



# Globalization, Development and the **Mass Media**

Colin Sparks



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# 1

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## **INTRODUCTION**

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This book is about the role that the media and other forms of communication can play in improving the conditions of life for the world's poorest people. The scale and depth of world poverty is perhaps too familiar, but some of the figures bear rehearsing once again. According to the World Bank, in 2002 there were 1,200,000,000 people who lived below its official poverty line, which is set at an income of \$1 per day (World Bank, 2002a: 2). Many millions more live on incomes only a little higher. Roughly the same number of people has no access to safe drinking water and 2.4 billion lack adequate sanitation facilities (Schumacher, 2005). More than one billion have no access to electricity (World Energy Outlook, 2002). Worldwide in 2005, 771 million people, the majority of them women, were judged illiterate according to the most basic of definitions (UIS, 2005). 150,000,000 children under five years of age were malnourished in 2000 (World Bank, 2002b: 3). The litany of absolute deprivation goes on and on. The lives of these people are immeasurably remote from the experiences of the writer of this book, and from that of the vast majority of its readers, but common humanity must surely suggest to all of us that improving the lot of the world's poor is one of the most pressing collective tasks we face.

Poor and very poor people are to be found all over the world, even in the fabulously rich cities of Europe and North America, just as extremely rich people are to be found living in luxury surrounded by a sea of poverty in those countries where 23 per cent of the population exist below the World Bank's official poverty line. The vast majority of the poor, however, live in poor countries. Many live in Asia and make up a good proportion of the huge populations of India and China. Many more live in Africa and further millions are to be found in Latin America. There are even many who are very poor, in relative terms at least, living in the countries that have emerged from the collapse of Soviet communism.

The countries that are hosts to these oceans of human misery have been given various labels, many of which contain some derivative of the verb 'to develop': less-developed countries, under-developed countries,

and developing countries. The very categories proclaim that changing the circumstances that blight the lives of millions is an urgent and present task. Literally millions of people – politicians, scholars, bankers, activists and very ordinary people – have for over more than half a century tried to find ways to end the conditions that produce poverty. These efforts have not been entirely fruitless. There has been change and progress, but it has been bitterly slow. The total number of people living on an income below \$1 per day fell from 1.3 billion to 1.2 billion in the course of the 1990s. In some parts of the world, notably China, the fall in the numbers of the extremely poor was quite sharp, although the gap between rich and poor widened drastically and the destruction of existing social infrastructure has meant that while incomes rose marginally living standards remained static or even declined (Hart-Landsberg and Burkett, 2005: 67). Elsewhere, notably in the former communist countries of central Asia, poverty increased inexorably (World Bank, 2002a: 2).

Some of the people who have been concerned about development issues have been interested in the media. They have tried to find ways in which communication, and particularly the mass media of newspapers, radio and television, can be used to help countries 'develop' and thus to reduce the amount of poverty. Most recently, there has been enormous interest in the potential of the internet to aid in development. Many of those who have tried to use the media for development have been activists – journalists and broadcasters, development workers and politicians – but some have had a more theoretical role. There have been thousands of books and articles dedicated to trying to understand what role the media might play in development, and to finding ways in which it might play such a role more effectively. Unlike many areas of communication theory, these investigations have often been closely tied to practice: scholars have theorized about the best ways to use the media to help development, and activists have tried to implement their findings.

This book is concerned first with ideas about development and the media. It seeks to understand the theories that have more or less directly guided thousands of practical development projects, and it draws on the distilled experience of those projects – some of the most grandiose were even formally called 'experiments' – as one of the ways of judging the value of the theories themselves. These close links between the ideas discussed in the academy and their immediate practical utility are a relatively rare, and for this writer very attractive, feature of much of the writing about the role of the media in development. Here, however, the focus is on the theories that guided action rather than on the details of the practical implementation of development projects.

Not everyone who has written in this field has had a close concern with practical projects, and even many who did have such concerns based them explicitly on general theoretical propositions. More recently, and

particularly in the last decade, writers about the international role of communication have tended to be influenced by theories of globalization, and have more or less consciously believed that the solution to poverty lay not in human agency but in the impersonal working of the market. For many of them, the only valid kind of practical project is that which leads to the opening of markets and the freeing of trade. Just as the World Bank, the IMF and the governments of the developed world came to agree on the 'Washington Consensus' that attempts at protection and the defence of local industries are obstacles to development, so there are those in the field of communication who hold similar views of the mass media. This book is also concerned with those theories, since they have, in the academy at least, replaced earlier interests in communication and development, although, as we shall see, ideas that are regarded as hopelessly outmoded in the best universities can retain a vigorous life outside their walls.

### **The historical dimension**

The intellectual history of this field is conventionally divided into three, and sometimes four, distinct phases (Boyd-Barrett, 1997: 16–21; Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1991). The first concerns were with the effect of international propaganda, particularly in the context of the great wars of the twentieth century. Immediately after the Second World War, some of the people who had worked on propaganda issues began to think about the media and development. They believed that the mass media had a crucial role to play in fostering modern attitudes and beliefs, which were thought to be the primary conditions for any significant social changes. This was the period during which what came to be called the 'dominant paradigm' of development communication was elaborated. It was followed by a much more critical phase, in which two distinct emphases are discernable in the literature. On the one hand, attention was focused upon the structures of international communication, which were held to be at least partly responsible for the continued subordination of developing countries to the interests of the metropolitan powers. Media and cultural imperialism were the central theoretical concerns of what we may term the 'imperialism paradigm'. The other line of thought saw the key weakness of the dominant paradigm as residing in its top-down approach. It started from a belief that the experts know what is best for everyone else, and designed communication programmes to transmit the fruits of that expertise to the people who were to 'be developed'. The alternative was to find ways of allowing the objects of development to become its subjects, and to use the media to give them a voice of their own. This stress upon the needs of the communities in question in discussion of development we may term the 'participatory paradigm'.

In contrast to both of these approaches, more recent writing has stressed the extent of the global flow of media content, and seen in the variety



of interpretations open to audiences evidence that the mass media could not possibly have the kinds of direct influence ascribed to them by earlier schools of thought. On the contrary, the products of the world's media industries often had a liberating effect, breaking down the habits and routines of obsolete social orders and promoting change and development. This domestication of the interests of grand social theory to the concerns of the media we should obviously term the 'globalization paradigm'. To this more or less conventional account, I will only add that most recently there have been some small signs of the emergence of a generation of writers who are advancing what may become another new paradigm, although this is as yet so underdeveloped that it is difficult to give it the same kind of snappy title as its predecessors (Hafez, 2007).

The general outline of this intellectual history is widely agreed by commentators on the field, and this book will not offer any radical departures from its main contours. We should note, however, that the different phases of this debate do not fit perfectly together. The concern with development communication, in all its variants, has a stress upon the local. The imperialism paradigm and the globalization paradigm, on the other hand, are concerned with very large scale issues. In practice, it is true, some of the later versions of development communication were quite closely associated with the imperialism paradigm, and more recently attempts have been made to associate them with globalization. As we shall see, these linkages have never been theorized, and indeed they rest on radically different foundations. The aim of making such a linkage was nevertheless entirely justified. The kinds of social change that are at stake in this book are ones that necessarily raise broader issues of power and property, and one of the aims here is to sketch how these two levels of analysis might be brought together more satisfactorily.

As a consequence, this book follows the established historical succession rather closely, but I would like at the outset to offer a disclaimer: this book does not pretend to be a formal history of the field. The study of intellectual history is as fascinating as any other kind of historical enquiry, but it imposes disciplines of completeness that are not appropriate to this project and it implies a greater dependence upon the written record than will be found here, where the focus is more on interpretation. There are large parts of what everyone would recognize as the 'history' of this field that are treated rather cursorily because they are not pertinent to the main focus of the book. A case in point is the detail of the progress of the New World Information and Communication Order through the various arms of UNESCO, which was one of the major sites of conflict about international communication for a decade in the 1970s and 1980s. As it happens, the succession of conferences, resolutions, amendments, victories and defeats, are well covered elsewhere, for example by Nordenstreng (1984, 1993), and I have very little to add to such scholarly endeavours. Many of the issues that were raised in that

conflict, however, remain unresolved and the aim here is to address at least some of those rather than re-analyse the record. Of course, it is neither possible nor desirable to ignore the succession of events, since the relationship between theory and practice was, in this instance, both extremely close and very problematic, but the focus is on the guiding ideas rather than on the details of resolutions and votes.

Issues of redundancy and competence apart, the main reason there is no attempt here to produce a genuine history of the field because the aim is to present many of these ideas as contemporary concerns that continue to inform practice. Just as development, at least in the non-theoretical sense of people struggling to lift themselves out of poverty, remains the central existential concern for millions of people, so important parts of the legacy of thinking about the developmental role of the mass media remain in active use as practical guides around the world.

It is entirely true that very few people in the best academies in the USA or Europe are today much interested in development communication, in theoretical critiques of the dominant paradigm, or the implications of the distinction between media and cultural imperialism. At best, it is the province of specialists closely linked with practical concerns (Gumicio-Dagron and Tufte, 2006). This is partly for a very good reason: academics are trained to keep up to date, and to concentrate their energies on emerging issues and concerns. Intellectual historians apart, few people are concerned with material published forty or fifty years ago. There are, however, also some very bad reasons for the neglect of these ideas. One is the belief, which is emphatically not shared here, that change in the social sciences equates with progress in our understanding of the world. On this account, 'more recent' equals 'better'. Whatever may be the case in the physical sciences, social science is so bound up with interpretation that we cannot assume that date determines value. Max Weber, who figures largely in much of what follows, as he must in any account of communication theory, died eighty years ago, but he still remains an enormously interesting and stimulating author whose ideas were, in the 1990s, applied with great effect to very contemporary phenomena (Ritzer, 1993). The view taken here is that it is worth reading some of the texts of earlier phases of communication theory for the same reason: because we might learn something from them that will help us understand our present situation.

The second bad reason for not reading dated texts is that academics seldom look outside the world of scholarship. It is assumed that if an idea is disregarded in the best academies, then that is the end of the matter, and nobody anywhere could possibly be so foolish as to find it valuable or useful. This is a completely mistaken approach, at least for the issue of development and communication. Studies have shown that the founding texts of the dominant paradigm, despite a surprisingly long academic afterlife, have

more or less vanished from the contemporary scene, at least as far as explicit citations in the scholarly literature are concerned (Fair, 1989; Fair and Shah, 1997). We shall see, however, that there are numerous contemporary large-scale social programmes that operate within the intellectual framework of the dominant paradigm, and even one or two academic studies that sneak it in, perhaps unconsciously. If one asks what currency many of the ideas discarded by academics decades ago still have, then in this case at least, the answer is: a great deal, amongst politicians, activists and development organizations.

## Scholar militants

One of the reasons for the long life of the ideas under discussion is that, for the first two phases of thinking, the people who developed and advanced them were self-consciously concerned with implementing their ideas in social action. While the founders of the dominant paradigm taught in elite US universities (MIT, Stanford, Illinois), they did not consider themselves as privileged inhabitants of ivory towers cut off from the mundane activities of the world. They had a conception of the role of the academic that placed them in the centre of the great social conflicts of their age. The phrase they had to describe themselves was 'policy scientists', whom they defined as 'the man of knowledge as adviser, applying his special skills to current problems of public policy' (Merton and Lerner, 1951: 284). Programmatically, impartial scientific enquiry was one dimension of the work of policy intellectuals, but they willingly involved themselves in providing solutions to problems identified by their government, while remaining aware of, and avoiding the dangers of becoming, what they termed bureaucratic intellectuals for a garrison state.

In practice, however, the leading figures amongst them aligned themselves very closely indeed with the garrison state. If the policy scientist was 'concerned with bringing the findings of systematic research to bear upon current issues and process of policy' it was clear that 'one persistent issue of democratic policy in the last three decades has been: how to cope successfully with aggressive totalitarianism' (Lerner et al., 1951: 91). Any study of the published record shows a group of very prominent social scientists – Klapper, Lasswell, Lerner, Merton, Pye, Schramm, de Sola Pool – working together in different combinations on projects for various US government agencies. The historian of their efforts writes of 'the continuing, inbred relationship among a handful of leading mass communication scholars and the US military and intelligence community' (Simpson, 1994: 89). Simpson perhaps overstates the case that these scholars were attempting to develop a 'science of control', but a glance at two of the leading figures shows that the links he identifies were certainly significant in their careers. According to Daniel Lerner, 'The policy sciences

of democracy face no more important task than to produce an accurate diagnosis of the Communization process as a guide to effective – in this case, usually preventive – therapy' (Lerner, 1967a: 467–8). He himself traced a path from the Psychological Warfare Division of the US Army, through the Hoover Institute, where he directed the programme on 'Revolution and the Development of International Relations' (Ithiel de Sola Pool was his assistant), to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Samarjiwa has persuasively argued that during that trajectory he established a relationship with the US Department of State that fundamentally influenced the intellectual framework of his major book, *The Passing of Traditional Society* (Samarjiwa, 1987: 7–10). The work at MIT, at least according to Mowlana, was funded by the Ford Foundation, allegedly acting as a conduit for the CIA and the US Air Force, and constituted an attempt to develop a systematic basis for government policy (Mowlana, 1996: 6ff). Wilbur Schramm was similarly engaged. He co-authored a US Air Force funded study about the North Korean takeover of Seoul (Riley and Schramm, 1951). The intellectual concern with anti-communism was a continuing one for Schramm. His influential volume on *The Processes and Effects of Mass Communication* (1961) displays a strong interest in propaganda and anti-communism: one of its chapters is a reprint from a USIA handbook (Bigman, 1952/61). Later in his career, Schramm founded the East–West Communications Institute, on the initiative of then Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, with funding from the US government (Keever, 1991: 7–8).

The later and very harsh critics of writers like Lerner and Schramm, coming from the imperialism paradigm, were at least as keen to involve themselves in political action, perhaps believing that philosophers had only interpreted the world differently but that the point was to change it. Among the key figures, Schiller, Smythe and Nordenstreng all identified themselves with leftist politics, although only Smythe acknowledged having joined a leftist party (Lent, 1995). Nordenstreng was for several years the President of the Prague-based International Organisation of Journalists, and as such played a very prominent role in UNESCO and other highly politicized fora in which media and cultural imperialism were hotly debated. Others, notably Colleen Roach, worked directly or indirectly for UNESCO itself, during the period when it was the key site of battles over a New World Information and Communication Order. As we shall see, the positions they took in these conflicts involved some very serious compromises, both in theory and in practice. The proponents of the participatory paradigm similarly contain many activists within their ranks, notably in non-governmental organizations oriented on development and communication, such as the World Association for Christian Communication.

It is only when we reach the period in which the globalization paradigm dominates academic discussion that we find a markedly lower level of involvement in direct social and political action. As we will see below,

this detachment arises not from some scrupulous desire to retain scholarly independence but from a new assessment of the relationship between theories of communication and social change. The new paradigm more or less forecloses the possibility of the systematic use of the media for definite and intended social change, and thus there remain no grounds for the media theorist to contribute to practical projects.

## **The context of debate**

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These paradigm shifts did not take place in an historical vacuum. No ideas ever do evolve without reference to the times in which they are developed, and this general rule is doubly true in the case of ideas that attempt to make the sort of close link between theory and social action that characterizes those under discussion here. It is in fact very difficult to understand the emphases and implications of the different paradigms without at least some awareness of the historical conditions under which they were developed.

We can conveniently date the key moments in the evolution of these ideas to three pivotal dates: 1947 and the birth of the Cold War; 1968 and a global wave of radicalism; 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Empire. We might, just possibly, add a fourth sometime around the start of the new millennium, although dating its precise origins remains problematic. In all of these cases, the fit will never be exact, but each of the periods inaugurated by those dates had characteristics that shaped the thinking of intellectuals who were engaged in work on the media. In order to better understand the detailed discussions in later chapters, we must here briefly review some of the key aspects of each of those periods.

The USA emerged from the Second World War overwhelmingly the world's strongest power. It dominated the world economically, politically and militarily. Fighting had wrecked many of its industrial competitors, while the USA had escaped direct damage and seen its economy shake off the Depression and grow explosively. Even after five years of peace and reconstruction, the total 1950 GNP of the USA was larger than that of the USSR, the UK, France, West Germany, Japan and Italy all added together (Kennedy, 1989: 475). The new political institutions of the peace, notably the United Nations but also the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, were headquartered in the USA, which was by far their largest paymaster. US navies dominated the seas from the Mediterranean to the Formosa Strait, and US bombers alone carried the devastating new atomic weapons.

Like Britain a century earlier, the US translated this enormous economic superiority into a belief in international free trade. But France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal and, particularly, the UK all had vast colonial empires that were anything but open to free trade. Despite being the victors in a 'war for democracy', the imperial powers showed no sign of being prepared to

extend that system of government to their overseas subjects. Indeed, they had been prepared to use the soldiers of the defeated Japanese empire to help them restore their rule in Asia. The US had long devoted considerable efforts to trying to dismantle the barriers that surrounded these empires. During the Second World War, 'nearly all important leaders in Washington assumed and hoped that the United States would revive and reform capitalism everywhere in the world, but pre-eminently in the British Empire' (Kolko, 1990: 623). Within the field of communication, the US news agencies UPI and AP had long been in conflict with the British Reuters and the French Havas. They had even entered an alliance with the Soviet Union's TASS in order to break the hold of the imperial cartel (Rantanen, 1992, 1994).

The old colonial empires were now politically and economically enfeebled, but they were still prepared to fight to hold on to their possessions. True, never in their wildest dreams would they think of fighting the USA, but they were certainly prepared to fight their colonial subjects, and they did so, frequently and bloodily. It would have been logical for the USA, itself a nation borne out of armed revolt against an imperial master, to side with those who sought to establish their independence.

The reason why the USA was never prepared to do that openly and unequivocally, indeed why it very often found itself giving aid and comfort to the colonialists, and why in the most notorious case of Vietnam ended up taking over the role of occupier from one of them, was because it now faced a new and, its leaders believed, far more dangerous enemy than the tottering European empires. The real threat, Presidents from Truman onward believed, was the awful spectre of International Communism. The USSR was much weaker than the USA economically and politically, but everybody, friend and foe alike, believed it had a stronger economic model and was catching up with the west very rapidly. Ideologically, it was a very powerful pole of attraction indeed.

'Marxism-Leninism' as propagated by Moscow and its allies offered an ideology that stressed the struggle for national independence and which called for unity against the foreign exploiters and their allies. The 'socialist stage' would come later, long after the achievement of statehood (Harris, 1971: 130-203). These ideas found thousands, perhaps millions, of willing adherents around the world, particularly amongst those fighting colonialism and its legacies. In the struggle between the USA and the USSR, the latter's weakness in arms was compensated by its strength in ideas. As one US communication scholar noted, the local supporters of its ideas gave the USSR an additional channel of communication and 'this extra channel gives the Soviet Union an immense advantage' (Smith, 1952/1961: 173).

The USA thus faced a problem. The people with whom it might wish to ally in forcing open the markets of the old colonial empires were very often in thrall to the ideas, and sometimes the policies, of the new communist enemy. As the post-war world unfolded, in country after country, the USA



found itself forced to abandon any democratizing ideas it had cherished during the struggle against fascism. Japan is an excellent example. Faced with mass support for 'overenthusiastic democratization', the US occupation forces reversed their policies and repaired relations with the Emperor and the old order. As a recent US historian of the occupation wrote: 'Initially, the Americans imposed a root-and-branch agenda of "demilitarisation and democratisation" that was in every sense a remarkable display of arrogant idealism – both self-righteous and genuinely visionary. Then, well before their departure, they reversed course and began rearming their erstwhile enemy as a subordinate Cold War partner in cooperation with the less liberal elements in society' (Dower, 1999: 23). Particularly after the victory of the Chinese communists, the US decided that anti-communism was more important than anti-colonialism and that it would at least tolerate the continuation of the old empires.

In the struggle against the reds, military power and economic leverage were important weapons, but the US needed an ideology as a counter to Marxism–Leninism as well. At home, the values of 'Americanism' could be redefined so that anyone with even moderately leftist views could be persecuted (Caute, 1978). Internationally, however, something else was needed. Communism offered a path out of dependence and poverty, and if the US was to counter that threat it needed an alternative that promised at least as much chance of success. As one proponent of development communication later wrote: 'If a nation was able to build a foundation of economic sufficiency ... the perils of a Communist revolution would be greatly reduced' (Chu, 1994: 35). 'Development' as a corpus of theories about communication and society arose directly out of these Cold War imperatives (Leys, 1996: 5–6). Within that general concern to provide a 'non-communist manifesto', as Rostow subtitled his famous book on economic growth, the dominant paradigm of development communication occupied a central place.

The critics of the dominant paradigm worked in the very different climate of 1968 and its aftermath. What one radical historian called the 'year that cast its spell on a generation' inaugurated a period when all of the contradictions of the post-war settlement came to a head (Harman, 1988: vii). The crisis of 1968 shook the developed West, the Stalinist East, the poorer countries of what was then called the Third World, and everywhere it had a profoundly radicalizing effect. A new generation of intellectuals developed, whose assumptions about the world did not automatically slot into the ready-made definitions provided by Washington and Moscow. True, the struggle between the 'Free World' and 'International Communism' remained the main feature of world politics, but in many ways its contours were changed. For one thing, the US was now clearly seen as the inheritor of the role of the former colonial powers. It might not have the same territorial ambitions as its predecessors, but it seemed, if anything, even

more unwilling to allow the people of developing countries make their own choices about the future. What was more, as the US stumbled to defeat in Vietnam in the aftermath of the Tet offensive of 1968, it looked very much as though this new informal empire, too, was on the wane. Student unrest in the US, a general strike in France, several years of intense class struggle in other major European countries like Italy and the UK, all combined to make it look as though private capitalism had reached the end of its useful life.

But if the end of capitalism seemed nigh, it did not follow that all of its opponents looked any longer to Moscow for inspiration. The Soviet empire, too, faced an internal challenge, and it was the most serious since the Hungarian revolution of 1956. In Czechoslovakia, a group of reform communists won the leadership of the party in March 1968 and began to introduce some cautious market reforms, and to allow a small degree of political liberalization. The leadership of the USSR saw this as unacceptably threatening and invaded the country in August, in the name of 'proletarian internationalism'. They imposed their own leadership on the party and jailed, exiled or demoted the reformers. Popular opposition to their invasion was crushed. Although less bloody than the defeat of the Hungarian rising, with perhaps 100 opponents of the invasion killed in protests as opposed to the 20,000 or so in 1956, the outright conservatism of the Russian leadership was just as obvious (Harman, 1983: 187–211). The belief that communism could somehow be given a 'human face' and that it might somehow evolve into democratic socialism received a massive setback.

Resistance and repression echoed around the world. To name but a few, in Mexico, in Derry in Northern Ireland, in Bolivia, a few years later in Chile, and in the black ghettos of the USA itself, there were outbreaks of popular opposition to the existing order. Everywhere, the established orthodoxies, political and intellectual, that sustained the ruling elites were subject to critical attack.

New thinking was clearly called for, in the field of development as much as anywhere else. The old recipes appeared to have failed. They had not brought much in the way of development, and what there was had ended up solidifying the power of the elites rather than helping the poor out of poverty. It was clear that the problem of development could not be explained entirely by the backwardness of the population. It seemed to be rooted either in the social structure of developing countries, or in the relationship between developing countries and the metropolitan centres, or perhaps in some combination of the two factors.

There were two main lines of thought in response to these reflections. The first concentrated on the fact that the domination of the rich countries over the poorer ones, of the developed over the underdeveloped, was obviously much more complex than the brutal simplicities of colonial dominance. The Portuguese empire collapsed in 1974 and the struggle for decolonization was by then in the main victoriously completed. Nevertheless, the rich



countries continued to dominate the economic and political life of the poorer ones. New mechanisms of domination, it was argued, had replaced the colonial governor and his military garrison. It was these external structures of dominance, articulated in the 'dependency thesis', that prevented the poorer countries from developing in the same way as the now-rich countries had done earlier. According to proponents of this view, 'development in the centre determined and maintained underdevelopment in the periphery' (Servaes and Malikhaio, 1994: 9). It followed from this that the struggle for national independence implied an economic as well as political dimension. Just as it had been essential to kick out the viceroy and his soldiers and build an independent state, so it was necessary to separate the economy as far as possible from the tentacles of international capitalism, to protect the national industries and to try to build up a powerful economy out of one's own resources.

It was a simple further step from this stress upon breaking the economic ties that bound countries into a cycle of underdevelopment to arguing that it was necessary to break the cultural and media ties that had the same functions. The social and economic imbalance 'found itself reinforced by a no less important disequilibrium at the level of communication' (Masmoudi, 1986: 51). To proponents of this view, the model of the USSR, and even more of China, seemed attractive. In contrast with the stagnation and international impotence of the capitalist underdeveloped states, first the USSR and then China had managed to transform the structures of their societies. Starting from the most benighted backwardness, they had been able to construct modern industry and modern weapons, and thus build themselves into world powers. The USA, by contrast, had demonstrated that its differences with the old colonial powers were only secondary, and it appeared now as the main centre of economic, political and military domination (Tran van Dinh, 1987). It was out of that analysis of the nature of the world that the imperialism paradigm in media studies emerged.

It was, however, possible to make a different reading of the lessons of 1968, and to chart a different route for thinking about the role of the media in social change. Wherever one looked at that time, the old order was being challenged, whether it waved the Stars and Stripes or the Red Flag. The politicians and generals in Washington and Moscow alike found their plans opposed from below. US conscripts, French strikers, and Czech students all had in common the fact that they took initiatives of their own accord, developed their own ideas of what they wanted, and acted independently and decisively to realize them. They were not uniformly successful in achieving their aims, but they did suggest a powerful alternative to the elite-directed, planned and regimented theories of social change that inspired both the orthodox Communist Parties and the US proponents of development. It was one of the ironies of development theory in general, and of the dominant paradigm of development communication in particular,