

WEST ASIAN AUDIENCES FOR SOUTH ASIAN SATELLITE TELEVISION: COSMOPOLITAN LOCALS AND NOSTALGIC EXPATRIATES

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Abstract

While early global/regional channels in Asia were seen as instruments of Western imperialism, they were soon followed by channels created by and targeted at sub-regional, national, or even subnational-ethnic markets. Much has been written about the impact of channels of global/regional origin on Asian audiences, but the phenomenon of audiences in one Asian subregion for television channels from another has seldom been addressed. Utilising a case-study of the pan-Asian broadcaster StarTV and the Indian-based broadcaster ZeeTV, the research investigates the viewership for these transnational channels in West Asia. It first chronicles the development of television policies in West Asia before examining the growth of South Asian television within its subregion and beyond. The limited data seems to indicate the viability of transnational satellite television targeting expatriate/migrant minorities together with cosmopolitan locals, rather than just nationally-bounded markets. These diverse audiences for satellite television in Asia also suggest that rather than being defined as West-over-East, the concept of media imperialism may be in need of theoretical reformulation in a postmodern era.

Introduction

From a media imperialism perspective, state-of-the-art communications technologies such as satellite television perpetuate the status quo of the capitalist world economy and impose a global culture of western origin. It is argued that although an increasing number of developing countries have launched satellites for domestic purposes, they continued to be dependent on technology and programming from developed countries. However, commercial broadcasters in developing countries are increasingly becoming major players on the regional and international stage, as

evident in Latin America for some decades and in Asia over the last decade. Yet there is little data gathered and virtually no discussion of the impact of television from one developing country on other developing countries has taken place. This paper seeks to examine the applicability of the concept of media imperialism in the context of transnational satellite television from India and its subregional audiences in South Asia and West Asia over the 1990s.

Background

In 1991 the pioneering satellite broadcaster in Asia, StarTV began broadcasting five television channels via the AsiaSat1 satellite and soon claimed audiences in over 50 countries Asia-wide under its footprint. Quite early, it had considerable impact in India since a sizeable portion of its 880 million population was capable of comprehending its predominant language of broadcast, English. All but one of StarTV's initial four English language channels were soon available on India's unregulated local cable networks. StarTV was subsequently bought by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation in the mid-1990s and began diversifying its programme offerings for national/ethnic markets. In 1992 a group of local and overseas Indian investors launched ZeeTV, a Hindi-language channel able to cater to both urban and rural areas of India, the latter relatively untouched by StarTV. It circumvented India's law banning commercial channels by uplinking from Hong Kong to AsiaSat1, the same satellite platform as StarTV then. In 1993 News Corporation purchased a 49.9 per cent stake in Asia Today, the parent company of ZeeTV, though by the end of the decade Asia Today had bought back News Corporation's stake. Since 1996 the former partners had been in 'collaborative competition' for market share, but the break-up prompted speculation of intensified competition between ZeeTV and StarTV. In 1998 the flagship channel Star Plus was relaunched as StarWorld targeted specifically at the Indian market and offering a number of programmes, in both Hindi and English and made within the country (AdWeek Asia, 1998). Over the 1990s a number of other commercial television channels such as SunTV, Asianet, Udaya, Eenadu and RajTV began broadcasting in minority Indian languages. Initially dependent on foreign satellites and uplinking facilities, as locally owned channels they have been granted uplinking access by the Indian government (Television Asia, 1998) to reach audiences across the South Asian sub-continent and beyond, particularly into neighbouring West Asia.

A tension was feared to arise between transnational television broadcasters in Asia and the countries under their footprints. While severe restrictions may not be acceptable to multinational corporations from developed countries, considerable deregulation may be unacceptable to developing countries. Satellite/cable television was thought to be the transnational medium par excellence, and global media corporations set to dominate the cultural landscape in Asia at the start of the 1990s.

Yet it became apparent even within the first five years that domestic and regional Asian channels, whether public or commercial, delivered by satellite, cable or even terrestrially, continued to attract far larger audiences in most countries in Asia than any global or 'western' ones. This has been quite true of West Asia as in other sub-regions where Indian television has attracted considerable audiences. Discourses on cultural imperialism have long presupposed that it is of developing countries by developed countries. When the audiences for television from one nation in the developing world are from neighbouring nations or those at a distance, with or without cultural affinities, mutual or otherwise, the question that arises is whether such definitions and arguments still apply.

Alleging Media Imperialism

Whenever the cultures of core countries in the world political-economic system are dominant in peripheral countries, cultural imperialism is said to occur and this is said to be symptomatic of a dependency or exploitative relationship. Most formulations of cultural imperialism are largely based on economic dependency perspectives, but Lee (1980) attempted to re-define the more specific media imperialism as the composite of programme flows, ownership, transfers of broadcast systems, and promotion of capitalist worldviews/ lifestyles. He viewed socialist control of the media as no less acceptable than capitalist domination, and suggests that regional co-operation, creative use of the media, and the synthesis of modern and traditional media may be antidotes to media imperialism. Said (1994) finds evidence of 'Western' imperialism in Asia from nineteenth century colonial literature right down to the mass media of today. Most programmes on domestic television in Third World countries were imported because of the high cost of local production and tastes of the local elite. Whatever was produced locally was often a clone of foreign programmes and gave only a sense of pseudo-indigenisation.

Mattelart (1983) contended that transnational corporations dominate national culture and as evidence cited news and programming distribution networks, and transnational advertising agency networks. Schiller (1989) argued further that the trend worldwide towards deregulation in broadcasting results from lobbying by corporations, faced with the increased competitiveness of a global marketplace made possible by the new communications technologies. Since public broadcasting proved expensive for developing countries and was often not able to gain popular support, commercial broadcasters who were able to attract advertising revenue tended to be encouraged instead. Furthermore these new communication technologies allowed the multinational corporations to bypass existing broadcasting and telecommunications structures, at least in part, and offer services on a fee-paying basis to advertisers or consumers.

A more recent dissenter from the dominant free-market view is Hamelink (1994) who questions the impact of deregulation on local autonomy in service industries, such as broadcasting in developing countries. Developing countries may either be excluded from the information age or have their cultures co-opted in the process of converting them into markets for global products. However Ayish (1992) contends that developing nations may have to rethink their authoritarian orientation if they wish to be integrated into the information-based global economy. He proposes that international communication be thought of primarily as information vital to politico-economic planning rather than as mass-media cultural imperialism. Given the ever-widening gap with developed countries, developing countries cannot afford to shut out technological change. Allegations of foreign media impact may be mitigated by emphasising their role in mediating new cultural experiences rather than determining it.

As with many others, Tomlinson (1991) sees media at the core of the cultural imperialism debate; comprising as it does the cluster of programming, advertising and news whose economics of production and dissemination is dominated by multinational corporations of the capitalist world market. Cultural imperialism is more than media imperialism since the media are not the totality of cultural experience but are merely the 'mediation' of capitalist modernity which is a form of global capitalist imperialism. Tomlinson questions who speaks for whom in the debate and asks whether Third World citizens themselves might not think cultural imperialism worth the social development which accompanies it such as clean water and good roads. So he concludes that cultural imperialism ought to be studied in terms of the wider socio-economic changes in developing countries in which the media play a role by mediating the complexity of the new culture to its citizens.

Albarran and Chan-Olmsted (1998) warn that while none of the global media conglomerates have achieved dominance in any national market, policy makers need to be watchful over consequences for competition and consumers. Herman and McChesney (1997) argue that the converging media, telecommunications and advertising industries dominated by US conglomerates comprise new missionaries of global capitalism and are a threat to national public spheres. But Skovmand and Schröder (1992), editing a series of articles which assess the impact of transnational, largely U.S. television on Europe, reject the simplistic notion that the effect is unilateral and uniform. They further allege that public broadcasting in Europe in the past has been paternalistic itself in reflecting only the tastes of the elite, a form of in-country imperialism. Barker (1996) argues for a plural public sphere in a post-modern globalised world where the nation-state has a lesser role. Nonetheless, books on transnational television in Asia such as Bhatt (1994) and Goonasekera and Lee (1998) still tend to express concern for the erosion of cultural values and undermining of national sovereignty.

Chronicling West Asia Television

Television was relatively well-developed in West Asia prior to the arrival of StarTV and ZeeTV, and had their own sub-regional satellite television services. However there was quite a divergence of approaches to developing and regulating television among the countries within West Asia. Kuwait was the first Gulf-state to introduce television in 1961, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) followed in 1969, though it took over two decades for television to reach its more distant emirates. Qatar introduced television in 1970 and like Kuwait began a second channel to cater to its expatriate community. Television in Bahrain began in 1973 and had by 1993 expanded into five channels and a cable pay-TV service. In Oman television began only in 1974 and utilised microwave transmissions to cover the whole country. Television in Saudi Arabia launched in 1965 was state-controlled and from 1982 consisted of two channels. It utilised the Intelsat to provide national coverage in conjunction with terrestrial facilities. Like other West Asian countries, the Gulf states have long had cooperative arrangements for news and programme exchanges, and a common understanding on the Islamic values they would uphold (Ayish and Qasim, 1995).

Among the Gulf states, satellite dishes are legal in the UAE, Kuwait and Oman. In addition to a commercial station in UAE's Dubai and Abu Dhabi there were cable networks operating there (World Broadcasting News, 1993). Since there are an estimated two expatriate employees for every local Arab in the UAE, most from Asia, this audience became of interest to transnational satellite television stations (Via Satellite, 1995). The Omani government debated the cultural impact of transnational satellite television when it was first introduced in 1991 but approved satellite dishes, believing that systematic Islamic teaching would immunise its 1.5 million citizens from the more adverse effects. Despite an official ban on satellite dishes in Bahrain, six per cent of its 230,000 television households had some access to DBS television. In addition to its own five channels, the state broadcaster offers 23 pay-TV channels via MMDS which includes StarTV and ZeeTV channels (Al-Thawadi and Gallard, 1997). Another Gulf state, Qatar, initially imposed a ban on satellite dishes and opted to install a cable network to carry selected and censored programming from the transnational television channels (Straits Times, 1994). Quite unexpectedly in 1995, Qatar lifted restrictions on all media and introduced satellite channel called Al-Jazeera which revolutionised news and information programming for the whole region (Al-Hail, 2000).

Although never approved officially in Saudi Arabia, estimates of up to 400,000 satellite dishes and two million viewers were made in the mid-1990s. Owners hid them behind brick walls or under tarpaulins, while prices of satellite dishes and receivers doubled with official crackdowns (Al-Makaty, 1995). However some mem-

bers had intimated that the Saudi royal family had considerable investments in Arabic satellite television broadcasting from Europe and elsewhere in the Middle East. Later micro-transmission system was installed in the country to re-distribute regional and international channels monitored to ensure programming in line with the country's religious and cultural values. But the consequent isolation of Saudis may explain their motivation for television via direct broadcast satellite instead (Marghalani, Palmgreen and Boyd, 1998). Although religion was a major factor in the development of television in West Asia, a major stimulus in the demand for satellite television was the start of the Gulf War in 1991. As in the rest of Asia, it compelled domestic television and restricted pay-TV to compete with new free-to-air transnational broadcasters via satellite (Kumar, 1999).

To apply a typology of government policies towards early transnational broadcasters such as StarTV (Thomas, 1999), most West Asian states adopted one of 'controlled access', while Qatar and Saudi Arabia opted for 'active suppression'. Likewise, the national response of most South Asian states such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal towards transnational commercial television via satellite could be characterised as 'controlled access'. But India held to a policy of 'complacent inaction' for a number of years yet, having neither the political will nor the resources to enforce laws prohibiting broadcasts by transnational television. Rather belatedly India did devise laws to regulate the burgeoning cable television industry and acknowledge the popularity of transnational and domestic broadcasts delivered via satellite and cable. Given its dominant geographical size, location and population, India has dominated the television market in the South Asian region for decades, simply by spillover television. With the advent of commercial satellite television, India channels led by ZeeTV have come to command audiences in West Asia as well in ways and for reasons this paper will elucidate.

South Asian Satellite Broadcasters

ZeeTV. Since its launch towards the end of 1992 on the southern beam of an AsiaSat1 transponder leased from Star TV, ZeeTV has been a major catalyst for change in South Asian television. It broke even within its first year of operations and by 1997 ZeeTV had a 29 per cent share of cable and satellite households. Its success has been attributed to the mixture of Hindi films and film-related programming, serials, music shows, game shows and chat shows. Through its programmes it also popularised a creole of Hindi and English called 'Hinglish' amongst a youthful market. By 1998 with a network of four 24-hour channels - ZeeTV, Zee Cinema, ZeeTV India and Music Asia, it reached approximately 23 million households in South Asia and West Asia. With ambitions to expand its operations to reach Indian diaspora in Europe and North America, ZeeTV was boasting of being the largest Asian television network (Thussu, 1999).

Other Indian Broadcasters. Since 50-60 per cent of the country is Hindi-speaking most of the stations, such as ZeeTV, JainTV, and ATN (founded by Indians from the UK) are in that language though JainTV then experimented with some Tamil and Bengali programming. There is now a Tamil satellite station - SunTV, a Malayalam satellite station - AsiaNet, and a Kannada satellite station - Udaya - all of them appealing to ethnic cultural tastes in the southern states. SunTV and AsiaNet were used primarily to reach Tamil Nadu and Kerala states while audiences such as Tamils and Keralians in the Middle East, in Sri Lanka or even elsewhere in India were initially treated by the broadcasters as incidental. Sony Entertainment Television began in 1995 and was soon claiming a penetration of 9.9 million households. A number of these newer commercial channels had a combination of domestic investors (including state governments, film-stars and politicians) and foreign investors (including multinational media conglomerates and ethnic Indians resident abroad), making it difficult to categorise them by ownership.

Transborder Audiences

West Asia. Within West Asia, satellite television reception grew in 1994 to 33 per cent of all TV households in Saudi Arabia despite government restrictions. Egyptian Satellite Channel (ESC) and Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC) were the most popular channels then and there were also satellite transmissions from Arab Radio and Television (ART), Orbit Communications and Dubai TV. Since the average StarTV home had 5.8 persons, there were over 2.2 million potential viewers, most of them local Arabs, affluent and better educated. However when it came to viewership, only 60 per cent of local Arabs and 31 per cent of expatriate Arabs watched StarTV yesterday as compared with 83 per cent of expatriate Asians, possibly due to English-language comprehension (StarTV, 1995). This number increased substantially with the launch of AsiaSat2 and by early 1997 StarTV had a penetration of 388,000 homes (StarTV, 2000a). Satellite dish antennae were the prime means of StarTV reception though cable systems were on the increase and some StarTV programming was transmitted terrestrially from Bahrain.

In the late 1990s, premier channels such as Star World, Star Movies as well as Fox Sports, National Geographic, Granada UK, CNBC and Sky News were offered in West Asia as the pay-TV package Star Select (StarTV, 2000b).

In the United Arab Emirates, StarTV penetration grew 148 per cent in 1994 alone to 288,790 households or 48 per cent of all TV households, though 70 per cent of StarTV homes were in the largest cities of Dubai and Abu Dhabi and 99 per cent by private satellite dishes. Of the potential 1.1 million viewers, expatriate Asians were the highest since 87 per cent of their households had StarTV and 72 per cent of them watched yesterday as compared with 58 per cent of local Arabs and 63 per cent of expatriate Arabs. Once again a StarTV/ZeeTV home had an 18 per cent

higher average monthly household income, more luxury consumer goods, better education and greater English comprehension, than other households. In June 1994, StarTV signed an agreement with Dubai Radio/television, the state-owned broadcaster, to develop and market jointly Arabic-language programming and an Arabic channel (Asian Wall Street Journal, 1994). By 1995 StarTV/ZeeTV was available in 75,544 households or 38 per cent of all TV households in Kuwait, an increase of 142 per cent over 1994, though it stagnated at that level into the late-1990s (StarTV, 2000a). There are no restrictions on transnational satellite television and the Kuwait government intends to compete with the market leaders, StarTV, CNN and MBC, by introducing its own satellite network. Finally in Israel, penetration of StarTV reached in 1994 at 784,000 households or 69 per cent of all TV households, made available through five major cable companies which all transmit StarTV along with other channels from the Astra, Eutelsat, Arabsat and AsiaSat satellites. As in most other West Asian states, penetration in Israel has plateaued at that level into the late 1990s (StarTV, 2000b).

South Asia. In India itself, StarTV/ZeeTV households numbered 10.2 million in 1994 and it was the market leader among all cable households in urban India which number 11.8 million households or 37 per cent of all TV households. As affiliated channels in the mid-1990s StarTV and ZeeTV were an urban phenomenon in India with a quarter of all StarTV households located in the six metropolitan cities of Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta, Madras and Hyderabad. Regionally, while western India had the highest penetration at 91 per cent of cable households, the south was a close second at 90 per cent. Since the average StarTV household comprised 5.9 persons, there were an estimated 60 million viewers. These were the more affluent with monthly household incomes of Rs.3,370 (US\$1,100) compared with Rs.2,727 (US\$900) of general TV homes, and owned more luxury consumer goods. StarTV household members had a higher comprehension of English at 49 per cent than general households at 42 per cent, and 'viewership yesterday' was over 20 per cent of all StarTV households and highest among the upper socio-economic groups. 'Viewership yesterday' was also highest in Madras, Hyderabad and Cochin in southern India where Hindi is not dominant and where the number of English-educated is probably higher (StarTV, 1995). Capitalising on the rapid growth of unlicensed cable networks and increasing liberalisation by the government, StarTV penetration in India expanded to an estimated 18 million households by end-1999 (StarTV 2000), while ZeeTV is said to have a reach of 24 million households or some 130 million viewers within the country (Indiantelevision.com, 2000).

Among the other South Asian countries, Bangladesh had a StarTV penetration in 1994 of 204,000 or 19 per cent of all TV households, and with an average of 5.3 persons per StarTV households it has almost 1.1 million viewers. StarTV was again an urban phenomenon with an estimated 66 per cent of urban households being

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television households and 36 per cent of these having access to satellite television through cable, most of them in the capital city of Dhaka and the second largest city of Chittagong. As elsewhere StarTV households were more affluent with monthly household incomes of Tk.7,787 (US\$201) compared with Tk.5,576 (US\$143) of non-StarTV households, and had a much higher incidence of consumer luxury goods, better educational standards and greater comprehension of English (StarTV, 1995). By 1999 the penetration of StarTV in Bangladesh had risen by a third to 305,000 households (StarTV, 2000a). In Pakistan the number of StarTV households doubled over 1994 to 174,000 though this still represented a low penetration rate of three per cent of all TV households. This is in part explained by the fact that expensive private satellite dishes were the dominant means of access at 53 per cent but cable distribution at three per cent was rising. The highest penetration was said to be in the cities of Karachi (population, 11 million), Quetta and Hyderabad. However by 1999 the penetration of StarTV in Pakistan had dropped dramatically to just 10,000 households for reasons unknown (StarTV, 2000a).

From the mid-1990s ZeeTV actually positioned itself as a 'South Asian channel' and began to recognise the Indian diaspora in the Gulf/Saudi Arabia, said to number up to five million then. Though its penetration matched the five-channel StarTV, ZeeTV enjoyed much higher viewership. However, these 'spill-over' audiences were initially treated as a bonus and not considered by media planners in Indian advertising agencies even though they had higher spending power (Ind 01.01), perhaps because media budgets were controlled by domestic clients/agents. Although ZeeTV was aimed primarily at the domestic Indian market, it could be said to be a transnational medium since it has had a sizeable audience market of both Arabs and expatriate Indians in the Gulf states of West Asia, of Pakistanis since their language of Urdu is similar to Hindi, and even of Egyptians to whom its Hindi movie-based programming was culturally attractive. In recognition of this it set up a joint-venture in West Asia called Zee Arabia for programme production (Ray and Jacka, 1996). By the late 1990s, ZeeTV is reputed to have a penetration of some 15 million households or 70 millions viewers among non-resident Indians, a large portion of which would be in West Asia (Indiantelevision.com, 2000).

Global. There are estimated to be 16-18 million non-resident Indians (NRIs) or ethnic Indians living around the globe, mainly in Southeast Asia, East and Southern Africa, the South Pacific, the Caribbean, the UK and the USA. They are exempt from local excise and luxury taxes on their re-entry into India (Ind 02.02). Collectively these NRIs are emerging as major investors in India's economic resurgence and so increasingly corporate and financial advertising is being directed at them utilising transnational satellite television (Ind 01.06). ZeeTV programming is available in Mauritius and Fiji, which have significant ethnic Indian populations, through tie-ins with a domestic broadcasters, terrestrial and cable (Ind 01.05). ZeeTV has ex-

tended its reach to Europe, the U.S. and the Far East - catering to these global Indians, otherwise known as NRIs or Non-Resident Indians (Ind 01.11). Although reaching Indians abroad is treated as a bonus, NRIs are a valuable target market since they are allowed to buy Indian export products to bring back, exempt from local excise and luxury taxes (Ind 02.02). Service industries catering to NRIs are another category of advertising on transnational satellite television, for example, finance, banking and other specialist expatriate services. Repatriation of savings and venture capital by these non-resident Indians (NRIs), placed the group as the fourth largest investors in the country behind the United States, Switzerland and Japan, and invaluable in augmenting India's foreign exchange reserves (Ind 01.06). It is therefore not surprising that for some years now ZeeTV and SET have been exporting their channels or programming to diasporic Indian channels in Europe, North America, South Africa, Indian Ocean states, East Africa and South Pacific (Stein and Sarma, 1998).

Discussion and Comment

In its early years StarTV deliberately targeted a pan-Asian English-educated elite but soon realised that even in regions which have known British colonialisation, this represented a small minority. Rather than StarTV, the engine behind the growth of satellite television in South & West Asia has been the Indian-dialect ZeeTV whose pioneering work has been emulated by the other ethnic-language commercial channels. Whether ZeeTV is to be classified as a transnational broadcaster rather than a domestic commercial broadcaster using the satellite medium to circumvent national regulation is open to debate, given its ownership, mode of delivery, programming and audiences. Over the 1990s StarTV and ZeeTV, themselves in competition, began multiplying the number of ethnic-language channels they offered in South and West Asia as elsewhere. Even the cosmopolitan-elite are said to prefer entertainment in their native dialects regardless of whether the local programme genres and formats are clones of 'Western' programming such as talk shows, quiz shows, soap operas and detective dramas. As Jacka (1994) explains, the origins of such programmes are difficult to trace and their effects are not as unidirectional as the media imperialism thesis suggests. Since television is quintessentially a postmodern medium, programme formats are borrowed from other nations and are imbued with local characteristics. The impetus for this quasi-globalisation may be attributed in large part to the dramatic increase of television air-time due to commercialisation and new technologies (Moran, 1998).

While more recent data on viewer profiles and viewership patterns in West Asia were not available, it is a reasonable assumption that expatriate South Asians continue to be a significant audience in West Asia since there has been no change in their employment trends since the mid-1990s. Unfortunately there was even less

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data available in the public domain on audiences and other India-based satellite broadcasters in West Asia, though doubtless the South Asian expatriates there have by now become a valid target market segment for some Indian advertisers. Given the market potential in South and West Asia, it is rather surprising that the only independent survey of viewership for pan-Asian satellite broadcasting, conducted in the late 1990s, focused exclusively on East Asia (Asian A&M, 1997; Asian Media Access, 2000). One reason for this myopia is the tendency generally for using Asia to refer to only those countries on the Pacific Rim, and for data to be collected primarily on national markets directly targeted by broadcasters rather than on transnational ethnic markets.

Nonetheless it is evident that having discovered a market among expatriate Indians in the Middle East, the new 'Indian-commercial' channels have ambitions of reaching expatriate Indians there and elsewhere. There are a number of options regarding how this might be done: making these channels available on more satellite platforms, licensing terrestrial stations to down-link programmes and re-broadcast them selectively, cooperating with cable-operators to relay the channel on a pay-TV basis, or simply making its programmes available to video libraries - the traditional cultural product source for diasporic communities globally. Programming from ZeeTV, for instance, is included in multicultural cable and terrestrial channels in the Fiji, Mauritius, Dubai, Bahrain, Malaysia, UK and the US. ZeeTV and the other commercial broadcasters are following in the footsteps of Doordarshan. The latter has long been a *de facto* transnational broadcaster itself, if only regionally, since its signals have been available in neighbouring Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka which share some cultural and language similarities with India, even if it is only of their minorities. Together these Indian-based channels may be seen as a form of media imperialism by India as the largest country in the South Asia region, perhaps more of a concern to neighbouring governments than foreign-language broadcasters like StarTV and CNN. Thus in relation to media imperialism, the demarcations between transnational and domestic, public and commercial, national and ethnic television broadcasting are becoming increasingly irrelevant.

As the competition between satellite channels in Asia intensifies, the targeting of the audience segments becomes essential for channel survival since pan-Asian audiences seem demonstrably not commercially viable. If there was an audience for 'western' programming on satellite television in Asia it was that of a small cosmopolitan elite which had previously acquired its globalised cultural tastes through education and travel. Asian countries with the highest viewership of transnational satellite television are those where signals are either shared via communal satellite dishes or relayed commercially by cable operators in neighbourhoods. This symbiotic relationship between domestic cable operations and transnational satellite television such as in West Asia as worldwide is being driven by programming requiring

minimal 'cultural discount' or programming with which audience segments are able to identify with culturally (Hoskins and Mirius, 1988). In a growing number of countries both within Asia and as far away as different hemispheres which have ethnic groups with cultural similarities or diasporic communities, cable/pay-TV providers and even domestic terrestrial broadcasters are utilising selected programming from these satellite channels on their multicultural channels. Most of this programming is provided by satellite television channels owned and managed by Asians, local or expatriate, rather than 'Western media imperialists', whatever that term may now be taken to mean.

In any case, research on transnational television such as those cited in this paper may lack rigour to make conclusive pronouncements on media imperialism because it fails to demonstrate significant socio-cultural change as a means of alleging adverse media impact. Such change is difficult to measure and especially to isolate from other determinants such as other media, marketing campaigns, economic affluence, political developments and urban migration. Surveying the various approaches to understanding the role of mass media, Boyd-Barrett (1982) concluded that there was a 'great need for an emphasis on micro-analysis of media impacts at small group and individual levels to engage with and illuminate the present emphasis on macro-analysis of media and multinational structures'. Transnational satellite television is often a site of discourse within the home and community over traditional and contemporary values between age-groups, socio-economic classes and gender. As such this new medium may be a positive means by which audiences transcend their ethnic group and nation-state and look to the region or even the world, in formulating their contemporary cultural identity.

Conclusion

This case study of StarTV and ZeeTV together with the wider survey of its West Asian and South Asian audiences demonstrates that the fears of governments about media imperialism by the 'West' have proven somewhat unfounded and predictions by academics about the consequences of the globalisation of culture have not quite been borne out. While satellites could potentially break down political and geographical barriers to reaching consumers across diverse countries, in reality the cultural and economic boundaries of markets are far more illusive. The critique of media imperialism presupposes the primacy of the nation-state and homogeneous national cultures over globalising 'Western cultures' originating from the developed world. The historical experience of South Asian television in West Asia chronicled in this paper suggests that the same growth of transnational satellite television feared to be undermining ethnic cultures seems rather to be facilitating their revival long suppressed within nation-states or neglected by their diaspora, rather than imposing a globalising 'western' culture. Instead of cultural imperialism imposed from

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without by a medium such as transnational satellite television, Asian societies manifest symptoms of the cultural eclecticism of post-modern cultures thought more prevalent in western countries and largely attributed to the impact of television media and advertising. Thus with the increasing complexity of global communications and the cultural plurality of our post-modern world, a time-worn concept such as media imperialism may be in critical need of theoretical reformulation if it is to maintain currency.

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