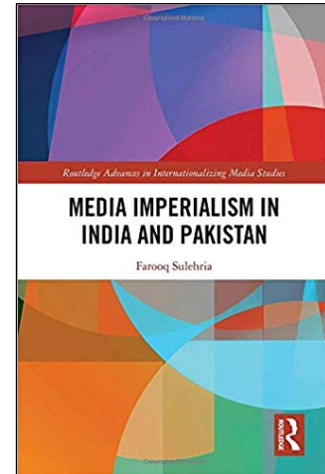


Farooq Sulehria, **Media Imperialism in India and Pakistan**, New York, NY: Routledge, 2018, 258 pp., \$134.36 (hardcover).

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Discourses of media imperialism that came to prominence from the 1960s into the 1980s fell from grace in the 1990s under a variety of attacks that were both conceptual (notions of globalization or cultural globalization largely displaced those of imperialism or cultural imperialism) and real world (as in the fall of the Soviet Union and a subsequent spate of “end of history” celebratory foolishness). But the term never disappeared and has continually resurfaced in response to continuing evidence of gross imbalances of power—and of media power—between nations, and the resurgence of a new era of neoliberal imperialism under such pretexts as “humanitarian intervention” and “war on terror.”



Author Farooq Sulehria, who at the time of publication was senior teaching fellow at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, breaks interesting new ground, first by concentrating on two countries that are underrepresented in the media imperialism literature, namely India and Pakistan, and secondly, by arguing that far from globalization having displaced media imperialism, it has intensified media dependency of these countries on the imperial centers.

The focus is primarily television. In **Media Imperialism in India and Pakistan**, Sulehria defines media imperialism both as capitalist exploitation of dependent media markets by the metropolitan West, and as the periphery’s explicit dependency on the imperial metropolitan countries. He allows for an element of cultural heterogeneity that has been introduced by globalization but considers it a Disneyized variety in a McDonaldized setting that comes about (following Ritzer) from the push for greater efficiency, predictability, calculability, and the replacement of human with nonhuman technology. Media imperialism in today’s era of an extraordinary proliferation of channels whose ownership is concentrated in fewer than one hundred firms—most of them headquartered in the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, and France—largely speaks the local language and is geostationary, hegemonic, and subtle.

The share of developing countries in the export of cultural goods, even when China is factored in, was not more than 10% in the first decade of the 21st century. Developing countries with appreciable media activity often align with transnational capital and play a subimperialistic role in the global dependency chain, and are chosen by transnational partners precisely because of their regional influence. This has important implications for discourses of glocalization and hybridity. Sulehria is skeptical of “active audience” critiques of media imperialism: in one example, he notes that since the arrival of the cinema in the colonial world, film sequences where a white hero kills a brown/black villain often draw wild cheers.

Instead of the media houses of India and Pakistan posing a challenge to global media monopolies, as many international communication scholars have long claimed, local media players prefer to become junior partners to transnational players. The media power of India still lags a long way behind that of Western countries, representing a small fraction of that of the United States. Except for the news segment, it is Western media that dominate general entertainment channels, sports, children's networks, business networks, movies, and music genres. The Pakistani media market is financially miniscule. Although global media have not invested in Pakistan, they have entered the market indirectly through the Indian TV system or by operating landing rights. They do not have a large share of the modest advertising pie, but they command the biggest audiences. Of the five major channels in Pakistan in terms of viewership, three are global players. Both Indian and Pakistani television systems have bought into the U.S. model of commercial television and offer clear examples of dependency in technology, production, telecast equipment, and satellite transmission. The biggest advertisers on TV in both countries are Western multinationals and the biggest advertising companies are Western advertising giants or joint ventures.

Sulehria's analysis may be illustrated with reference to his study of the larger of the two countries he examines, India. The entire media and entertainment market in India in 2017 was less than \$20 billion, contrasting very modestly with the revenues generated by just one single Western player (News Corporation) of \$33 billion. Although government regulation prohibited majority ownership by foreign corporations in the case of news, the three major Western news agencies (AFP, AP, and Reuters) dominated foreign news supply and Western players dominated general entertainment channels, sports, children's and business networks, movies, and music genres. They did not dominate regional channels. In children's television, not a single Indian entity appeared in the top 10 channels and only 20–25% of the content was locally generated. Sony and News Corporation dominated sports. Dependency was manifest through India's use of satellites, where Indian players lacked capacity and had become dependent on foreign satellites, jacking up prices. In direct-to-home television, Indian monopolies dominated. But set-top boxes and digitization-related equipment were largely imported. Viewer measurement was controlled by a joint Dutch–U.K. venture, backed by global advertising giant WPP. The top players controlling two thirds of market research activity were joint ventures or foreign. Global advertising giants had taken over the Indian advertising market. There was no totally Indian company in the top 20. Advertising revenue per channel had fallen as television channels proliferated. Major advertisers, especially in prime time, were inevitably the only ones who could afford the cost, and those who could afford it were increasingly multinationals. While television sets were manufactured in India, the leading manufacturers were not Indian.

The rise to dominance of corporate television, treating viewers as commodities, its tabloid content marginalizing—to the point of near exclusion—the working class and peasants, treating its own workers shabbily, had been devastating for state-controlled television, which regarded audience members as citizens, and for the functioning of television as a contributor to democratization.

The analysis extends to consideration of media education and training, and media corruption. In an extensive chapter, Sulehria shows how media imperialism is culturally reproduced, ideologically internalized, and practically rationalized through education and training that relies heavily on Western concepts such as professionalization (originally designed in the United States to neuter progressive journalism), Western funding, the transfer of Western institutional forms and organizational structures,

Western curricula and teaching materials, imitation of foreign best practices, Western-trained faculty, and Western visitors. Students in the periphery are socialized into knowledge systems that make them more compatible with liberal metropolitan practices.

Advocates of anticorruption measures, from political leaders of developing countries to Western media frequently employ the term "corruption" in a politicized and decontextualized manner that marginalizes equivalent or equally dubious practices in the west, focuses on bribe takers rather than bribe givers, conveniently distracts attention from the structural causes of corruption, overlooks practices conducive to corruption that were introduced by prior colonial administrations, ignores the role of gross inequalities of wealth and power, and forgets that development experts once declared that "corruption" could be a good thing for "development" when it stimulated economic growth. Additionally, however, the era of deregulated, privatized, and commercialized media has introduced or intensified its own corruption practices, including "envelope" journalism, proxy ownership of television channels, discriminatory allocation of government advertising, unfair selection of advertising agencies, and the impact of owners' nonmedia interests or cross-media ownership on their media properties.

In his conclusion, Sulehria considers globalization itself an ideology of imperialism that obscures the extent to which dependency has grown in direct proportion to the expansion of television. Not only has the manifestation of media imperialism intensified, but globalization has introduced new forms of dependency.