BOOK REVIEW

**Media imperialism in India and Pakistan**, by Farooq Sulehria, New York, NY, Routledge, 2018, 258 pp., $134.36 (hardcover), ISBN-13: 9781138303294, ISBN-10: 1138303291

Media imperialism was popularly debated in communication studies in the ‘70s and ‘80s. In those days, the debate was predominantly focused on global information flows where news and entertainment content was considered to move one way, from developed to developing nations.

In Herbert Schiller’s view, for instance, this flow of information was part of a world system where multinationals from developed countries exported media programs and cultural values to less developed countries. Rejecting the ‘world system’ theory, scholars began to view this media flow as a positive trend in terms of a homogenized global culture to promote peace and humanity. Elihu Katz, for example, argued that globalizing the media would bring distant cultures closer and promote a world community.

The debates, however, remained largely theoretical and conceptual with little empirical validity on the number and nature of programs exported to developing nations and the profits gained by the developed world. The needed data was provided in 1974 when a major study by Nordestreng and Varis demonstrated that countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe imported 45% to 80% of TV programs from developed countries including the United States.

To remedy the situation, the New World Communication and Information Order was proposed which suggested a three-fold solution: development of media systems at the national level, free flow of information internationally, and a balanced flow among the countries. The whole debate, along with its solutions, was limited to technological imbalance, cultural domination, and one-way flow of information. As the influence of the capitalist system, spearheaded by the United States, increased politically and economically, this debate also became ‘outdated’ and thought to be irrelevant to the twenty-first century.

In his book – *Media Imperialism in India and Pakistan* – Farooq Sulehria has not only revisited this old debate between the developed and developing countries but had also reexamined theoretical and empirical notions of media imperialism relevant to the twenty-first century. The study was based on his doctoral research at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. Spread over 258 pages, the book is divided into six chapters on theoretical polemics, dynamics of media imperialism in India and Pakistan, media and journalism training in both countries, corruption, and the final analysis of the issues raised.

In challenging the old theory of the flow of information, the author argues that it is the exploitative domination and dependency, which should have been a focal point of the debate from the beginning, not a free flow of information. This dependency, to him, is fundamentally capitalistic, economic, and increasingly hegemonic. Subscribing to the dependency theory of Andre Gunder Frank, which describes a metropolitan-capitalist center managing this dependency of peripheral nations on the developed West, the book further broadens its impact on media imperialism. The author convincingly connected the global dependency dynamics to media corporations that work primarily to increase their profits.

Through a comparative study of two South Asian countries, the book demonstrates how media dependencies operate differently in India and Pakistan. While international media
conglomerates operate directly in India through joint ventures with domestic companies, their presence in Pakistan seems to be indirect. Murdoch’s media houses have become the second top media group in India based on collaborative ventures with ZEE, NDTV, Star News, and other companies. India, not only became a dependent periphery in this system, but it also plays the role of a subimperial center, capturing media markets in developing countries for films and TV programs.

In the case of Pakistan, this dependency is argued to be determined through proxy mechanisms using landing rights for international TV channels, satellite systems, distribution technologies, manufacturing of TV sets and production technologies, advertising, news agencies, managing TRPs, and other areas.

According to the author, a critical aspect of such dependencies that had been widely ignored in the media imperialism debate is the higher education curriculum and media training, which promoted these dependencies on media conglomerates unintentionally. The author devotes a full chapter, ‘Media Education and Training: Enabling Media Imperialism’ to capacity building projects. This chapter analyzes consulting projects on curriculum development, research, and teachers training in higher education in both countries.

In the book, the author persuasively argues that from the view of media dependency, globalization has been wrongly seen as a catalyst for modernization and development. On the contrary, the old state-owned TV and radio systems in both countries were more effective in promoting development and equality through programs on rural development, agriculture, and sociocultural emancipation. The author goes further to iterate the impact of the new commercial logic in promoting social inequalities, overlooking the rural and urban poor in TV programs, and further marginalizing the lower strata of the society by excluding them from news and entertainment contents.

Overall, the book has widened the debate on media imperialism by discussing the impact of media dependencies in a broader context through the commodification of audiences and tabloidization of media content. As a result of media liberalization, television audiences were reduced to a commodity relevant only to the rating system as well as consumers of programs and advertised products. Additionally, the author argues how the content of TV entertainment and news has been increasingly tabloidized by sex, crimes, gender inequalities, personal scandals, and corruption among media managers and workers. Television talk shows, as a result of cutthroat media competition, have been reduced to shouting wars between political rivals, side-tracking the real social and economic issues of the masses.

One limitation of the book is the limited discussion on the reasons why the global media had not penetrated the Pakistani market as visibly as the Indian market. Perhaps, a focal point missed in the book is the state-level resistance to preserve the cultural values of traditional society as a formidable barrier to international TV programs. Interestingly, state policies in Pakistan have been highly selective as Bollywood movies, and soap operas of Indian TV channels are allowed because of their popularity with Pakistani audiences.

The author has provided convincing data to support his arguments and engage readers in further discussion on the brilliantly identified issues. A more in-depth discussion on major arguments, such as the media dependency and media policies in India and Pakistan, would have helped comprehend the depth of the issues, especially in concluding sections of some chapters. For instance, Chapter 4 should be expanded to elaborate on the positive and negative impacts of international projects in higher education in both countries.

In all, this book offers a good foundation to investigate aspects of media imperialism in other areas such as public relations, radio broadcasting, online and social media technologies, and print media formats. Without a doubt, the book has added new dimensions to the age-old
media imperialism debate which were never thought to be relevant through a comparative study of two South Asian countries, India and Pakistan.

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