaged in McLuhan's global village phenomenon.

1. GLOBAL VILLAGE, ICTS AND GLOBALISATION

The world today is aptly described as a global village in which a web of information networks interconnects individuals in nearly instantaneous global communication (Singhal & Rogers, 2001). Canadian media scholar Marshal McLuhan (1964) coined the term *global village* in the 1960s. He proclaimed the advent of a global village, a sort of borderless world in which communication media transcends the boundaries of nations: "Ours is a brand new world of all at oneness, time has ceased, and space has vanished. We now live in… simultaneous happening." McLuhan (1964) further predicted that each new communication medium would transcend the boundaries of experience reached by earlier media and would contribut to further change. He correctly saw that different media would work together and converge to form a global village. In the global village, information and experience would be freely available for all to share. McLuhan insisted that electronic media would decentralise power and information, allowing people to live in small clusters far from urban centres while nevertheless having the same level of access to information.

The global village is a world that is interconnected by Internet, World Wide Web and new communication media, one that is creating a more or less uniform global culture. Singhal and Rogers (2001) argue that - at least at a superficial level - large cities across the world today resemble major cities in the West in the products sold, movies shown, air conditioning, traffic problems, fast food, Cokes, McDonalds, Reeboks and Japanese automobiles. The advent of satellite channels, global networks and Internet has brought about drastic changes in the media environment since the 1990s. New developments in communication technology have rewritten the very definition of journalism itself. The definition of news has changed from something that has just happened to something happening at the very moment you are hearing or watching it (Joseph, 2006: 102).

In thinking about the future of media in the globalised world, "push" and "pull" are two words that capture the direction in which the media are moving. Joseph (2006: 102) notes that:

> Broadcasting TV is a push medium wherein a select band of producers decide what content is to be created, create it and then push it down through analogue or digital channels at audience which are assumed to consist of essentially passive recipients. The web is opposite of this. It is a pull medium. Nothing comes to a user unless he/she chooses it and clicks onto it to pull it down on the computer. The asymmetry of the old media world is overturned in the net-dominated new media environment.

Gradually, it is being discovered that the passivity of the old broadcast model may have been due more to the absence of tools and publication opportunities than to the intrinsic defects in human nature (Naughton, 2006). For the media this means that journalists should be offering "commentary, facts checking and inflection" on the material in the public domain, acting as map makers to make "people sense" of everything that is out there on the Internet. The map conceptualises and mediates the sources they point to but not to?the interpretation of the readers themselves (Hall, 2001). Many experts have also argued that the importance of the "word" is declining while that of the visual image is ascending. The media culture that was dominated until recently by the printed word is disappearing; it is being replaced by a culture dominated by images. That was why Marshal McLuhan declared four decades ago that human beings were returning to the preliterate state in human evolution (Vilanilam, 2005).

Joseph (2006: 103) also states that digitisation and computerisation have facilitated the process of media convergence. According to him, communication (computerised communication) is part of every medium's operation today and watertight compartmentalisation of various media is a futile exercise. Digitisation opened new possibilities for the creation of services within and beyond the framework of traditional communication sectors. Media convergence is leading to the death of time and distance, which, in a way, is assisting the process of globalisation by rendering what is *global* local, and what is *local* global. Herman and McChasney (1997) further identify the most important features of the growth of global media in the past two decades to be the consolidation and concentration of advertisement-based commercial media and the parallel weakening of the public broadcasting system. Media globalisation is further characterised by larger cross-border flows of media output, the growth of media TNCs and the tendency towards the concentration of media control and the spread and the intensification of commercialisation. In the 1990s, the media started to operate across national borders and to have a greater impact on national cultural systems. Media and entertainment outlays were growing faster than GDP almost everywhere in the world and especially in Europe.

In his analysis of the implication of ICTs in this age of globalisation, Friedman (2005) states that the 21st century will be remembered for a whole new world of globalisation - a flattening of the world. He sees the whole globalised world as flat in the sense that the entire world is now a level playing field with easy exits and entrances. Joseph (2006: 101) moreover notes that the globalised world is entering a new phase where more people than ever before are going to have access to ICT facilities as innovators, collaborators, and even as terrorists, while Friedman (2005) argues that wherever one turns, hierarchies are being challenged from below or are transforming themselves from top-down structures into more horizontal and collaborative entities. This flattening process is

happening at unusual speed and directly or indirectly touching many more people on the planet at once.

It is interesting at this point to observe that McLuhan (1964) 43 years ago predicted the emergence of this situation when he visualised a dispersed media structure "whose centres are everywhere and margins are nowhere". Today, globalisation and ICTS have led to the emergence not only of a global village but also of a global family and community now sharing common values, economic-cum-political ideologies and socio-cultural orientations irrespective of their places of geographical provenance, race, language and socio-economic status (Ekeanyanwu, 2008).

Rothkop (1997: 98), in his remarks to justify the place of ICTs intoday's world, states:
> Much has been written about the role of information technologies and services in this process. Today, 15 major U.S. telecommunications companies, including giants like Motorola, Loral Space & Communications, and Teledesic (a joint project of Microsoft's Bill Gates and cellular pioneer Craig McCaw), offer competing plans that will encircle the globe with a constellation of satellites and will enable anyone anywhere to communicate instantly with anyone elsewhere without an established telecommunications infrastructure on the ground near either the sender or the recipient. Technology no doubt, is not only transforming the world; it is creating its own metaphors as well. Satellites carrying television signals now enable people on opposite sides of the globe to be exposed regularly to a wide range of cultural stimuli. Russian viewers are hooked on Latin soap operas, and Middle Eastern leaders have cited CNN as a prime source for even local news.

Sociologists have argued that the emergence of a global culture has the capacity to bind society and individuals together. This, according to Meyer, Boli, George & Ramirez (1997: 162) could be done "by rationalized systems of (imperfectly) egalitarian justice and participatory representation, in the economy, polity, culture, and social interaction". Critics of world-society theory agree on this count in that there is no such thing as a "global civil society." Communication and transportation technology are not enough to account for the rise of cross-border advocacy groups (Keck & Sikkink, 1998: 32-34, 210-211), although "global governance" of major aspects of transportation and communication has been on the rise since 1850 (Murphy, 1994).

Political and social theorists and historians have noted the rise of what modernists would call "particularistic" identities as evidence against the rise of a global culture. Cox (1996: 27) writes about globalisation producing a "resurgent affirmation of identities", while Mazlish (1993: 14) notes that "[E]thnic feeling is a powerful bond" and skeptically asks: "What counterpart can there be on the global level?" Yashar (1999) not only rejects the concepts "global culture" and "global citizenship", but also finds fault with the argument that globalisation has induced the proliferation of ethnic movements. In her comparison of indigenous movements in Latin America, Yashar clearly demonstrates that no aspect of globalisation - either cultural, economic, political, social or normative - can account for the rise of ethnic-based activism since the 1960s. Rather, globalisation changes the characteristics of those very states that activists face in making their claims.

Some of the most persuasive arguments against the idea of the emergence of a global culture come from Geertz (1998: 107-108). He observes that the world is:

> Growing more global and more divided, more thoroughly interconnected and more intricately partitioned at the same time…. All these vast connections and intricate interdependence are sometimes referred to, after cultural studies sloganeers, as the 'global village', or, after World Bank ones, as 'borderless capitalism'. But as it has neither solidarity nor tradition, neither edge nor focus, and lacks all wholeness, it is a poor sort of village.

Geertz (1998: 109-110) further notes:

> The view of culture, a culture, this culture, as a consensus on fundamentals - shared conceptions, shared feelings, and shared values - seems hardly viable in the face of so much dispersion and disassembly. Whatever it is that defines identity in borderless capitalism and the global village it is not deep going agreements on deep going matters, but something more like the recurrence of familiar divisions, persisting arguments, standing threats, the notion that whatever else may happen, the order of difference must be somehow maintained.

Similarly, Smith (1980: 171) opens his essay on global culture with the concept to which he refers as the "initial problem":

> Can we speak of 'culture' in the singular? If by 'culture' is meant a collective mode of life, or a repertoire of beliefs, styles, values and symbols, then we can only speak of cultures, never just culture; for a collective mode of life, or a repertoire of beliefs, etc., presupposes different modes and repertoires in a universe of modes and repertoires. Hence, the idea of a 'global culture' is a practical impossibility, except in interplanetary terms.

Appadurai (1996: 4, 21) aptly articulates the anthropological approach to the global. He argues that "[I]ndividuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern", and writes about the "global modern". In his view, the central feature of global culture today is the politics of the mutual effort of *sameness* and *difference* to cannibalise one another, thereby proclaiming their successful hijacking of the twin enlightenment ideas of the triumphantly universal and the resiliently particular. This mutual cannibalisation rears its ugly face in riots, refugee flows, state-sponsored torture, and ethnocide. Its brighter side is in the expansion of many individual horizons of hope and fantasy (Appadurai, 1996: 4, 21).

The critical point is that both sides of the coin of global cultural processes are today products of the infinitely varied mutual contest of sameness and difference on a stage characterised by radical disjuncture between different sorts of global flows and the uncertain landscapes created in and through such disjuncture (Appadurai 1996: 43). Drawing on anthropological work and his own research, Portes (1997: 3) proposes the term *transnational communities* to refer to cross-border networks of immigrants that are "'neither here nor there' but in both places simultaneously" (see also Portes, Guarnizo & Landolt, 1999). Different transnational communities, however, exhibit different origins, features and problems, and certainly do not form a monolithic global class of cosmopolitan citizens.

2. INDIGENOUS CULTURES, ICTS AND GLOBALISATION

One of the primary points of departure in this paper is on the potential influence that globalisation driven by ICTs has on indigenous cultures and societies. The arguments in this section, therefore, follow from issues raised in the global village phenomenon and how said phenomenon is impacting tribal societies and local (indigenous) cultures. Based on this, the paper raises some other fundamental posers: Is there a link between ICTs and indigenous cultures? Are indigenous cultures shaped by ICTs and are these cultures integrating themselves into a global culture? The attempt to answer some of these questions leads us to the very nature of ICTs that have definitely defined 21st century globalisation and the attendant effects of the latter phenomenon on indigenous cultures.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs), bring the idea of globalisation to a better understanding as it relates to the media and to culture. The effects of the revolution in ICTs on modern global information flows are overwhelming. With the onset of the post-industrial age, nation-states are co-players and stakeholders in the process of globalisation along with multinational corporations (MNCs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on the world political and socio-cultural stage. Information and communication technologies (ICTs), therefore, are the coordinating platforms that link all players and stakeholders in the process of globalisation. In summary, ICTs are driving globalisation to cause enormous impacts on indigenous cultures, societies and peoples.

Soola (1998) notes that ICTs provide near-limitless possibilities of increasing the quantity, and enhancing the quality, speed and availability of information in a complex but increasingly interdependent world of business. Adaja (2007) also notes that "ICT is basically the application of modern technologies to information generation, processing, storage, retrieval and dissemination to meet the needs and requirements of individuals, groups, organizations, governments and societies. It guarantees accuracy, efficiency, prompt and instantaneous transmission or distribution of information".

On the question as to whether there is a link between ICTs, globalisation and indigenous cultures, two schools of thought are clearly distinguishable here, while yet a third is emerging. Opponents of globalisation argue that the playing field is not level. Free trade naturally favours larger economies, they say, and so the predominant Western influence stifles the cultures and traditions of the developing world. Free traders also argue that globalisation enhances culture, and that, in any event, culture cannot thrive in poverty. Both sides generally agree that subsidies, tariffs and other protectionist policies by developed countries against goods commonly produced in the developing nations (textiles, for example) hamper both culture and economic growth there. Furthermore, advocates of globalisation maintain that free trade and free markets neither dilute nor pollute other cultures; in fact, they enhance them. Trade creates wealth, they say, and wealth frees the world's poorest people from the daily struggle for survival, and allows them to embrace, celebrate and share the art, music, crafts and literature that might otherwise have been sacrificed to poverty (Ekeanyanwu, 2008).

So who is right? Is globalisation aided by ICTs killing non-Western cultures, or is it augmenting and enhancing them? In this controversy, the third school of thought emerges. This school, according to Robertson (1992), attempts to draw a middle ground in the controversy. It believes that ICTs and globalisation could be made more acceptable and meaningful to local or indigenous situations notwithstanding the inherent dangers in them. The proponents of this emerging school of thought, therefore, advocates for *glocalisation*.

From the perspective of worker exploitation, ICTs and globalisation are evil. From the perspectives of technological and cultural transfer, ICTs and globalisation are beneficial. And,from the middle-of-the-road view, ICTs and globalisation could lead to glocalisation, which is somehow acceptable and has the potential to bring the other two opposing points of view together. According to Tardif (2002), the two earlier voices of ICTs and globalisation could be heard throughout the world because they both have an impact and create a tone that strengthens the voice of globalisation from pole to pole. Majorities, in every nation surveyed, report that over the past five years there has been an increased availability of foreign movies, television programmes and music. And in more than half of these countries, the globalisation of culture has been intensive, with people saying that there is much more foreign culture available to them than before. This trend is particularly evident in Central America, Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia. Tardiff (2002: 23) provides research statistics to support his claims:

> Roughly nine-in-ten people see greater availability of foreign pop culture in several countries: Ukraine (94%), Lebanon (92%), Vietnam (92%), Indonesia (90%), Nigeria (89%) and Senegal (88%). In Ukraine, nearly three-quarters of respondents (74%) in a recent study say there has been a large increase in the availability of foreign movies, television programs and music. Countries that are prominent cultural exporters – such as the United States and France – are somewhat less likely to see increased availability of cultural exports from other parts of the world. Overall, about six-in-ten Americans (62%) say foreign movies, television and music have become more available compared with five years before then, but just four-in-ten say they are a lot more available. Roughly the same number in France (64%) sees greater availability of foreign popular culture – the lowest percentage in Western Europe.

Gauging the long-term socio-cultural impacts of ICTs and globalisation is extraordinarily difficult. As Arthur C. Clarke (cited in Cairncross, 2000) once said, people exaggerate the short-run impacts of technological change and underestimate the long-run effects. Really big technological changes permeate our homes, our personal relationships, our daily habits, the way we think and speak. We must note that new technological developments have consequences that nobody could have imagined when they were new. The revolution in communications technologies will have results and consequences that are just pervasive, intimate, and surprising.

Similarly to Portes, Friedman (1994) accepts Geertz's, Smith's and Appadurai's basic notion of cultural fragmentation, but argues that in today's world the existence of tribal societies cannot be correctly understood without explaining how they are embedded in global networks. In his view, cultural diversity must be viewed in a global context. There remains the ultimate question about

the alleged rise of a global culture: What is the global language? The diffusion of Esperanto has certainly not delivered on early expectations, and the "English-as-global-language" argument seems equally far-fetched and indefensible. As Mazlish (1993: 16) observes, English "is becoming a sort of Lingua Franca [but] there are serious limitations to the use of English as the daily language of a global culture." Moreover, English is being challenged as the dominant language in parts of the United States and the United Kingdom. It is also instructive to recall that the most successful world language ever, Latin, evolved into a mosaic of Romance languages after spreading in its various vulgarised forms throughout most of Western and Central Europe, North-western Africa and Asia Minor.

Another sound argument against English as the global language is the one by Smith (1990: 185-186) who notes that rather than the emergence of a "global" culture, what we are witnessing is the emergence of "culture areas" - not necessarily at odds or in conflict with each other, as Huntington (1996) would have it. Thus, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, French, Kiswahili and Chinese have become the shared languages of certain groups, communities or population strata across countries located in specific regions of the world, namely Latin America, the CIS, the Arab world, sub-Saharan Africa, East Africa, and South East Asia, respectively. Inevitably, globalisation can lead to the development of indigenous languages - a major component of the culture of any people.

Another vital point in favour of globalisation and ICTs emanates from the argument of the opponents of the cultural development school of thought. They note that with globalisation and developments in information and communications technologies, American culture and English language will swamp their cultures and traditional industries. Such fears are justified on the platform that most urban cultures in Africa, for instance, reflect shifts in cultural production and consumption that tend to be at odds with existing local and traditional cultures. However, such fears are still debatable and questionable. According to Cairncross (2000: 279):

> Electronic media affect language in three main ways. They alter the way language is used, they create a need for a global language that will most likely be filled by English, and they influence the future of other languages. In the last case, one of the main impacts of new communications will be to lower the entry barriers to cultural industries such as television and movie-making.

Ekeanyanwu (2009) also notes that the English language, for instance, is foreign to Nigeria but its adoption as a Lingua Franca has not harmed the indigenous languages spoken in that nation. In fact, the more than 250 indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria long before the introduction of English have all remained, and some are gradually acquiring innovations that will keep them relevant to their speakers even beyond the 50th century. There is what we now call "Nigerian English", "Broken English" or "Pidgin English". These are variants of "English English" that were transferred to indigenous societies by foreigners. The cultural implication of this scenario is that the linguistic differences in a pluralistic society like Nigeria are no longer barriers to communication at the national level. This has enhanced national cohesion, the inter-cultural re-orientation of the peoples of Nigeria, and regional integration and unity. All of these can not easily be dismissed as evidence of cultural imperialism.

Critics of cultural-imperialism arguments also contend that the flow of information from the global North to the global South results in an intermingling of cultures and not in the dominance of one culture over another. Prior to the Internet, European and Asian countries were concerned about the influence of American television and film, believing that American popular entertainment would undermine the growth of local pop culture. However, it was found that foreign entertainment often took a secondary place among a domestic audience, especially when language differences required the programmes to be either dubbed or subtitled. European audiences viewed American programming only when they felt that the quality of programming in their local channels was poor. (see Thompson on http//llc.edu/student/globalization.htm).

Another positive effect of globalisation is the cross-reference of culture that it promotes around the world. The spread of non-indigenous culture is evident in many aspects of life in many countries. Globalisation allows for Americans to eat Italian food, for rural Vietnamese farmers to watch the daily news on television, for Frenchmen and women to eat fast food, for Germans to watch American-made movies, and for Japanese to listen to Scottish music. There are other signs that Western "cultural hegemony" might also be somewhat overstated. For example, European anti-globalisation activists have long criticised Hollywood and its big-budget studios for monopolising the world movie industry and, consequently, polluting other cultures with American iconolatry. But, according to a worldwide 1999 BBC poll, the most famous movie star in the world is neither Ben Affleck nor Julia Roberts, but Amitabh Bachchan, an Indian film star probably unfamiliar to most Americans.

Furthermore, the argument that cultural products impose the values of one culture on another, assumes an audience with a rather passive response to media messages. This view is somewhat erroneous in that it discards both the mass society and the bullet theory notions. In other words, this idea assumes a "hypodermic" model effect of the media, where audiences are influenced by any media message that is communicated to them. In contrast, most research findings suggest that audiences actually have an active reading of any message - critiquing and analysing ideological messages, and interpreting them to fit within their own cultural contexts. Studies in the Latin American countries have shown that local cultures "interact" with foreign ones, creating a hybridisation of the two, instead of a subjugation of the local culture by the foreign one. These issues question the major tenets/principles? of cultural imperialism theory.

3.   *CULTURAL IMPERIALISM THEORY REVISITED*

Critical theorists, according to White (2001), have suggested various phrases in reference to notions of cultural imperialism. An examination of the international communication literature will reveal several different terms such as *media imperialism* (Boyd-Barrett, 1977); *structural imperialism* (Galtung, 1979); *cultural synchronisation* (Hamelink, 1983); *cultural dependency and domination* (Link, 1984; Mohammadi, 1995); *electronic colonialism* (McPhail, 1987); *communication imperialism* (Sui-Nam Lee, 1988); *ideological imperialism,* and *economic imperialism* (Mattleart, 1994) - all relating to the same basic notion of cultural imperialism. Different media scholars who have at one time or another written on the subject of cultural imperialism also attribute its beginnings to different sources (All the references cited in this paragraph are from White, 2001).

The theory of cultural imperialism was developed in the 1970s to explain the media situation as it existed at that time. The nature of media (i.e., print, radio and television), at that time, promoted a one-way, top-down transmission system from the dominant country to the dominated country, which theoretically gave rise to a passive audience and a powerful media (Sengupta & Frith, 1997 cited in White, 2001). This situation created imbalance in the global news-flow scene and cries of media/cultural imperialism/marginalisation. These cries, inevitably, led to calls for a New World Information and Communication Order.

Cultural imperialism is thus defined as "the process whereby the ownership, structure, distribution, or content of the media in any country are singly or together 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: 117). One could also describe media/cultural imperialism as the subtle manipulation of the mass media of underdeveloped or developing countries by the developed Western capitalist nations of Europe and North America, using their advanced and well-developed mass media to control the behaviour, lifestyles, morals, mores, arts, and values of the undeveloped or developing nations through the production and massive exportation of media software to the developing nations. Cultural imperialism is further also the subjugation of a local culture and the imposition of an alien culture on the local culture (Ekeanyanwu, 2005: 29).

Cultural imperialism became an issue in international media circles and one of the core debates in the controversy over the New World Information and Communication Order after the MacBride Commission published its findings, stating that "the media of communication are cultural instruments which serve to promote or influence attitudes, motivation, foster the spread of behaviour patterns and bring about social integration" (MacBride et al., 1980).

4.   THE MAIN ARGUMENT OF CULTURAL IMPERIALISM THEORY

After a critical analysis of the arguments advanced by most of the theorists and other scholars who have written on the topic of cultural imperialism, the major proposition seems to be best summarised in the work of Schiller (1976). According to his thinking, cultural imperialism proposes that a society is brought into the modern world system when its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping its social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system (Schiller, 1976 cited in White, 2001). The summary of this view is that the essence of cultural imperialism is the domination of one nation by another with the conducive environment being created by transnational media organisations.

Another assumption of cultural imperialism, according to White (2001: 4) citing Tomlison (1991) is that:

> Media play a central role in creating culture. This axiom is linked to the interchangeable use of various terms to refer to cultural imperialism. Writers who talk about "cultural imperialism" as "media imperialism," treating the two terms as synonyms, bring into

question the centrality of the media in claims of cultural imperialism. This practice implies that the media have such an overwhelming role in the process referred to as "cultural imperialism" that the word "cultural" can be interchanged with "media" from time to time. Of course, one must be careful in attributing this massive central significance to the media. To understand claims about media imperialism, one would need to examine the relationship of the media to other aspects of culture without assuming its centrality from the outset (Tomlinson, 1991).

White (2001: 4) further notes that cultural imperialism theory also presumes a centralised approach to the development, diffusion and distribution of media products. "The thinking here is that all media products originate from only center nations that have devious ulterior motives of deliberately wanting to dominate the media of periphery nations. This belief is based partly on the view that no periphery country will ever be able to produce media products of its own." How wrong such a view!

5. THE MAJOR LIMITATIONS OF CULTURAL IMPERIALISM THEORY

Many limitations have been identified by scholars who are opposed to the major arguments of cultural imperialism theory. Their views are summarised below:

1. The advocates of cultural imperialism, led by Herbert Schiller, developed their arguments in the 1960s and 1970s when United States economic dominance in the global system seemed secure and unchallengeable. This situation has since changed in the 21st century with the emergence of other economic and political superpowers like China, Japan, etc. Therefore, the unipolar power structure which cultural imperialism presumes is no longer in existence in 21st-century power relations. We now talk of multipolar power structures and relations. Unipolarism is the existence of a single superpower in world politics and relations, while multipolarism is the existence of multiple superpowers in global politics and international relations.

2. The theory lacks explanatory power and thus needs to be advanced beyond the level of pure description (Ogan, 1988 cited in White, 2001). Beyond this, the theory is also found to be lacking in predictive powers.

3. The economic component of media imperialism may be expressed in statistics, but the cultural component is much more difficult to measure (Ogan, 1988 cited in White, 2001). This calls into question the various empirical supports this theory claims to have garnered over time.

4. Cultural imperialism theory also implies that before the arrival of US media, developing nations were enjoying a cozy Golden Age of indigenous, authentic traditions and cultural heritage untainted by values and orientations imposed from outside. This argument risks being patronising to what are seen as "weaker" nations and of romanticising as "indigenous" those cultures whose traditions and heritages have been shaped by very long and brutal processes of cultural conflict, triangulation and synchronisation, often involving the imposition of external values from centuries back, resulting in rich hybridities (Negus & Roman-Velasquez, 2000).

5. The theory also lacks conceptual precision (Lee, 1988 cited in White, 2001). This is the major reason for the theory being linked, over time, with various conflicting notions.
6. The theory does not hold true in all ramifications of the phenomenon that it attempts to explain (Sinclair, Jacka, & Cunningham, 1996 cited in White, 2001). Therefore, when related constructs are given different interpretations in related situations, then something is definitely wrong with the platform from which such interpretations are made.
7. Twenty-first century media scholars like Uche (1996) have also drawn clear and distinct lines between cultural imperialism, cultural synchronisation and cultural juxtaposition. He argues that what most persons call cultural imperialism may actually be regarded as cultural synchronisation. According to him, cultural imperialism means that an external culture is imposed upon another culture against its will; cultural synchronisation means that an external culture is welcomed and imitated by another culture, which the external eventually supersedes in an evolutionary fashion; while cultural juxtaposition means the placing together of locally produced cultural elements with the externally produced, or the opposition and coexistence of distinct types of cultural productivity within late capitalism. Such distinctions are blatantly lacking in conceptualisations of cultural imperialism theory.
8. Cultural imperialism theory does not also acknowledge an audience's ability to process information and interpret messages differently based on their individual background, and as suggested by individual differences theory (Liebes & Katz, 1990 cited in White, 2001). The theory also goes against the uses and gratification model that rightly presumes an active media audience able to process and interpret media messages or stimuli from the vantage point of their individual socio-cultural experiences and backgrounds.
9. Another argument that further interrogates cultural imperialism theory is closely linked to the major postulates of technological determinism as a theory. McLuhan, in his analysis of technological determinism theory, believes that all social, economic, political and cultural changes are innately based on the development and diffusion of technology. In essence, this theory regards our present cultural challenges to be a direct result of the information explosion fostered by television, the computer and the Internet. This theory, therefore, suggests that the historical, economic, and cultural changes in the world are traceable to the invention, development and diffusion of ICTs. According to DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1982: 185), most people would reject McLuhan's claim that the content of media messages has no impact on audiences. Essentially, media theorists reject the extreme form of technological determinism advanced by McLuhan for two reasons. DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1982: 185) summarised these reasons thus:

    > Social scientists generally reject the idea that any single factor - be it technology, the economy, or chromosomes - can be the single cause of social behaviour. This distrust of single-factor theories is buttressed by theory and research developments that demonstrate the influence of both psychological and social factors on the individual's or group's encounters with the mass media.

    Continuing, DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1982) note that Innis's thesis (technological determinism) need not be rejected out of hand, stating that most media theorists would

accept the proposition that the technological characteristics of a mass medium may be one of many factors that should be taken into account. However, others view technology as more or less neutral and claim that the way people use technology is what gives it significance and meaning. This school of thought accepts technology as one of the many factors that shape economic and cultural change; technology's influence is ultimately determined by how much power it is given by the people and cultures that use it. Baran (2002: 22) therefore, raises a fundamental question:

> Are we more or less powerless in the wake of advances like the Internet, the World Wide Web, instant global audio and visual communication? If we are at the mercy of technology, the culture that surrounds us will not be of our making, and the best we can hope to do is to make our way reasonably well in a world outside our own control. But if these technologies are indeed neutral and their power resides in how we choose to use them, we can utilize them responsively and thoughtfully to construct and maintain whatever kind of culture we want.

If we further analyse Baran's position here, it would mean that the accusation levelled against globalisation and ICTs - that they are leading to cultural imperialism - is both misleading and misrepresentative. The power of technology lies in the use to which it is put, not in its very nature. Therefore, we can apply it to suit our cultural needs; it does not compel us to follow its own dictates or the dictates of the owners of such technology as is suggested by some anti-Western media scholars who always argue in favour of cultural imperialism as the main and sometimes, the only result of the influence of globalisation and ICTs on indigenous cultures.

10. The theory builds on mass-society and magic-bullet submissions that have long been discredited in media practice and scholarship. So, are we moving backward and forward or forward and backward in the development and diffusion of mass communication theories? The answer should be obvious.

11. The criteria for evaluating theories - scope, precision, testability and utility - have been used in the comparison of cultural imperialism and other macroscopic theories. These criteria have been suggested for evaluating mainly social scientific theories. However, even though cultural imperialism is considered mainly a critical theory, these criteria could still be used because cultural imperialism has been applied in social scientific research. Using these criteria, White (2001) notes the following:

> Although the theory, arguably, has broad scope as it attempts to cover a lot of the phenomena related to relationships between nations, therein lies part of the theory's shortcoming. According to Fejes (1981: 282), the theory is almost a "pseudo-concept, something which can be used to explain everything in general about media in developing countries and hence nothing in particular". This is further complicated by the fact that the theory lacks precisely defined constructs and propositions which makes it highly challenging to test the theory. With these inadequacies related to precision and testability, one can infer that the theory does not have much utility either. At best, the theory is descriptive and does not have much explanatory or predictive power.

6.   CONCLUSION

In summary, White (2001) notes that the developed media systems of the world, which are becoming widely available in the form of telecommunications, computers, Internet, and satellite technology, provide for greater interaction between sender and receiver than has ever before been possible. Therefore, the cultural imperialism argument that has been framed in terms of centre nations (that are actually no longer in existence) with power over disempowered periphery nations (that are now developing nations and some of them are gradually leap-frogging into the league of developed nations) must be reconsidered as the new media slowly but steadily penetrate into developing nations and societies.

Thus, in my view, the advocates of cultural imperialism theory who are still not convinced about the need for cultural synchronisation, flexibility and greater integration in the emerging global village are out of touch with the inherent possibilities of globalisation aided by ICTs. As highlighted in this paper, no one could easily predict either the future or the nature globalisation will take in the later part of this century or in the beginning of the 22nd century. The sophistication and continued progress in new communication technologies also seem unpredictable. The only way out is to be aware so as to avoid being caught unawares. Therefore, integration into the global system called "global village" seems inevitable for cultures and peoples who want to remain relevant in contemporary discourse. This dynamism should be pursued vigorously. Cultural imperialism arguments seem merely? diversionary.

The protagonists of cultural imperialism theory should also not forget that most indigenous cultural values and traditions of native peoples all over developing societies have long merged with Western/European values - since the days of political imperialism/colonialism. There is therefore dysfunctionality in indigenous cultural values and orientations as a result of these anti-global dispositions. The solution therefore lies in the further spread and acceptance of the global culture and a deeper and more committed integration into the global village.

The fear that individual cultures and national identities will disappear should not be entertained - the world's great diversity will ensure that culture-specific, special-interest fare remains in popular demand. Local societies and individual identities will never disappear or become American or Western as a result of the globalisation phenomenon. Rather, I see a one-world community inhabited by global citizens driven by the desire to live together in a spirit of global cooperation, yet retaining those distinct features that make them who they are. Such is the world of cultural pluralism in which there is no place for cultural imperialism arguments.

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