

## Book Review

Sulehria, Farooq. *Media Imperialism in Pakistan and India*  
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During the first two decades of the twenty-first century, broadcast and electronic media—with the help of digitization, screened devices and investment of global finance capital—has grown by leaps and bounds in the developing world. The TV systems of India and Pakistan have both transformed from the state-directed modernization and public information initiatives of the postcolonial governments. With the arrival of licensing regimes, regulation of private production and distribution of media commodities, these spheres of public consumption of information and entertainment have opened up to the fast-growing demographics of the region, creating opportunities for advertising revenue generated through the marketing of global commodities. The growth and diversification of “media systems” around the world have become inextricably tied up with discourses of globalization. However, while the field of media studies has focused on the growth and technological development of media technologies and formats in the metropolitan societies, peripheral media systems—either in relation to the West or to each other—have only recently become the focus of the emerging disciplinary trajectories of global and comparative media studies.

The extent of research on Indian, and particularly Pakistani media transformations has been unfortunately dwarfed by the astronomical financial, commercial and cultural growth of these technologically-mediated spheres of life. The postcolonial context of India and Pakistan—both part of the territories of the British Raj til 1947—is essential for a refined understanding of the role media technologies and the proliferation of technological goods play in the intermediation of the precarious relation between the metropolitan core and the postcolonial periphery. In this regard, Farooq Sulehria’s *Media Imperialism in India and Pakistan* (2018), a part of the Routledge Advances in Internationalizing Media Studies, makes an important and welcome contribution to the development of the increasingly important field of

comparative *and* critical south Asian media studies. In his well-researched study, Sulehria tackles the interlocking problematics of globalization theory, critical theories of imperialism, and dependency economics in relation to the growth of media technologies and formats perpetuated by the Western world in the non-West.

Sulehria initiates his critical inquiry of “media imperialism” in the cases of India and Pakistan by questioning “whether globalization has delivered the end of media imperialism by leveling the global media markets to the point whereby western domination and one-way flow in the global media sphere have become a thing of the past” (p. 3). Indeed, what appear to be self-contained zones of media discourse within the particular national cultural contexts of India and Pakistan had begun to become elaborated as early as the 1990s. One way of considering these developments is that through technological growth and development of professional spheres of media production, countries like India and Pakistan would become self-sufficient in providing media goods for their respective populations, thus disrupting the dependency circuitry on Western media products. In contrast, as Sulehria contends, the relations between imperialism, globalization and dependency need to be reassessed in how they play out in the particular postcolonial context of the political economy of media in south Asia.

A cursory look at Indian media industries would suggest that India has become a major competitor in the global media system. However, as Sulehria’s research on the growth of Indian media suggests, the undergirding of this supposedly indigenous sphere of media is actually globalized through and through with investments of finance capital, joint ventures, as well as technological and professional training dependencies. From the 1960s to the 1990s, Indian television media was largely defined by the state-owned Durdarshan initiative.

During the 90s Sulehria contends that the economic rupture between Nehruvian developmental logic and the neoliberal wave that India is currently riding manifested itself in the country's television media. As a lucrative and emerging market, and a prominent part of the BRICS countries, the Indian media market has seen a rapid influx of global investments through joint-ventures where local media houses have entered into deals with global giants such as Sony or News Corp. Sulehria goes on to show that while the economic and financial dependency of the Indian media industry is in place, technology, for example satellites, has made the traditional analysis of imperialism more complicated.

As Sulehria argues, the Indian media case does not neatly fit into the core-periphery schema, hence he relies on the term "sub-imperialism" to describe the situation of the south Asian postcolony. The "subimperialism" relation between the core-periphery nexus of the imperialism and dependency schema is a critical point of relay for Sulehria's argument. This intermediary status refers to a situation where economic or financial power is projected out of periphery countries as an extension of imperialism at a regional level (p. 30). Joint-ventures form part of the new frontier of western capital's encroachment on peripheral media markets and have formed an important aspect of the growth of the Indian media empire. Indigenous capital in peripheral regions often requires investment from global capital in order to capture market share in early periods of the industry. Sulehria demonstrates how this process in the 90s and early 2000s reshaped transformed the mediascape of India. The example of NDTV is particularly insightful in this regard. A production company established to support Doordarshan, the Indian state television, entered into a joint-venture with News Corporation in the 90s resulting in India's first 24-hour television news channel and also News Corp's initial foray into the Indian media market. Although the JV ended in 2003, it has arguably changed the face of the Indian TV and media system and signifies something of broader significance for global capital under neoliberalism.

The neoliberal media transition that takes place in the south Asian region away from state-run modernization public-information initiatives, like Doordarshan (DD) and the Pakistan Television Network (PTV), towards privately held commercial media ventures has significant political and economic effects in the early 21st century. In India, the recent infusion of private media outlets has put the squeeze on DD's revenue stream which, on the one hand makes the state media project financially untenable, while on the other hand forces DD to compete with content sponsored by global finance capital. This reconfiguration, "especially in the case of DD, betrays the very rationale that justified its creation" (p. 78). Neighboring Pakistan has undergone a similar transition whereby state-owned PTV has to transform itself in the face of cut-throat competition from private media houses fueling sensationalism and infotainment. Without a coherent public information initiative, media in both India and Pakistan has become beholden to new modes of capitalist production,

distribution and consumption. In this regard, Sulehria's study stands as a harbinger of the mediatic change that has reshaped the region over the past two decades.

The case of a liberal broadcasting regime for satellite and cable television in Pakistan is more interesting, yet is severely under-researched. Even as a comparative case considered in tandem with the liberalization and growth of the Indian media industry, the Pakistan case can provide valuable insights into the development of south Asian media into the twenty-first century. Providing an excellent groundwork for future research endeavors into such a regional comparison, Sulehria has uncovered some interesting facts about Pakistan in terms of the history of media and technology. As far as the framework of imperialism and dependency goes, Sulehria finds that the Pakistani case of media imperialism markedly different. According to Sulehria, "neither global media conglomerates nor the regional players have directly invested either in the TV market or other segments of the media market" (p. 96). However he notes that indirect dependency of Pakistani media on circuits of global media have been soldered in different ways, including satellite and hardware dependency viz. landing rights, influence of global advertising conglomerates. In addition to this Sulehria also adds value to the importation of globalized television and media formats such as 24-hour news programming which came to Pakistan in the 1990s, and more recently the reality TV and tele-novella formats which have taken hold of TV audiences. These coupled together with professional training and hardware importation as well as global licensing, according to Sulehria's analysis, submits Pakistan to a media dependency, despite its purported insularity.

The interesting questions arising out of this comparative analysis of Indian and Pakistani experience of broadcast liberalization concern the radically different trajectories on the one hand, and the obvious overlaps in the two media cultures on the other. In particular, the study sheds light on why Indian media has become interlaced with the global template, while Pakistan has remained largely excluded from the influx of direct investment in its media system. A part of this may have to do with the lawmaking and legislation of the two countries, as Sulehria has pointed out, with India being open to investment early on and putting restrictions on Joint Ventures later, while the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) laws endeavored to make the Pakistani media insular. This particular nationalistic element of the Pakistani media—especially the news media—presents an interesting counterpoint to the media imperialism thesis. While entertainment programs and channels are somewhat under the aegis of Western or Indian programming, for instance through, Cartoon Network, Bollywood films, and News Corp's influence over Urdu One, Pakistan's internal narrative disseminated through constant 24-hour breaking news is heavily regulated and regimented by state authorities to counter both the Indian threat of 5th generation warfare, and imperialistic modes of domination stemming from Western media conglomerates. This insular and insulated national

sphere of media—albeit projected through global hardware and formats— of how a propaganda model of information is implemented through political and financial manipulation of private, indigenous, owner-run enterprises, is perhaps the most interesting aspect of Pakistani media in recent years and deserves attention in future research.

colonial peripheral zones of the emerging global political economy of media.

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It is interesting to note that the overlaps and differences between Indian and Pakistani media systems also mimic the general historical and cultural relation between the two countries. Similar to the ways in which the two rivals gained nuclear weapons capabilities, Sulehria points out that even Pakistan's endeavors to launch its own satellite in the 90s were to put it on parity with India. Furthermore, the very liberalization of Pakistani media appears to stem from General Musharraf's reaction to how the Kargil war of 1999 played out on global media. Determined to counter Indian channels' narrative domination, Musharraf endeavored to open up a Pakistani sphere of media as a reactive measure to India's growing influence. At the same time Pakistani media borrowed from Indian innovators such as Zee news, in order to produce a combined news and entertainment format to the extent that Pakistani news channels often report on Bollywood celebrity gossip, but not on political or economic news from India, while Indian channels like TimesNow India frequently broadcast anti-Pakistan opinions and stories.

Whilst globalization and imperialism are certainly important aspects of developing indigenous spheres of media in the developing or third world, the domination of global capital and the imperialism/dependency debate do not capture some of the more interesting facets of such an intra-regional comparison. For instance, a genealogical frame of analysis in terms of historical media systems may present an alternative way of considering the relation between Pakistan, India and the West, both in terms of media practices, as well as media formats. This genealogy bares witness to how these colonial and postcolonial media systems came to be and can explain how modes of colonial control permeated into the postcolonial state, while understanding different modes of imperialism and their relation to media technology. As a domain of imperialism, British India inherited a colonial media system which became bifurcated between India and Pakistan at Partition. Within the contours of the imperialism debate, however, Sulehria has provided an excellent background on the 20th century regimes of broadcasting of PTV and DD in Pakistan and India respectively. Readers will also find beneficial his account of the way emerging circuits of neoliberalism in the 21st century have upended the developmentalist state vision in favor of a market-oriented commercial media, which these state organs have to compete with in contemporary times. This is indeed a watershed moment for the growth and development of media practices in the region, Sulehria's contribution to the literature on this important topic is certainly a push for further research and analysis of how global formats, technologies and ways of seeing are being reconfigured and redeployed in historically