



*Communication
and
Human Values*

Beyond Cultural Imperialism

Globalization, communication
& the new international order

Edited by Peter Golding
and Phil Harris



BEYOND CULTURAL IMPERIALISM

Globalization, Communication
and the New International Order

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Peter Golding
and
Phil Harris



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COMMUNICATION AND HUMAN VALUES



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*To the memory of Barry Troyna,
good friend and comrade
from barricades to terraces.*

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Foreword

This book has its origins in conversations between the editors about the way world communications research was changing in the 1990s. Although this may have seemed on the surface to revolve around such issues as the declining state of English pub culture, the inability of Scottish football to travel, and the relative merits of takeaway pizzas in Rome and Leicester, underlying these conversations was a deep unease about the analysis of global cultural change.

The editors were fortunate in having some discipline imposed on their thoughts by the active intervention of one or two key thinkers in this area working at the admirably open-minded and energetic base of the World Association for Christian Communication. Neville Jayaweera, who was then working at WACC, started out as a partner in this enterprise; however, his subsequent duties in Scandinavia, on diplomatic call for Sri Lanka, absorbed his time and efforts. Michael Traber, recently retired from WACC, has been a friend and support throughout the development of this project, and the book would have been impossible without his quiet, but effective, encouragement. To other staff at WACC, especially Philip Lee, and Pradip Thomas, we also owe a great debt. More formally, we gladly acknowledge to WACC our gratitude for the grant which enabled much of the editorial work for this project to take place across a growing diversity of locations. Bob White, of the Gregorian University in Rome, has been supportive throughout, alongside Mike Traber as co-editor of the series to which this book contributes.

Editing a book with contributors scattered across four continents, and with its editors never in the same country for more than a few days at a time, poses problems of international communication which make the concerns of this volume only too tangible. We are grateful to our contributors for their patience and forbearance, when many might have assumed their efforts would never see the light of day. We are especially grateful to Wendy Monk at Loughborough, for her invaluable editorial assistance, carried out with characteristic efficiency and good humour, at a stage when editorial energy was flagging. International communications are of the essence in a project such as this, but as ever the support that really matters is

that closest to hand. We both want to thank our families for their now expected patience and tolerance of long, expensive phone calls, and occasional disappearance into editorial purdah for days on end.

Our saddest duty is to record our desire to dedicate this book to the memory of our good friend, Barry Troyna. Barry was, throughout his life, a tireless fighter against racism wherever it was to be found, and someone who keenly understood the international forces which lie behind the indignities and cruelties of racial conflict and oppression. However global culture and communications change, the key issues remain the same.

Peter Golding
Phil Harris
June 1996

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Introduction

Peter Golding and Phil Harris

Wandering round an upmarket shopping centre in swelteringly sunny Penang, days before Christmas, it was a trifle disconcerting to riffle through the Christmas tree baubles and admire the artificial snow décor on the mock Tudor shop windows. In a fearsomely expensive Tokyo hotel the restaurants compete to offer the most elegant of chic European cuisine. Mooching round the acrid and sticky dust trails behind a Lagos street market it was impossible to miss kicking endless lines of lager cans. At the back of the awesome baroque structures of the former royal palace, high above the Danube in Budapest, stands one of the largest, reddest Coca-Cola machines you could ever wish to see. 'You can see who won, can't you?', our guide queried ruefully.

In frantic response the Vietnamese government was not the first in launching a campaign against 'cultural poisons', as retailers were forced to hide British breakfast cereals and French wines under blankets while police tore down advertising billboards displaying foreign goods. Even more desperate measures in the digital age are required, as the Chinese government announced in 1996 rules intended to increase its control over cyberspace by forcing computer networks to use approved links and forbidding the spread of information that would 'hinder public order'.

Something, it is clear, is happening to the diversity and reach of world cultures. For the archetypal travelling academic or journalist, doing their best to ape the smart familiarity and high-tech purposefulness of the jet-set executive, one airport lounge can seem confusingly much like another, one English-dominated international seminar indistinguishable from a dozen more. This troubling semblance of the superficial trappings of a global culture has lurked behind much discussion of international media culture for many years. Cultural oppression or global village? Threat or promise?

What can one more book add to this substantial literature? News editors have a distinct advantage over book editors. They don't have to worry that history is rapidly going to overtake their product and

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render it obsolete. Disposable and ephemeral as their work is, they need only be concerned about the opposition scooping an item by a few hours, or the apparent advantages of broadcast media exploiting the immediacy of telecommunications over the less instant technologies of print. The book editor takes an altogether more leisurely and lofty view of time's tread. Yet so often this can become a trap.

These cautionary thoughts have been prominent in our minds in the preparation and production of this collection. When first mooted many years ago, the collapse of the Soviet empire, the redundancy of Cold War practice and rhetoric, the formal disappearance of apartheid, the rapid dwindling of US hegemony, and the resurgence of nationalisms, ethnic, local and regional, were either wholly invisible or only just beginning to surface. The pace and significance of the change in the international order in the dying years of the millennium have caught us all unawares.

Yet it was nagging doubts about our capacity to understand and analyse even such changes as we had recognized, that prompted the book in the first place. Our focus on communications and media issues led us to the surprising observation that this most international and interdisciplinary of fields of study had become curiously insular in its approach. While exciting and vital debates about the nature of the changes in international politics and social dynamics were attracting the attention of other intellectual and political fields, communication scholars were increasingly, and unproductively, becoming self-enclosed in their own ever more introspective dialogues.

Of course the sense of change can be much exaggerated. Social scientists of all persuasions enjoy the sense of living on the cusp of social reconstruction. As futurologists wrestle with the implications of new information technologies it is easy to get caught up in a seductive rhetoric which sees us as just about to turn the corner into a new, post-modern, or information age. Most of the world's population would be somewhat intrigued and bewildered by the visions conjured in seminars and think-tanks from Berkeley to Paris, while enduring privations resulting from the eternal verities of global inequality and exploitation.

It is worth pausing to remind ourselves how deeply rooted such simple structural features remain. The 1980s were indeed the 'lost decade' for much of the poorer two-thirds of the world. At the start of the decade roughly 60 per cent of the world's population lived in countries whose per capita income was less than 10 per cent of the world average. As the 1990s arrived some were emerging from the morass of destitution. But this was a small minority, mainly in the East Asian bloc of 'newly industrializing countries'. While aid

was hastily diverted to the struggling economies of Eastern Europe (prompted by commercial opportunism and American alarm at the political instability generated by collapsing economies and a power vacuum), the poorer countries, of Asia and Africa especially, listened to uncomfortable advice about 'structural adjustment' while watching over soaring debt and falling primary commodity prices.

The combination of growing northern protectionism, declining aid, higher real interest rates, and growing debt has further consolidated the endemic crisis of Third World economies. By the year 2000, as the rest of us gaze in wonder at millennium celebrations and ponder the luxuries of the digital future, about a billion people will be living in absolute poverty. The statistics of these diverging experiences are always staggering, and rarely illuminating, but as Paquet-Sévigny has reminded us, their scale is mammoth. 'Some 70 per cent of world income is produced and consumed by 15 per cent of the world's population. In the 41 least developed countries, average per capita income is well under \$300, in sharp contrast to the \$14,500 average of developed market economies ... Each year in the developing world, 14 million people die before their fifth birthday' (quoted in Ihonvbere, 1992: 990). Massively mounting debt engendered a new form of economic bondage, exacerbated by declining incoming private capital flows.

The advice from the North has been stern. As an OECD report puts it, the problem is 'fundamental institutional and human resource weaknesses'. It wags its finger disapprovingly and offers firm guidance: 'It is clear that a critical factor in enabling developing countries to participate dynamically in world trade, and thus to adjust to the fundamental long-term forces now in play, is a flexible robust, business sector. The individual business unit is the key institution for intermediating between national capacities and the world economy.' The need is for 'market and efficiency-oriented growth policies and their effective implementation by strong and competent governments' (OECD, 1990: 58). It does not take much imagination to translate these epithets. As the report goes on 'constructive labour relations are an important aspect of private sector development', and there is a 'need to rationalise the parastatal sector' (*ibid.*: 80-1). The reward for the obedient, of course, will be, in that wonderful euphemism, structural adjustment loans.

What emerges then is a pattern that goes full circle. Moving forward from Bretton Woods in 1944, through the rise of the Non-Aligned Movement at Bandung in 1955, or more completely in 1961, and the arrival of the Third World on the international agenda of economic decision-making at UNCTAD in 1964, brings us to the brave new world of the 1990s with the Western economies

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on the edge of recession, and the Third World riddled with dual economies, massive debts, and over a billion people living in stark and absolute poverty. On the demand side we find a rising appetite for imports fuelled by a pattern of demand nurtured by cosmopolitan elites, and consequently a growing dependence on the North for research and development, technology, and education.

Communication scholars have never ignored the global dimension to their subject. The myopia and insularity to which we allude is not that of parochialism, but of intellectual provincialism. The interest of communications research in international dynamics has gone through three phases. The first involved a happy optimism, in which the media would be 'magic multipliers', bringing development advice instantly, effectively and extensively to the information-hungry multitudes. Pioneers like Wilbur Schramm evolved elaborate and inventive conceptual frameworks and research programmes whose practical application was energetic and well meant, if the political programme underlying them was only too evident (Golding, 1974, 1977). A second, and more critical phase construed the spread of Western imagery and culture as a new form of imperialism, cultural imperialism, which was more insidious and more effective in cementing the dependency of the post-colonial periphery than the fiscal crudities of earlier decades. Finally the concept of globalization appeared, 'the concept of the 1990s' (Waters, 1995:1). An all-embracing capture of the distinctive features of late modernity, cultural flows and information technology were prominent and defining facets of this characterization of the modern world.

This certainly took us beyond the all too narrow debates increasingly common within communication and media scholarship. Those debates have found themselves truncated in two ways. First, they have too frequently been confined within an *administrative* frame of reference, generating ritual recitals of the meetings, declarations and conferences which are the wayside landmarks of the post-war trek towards cultural sovereignty. The emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement to provide a political accompaniment to pressure for a New International Economic Order led inexorably to the cardinal involvement of UNESCO as a forum for what became the insistent demand for a New World Information and Communication Order. Culminating in the establishment of the MacBride Commission and, later, the International Programme for the Development of Communications, the oft told story of the political campaign which took the USA and UK out of UNESCO is critically reviewed in the chapters that follow, especially those by Hamelink and by Roach. But the literature which swelled alongside these debates was so often a litany of gatherings and manifestos, from Nairobi to Algiers, to

Lima, to New Delhi, to Colombo. It became harder and harder to stand back from such academic tourist guides to see the economic and social dynamics underneath. The reduction of history to a documentary paper chase was quite inadequate to the complex social, political and economic dynamics in play.

Secondly, the frame of reference was excessively focused on the mass media. After all, the charter document from UNESCO was a *Mass Media Declaration* (1978), and the public debate from both sides was very often about the presumed attempt to foster control and licensing of journalists in Third World authoritarian regimes, while clinging to the tenets of liberal freedom of the press in the West. This seemed fundamentally inadequate to the questions of culture, identity, and globalization with which writers outside communication research were becoming increasingly exercised.

Crucial to the limited vision developed in these debates was the sense of a David and Goliath model inherent in the term 'cultural imperialism'. Centre dominated periphery, imperialists held dominion over dependencies, and all was increasingly held in place by the power of the media above all else. The term cultural imperialism began to limit rather than illuminate discussion. Garofalo (1993: 18) has usefully summarized the weaknesses of the concept under four heads. Firstly it overstates external determinants and undervalues the internal dynamics, not least those of resistance, within dependent societies. Secondly, it conflates economic power and cultural effects. Thirdly, there is an assumption that audiences are passive, and that local and oppositional creativity is of little significance. Finally, there is an often patronizing assumption that what is at risk is the 'authentic' and organic culture of the developing world under the onslaught of something synthetic and inauthentic coming from the West. Now we would only go so far with this impatient rewriting. Garofalo calls for an important riposte to the more deterministic models of cultural flow, and rightly draws attention to the undue simplicity of much that flowed from 'cultural imperialism' models. However, as in the parallel debates within 'Cultural Studies' in Western scholarship, the rediscovery of the resistant and creative, even subversive, power of audiences can too easily slip, even within self-consciously radical discourses, into a romantic celebration of the cultural insubordination of consumers. Welcome music to the indignant ears of MTV, Coca-Cola, McDonald's and the rest, but perhaps just a trifle optimistic in its rejection of even the more simplistic accounts of cultural oppression.

Nonetheless, it became clear that 'cultural imperialism' needed unpacking in both its component terms. The lingering Leninist tones of imperialism lent it too deliberate and calculated a meaning. For