GLOBALISATION, IMPERIALISM & COMMUNICATION STUDIES:

FROM THE MACBRIDE REPORT TO WORLD SUMMIT ON THE "INFORMATION SOCIETY"

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ABSTRACT

This article is orientated towards a contextual reading of the MacBride Report. This suggests that the Report can be fruitfully read as "socially situated" (shaped by its essentially political rather than scholarly role) and it also implies attention to the many changes in the framework, structures and flows of international communication since 1980. The article notes selective aspects of the concerns and orientations which informed the MacBride Report, particularly those addressing structural features of unequal resources and power in a post-colonial world which, in turn operate to shape communication inequalities. It finds such issues have been somewhat neglected or inadequately addressed, both in the communication studies field and in international policy discourses in more recent times. The article describes certain recent developments in neighbouring fields which closely resonate with aspects of the earlier report – in particular, the growth or revival of interest in the concept of "imperialism." Whilst imperialism has become something of a neglected (if not quite taboo) term in communication studies in recent times, it is now addressed more openly in other influential domains. This paper argues that re-engagement with this concept is now overdue and potentially fruitful for both the contemporary "academic" communications studies field and for the agenda of "policy" research issues.

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Re-Reading MacBride in the Contemporary

This paper is orientated towards a contextual reading of the MacBride Report, especially in assessing its relevance to contemporary international communication issues and their study. Of course, a contextual reading also implies attention to the many changes in the framework, structures and flows of international communication since 1980. The paper considers selective aspects of the concerns and orientations which informed the MacBride/ISCP Report concerning structural features of unequal power in a post-colonial world. This reading finds that, if suitably extended and updated, such features are of continuing relevance for contemporary communication studies They provide useful starting points in understanding structural features and trends that are widely deemed to mark the contemporary..

Like any other text, the MacBride Report can be most fruitfully read/considered as "socially situated" and framed by its social context of production in specific ways. Crucial to its framing were the polarised debates of the 1970s concerning the sources and forms of global inequalities in economic and political power and social well-being and in which imbalances in the structures and flow of communication were but one aspect. Although many eminent academics contributed to the process of its production, it is clear that the report is not an academic document. In essence, the report comprises a political or diplomatic intervention that sought to steer towards some middle ground amidst the competing claims and concerns of the superpowers and non-aligned countries in the relevant policy debates (NWICO). Yet in re-reading it some 25 years after its publication, one is struck by the holistic, sociological (political-economic, "structural") and production-orientated approach to international communication imbalances which animated aspects of the MacBride report. That is particularly the case when it is compared to many of the official policy documents produced in the UN's current WSIS process, not to mention the kinds of concepts and concerns that predominate in the communication studies literature today.

Here I can only briefly note how certain key features of the framing, approach and content of the MacBride Report, compare to influential developments and trends in the communication studies field over the past 20 years. As this is well-trodden terrain that will be familiar to the current audience, the treatment will be very brief here. In sum, the major trends in the communication studies field over the 25 years since publication of MacBride Report may be summarised as follows:

- The culturalist or linguistic turn in social and communication studies;
- The postmodern rejection of meta-narratives/theories
- The emphasis on consumption, the privileging of the "active" moment of reading/viewing
- The assumption that the "discovery" of active audiences negates concerns with communication supply/production structures and flows
- Flawed/excessive culturalist readings of the culture/economy relation,
- Neglect of the growing role of producer/instrumental knowledge functions
- The "presumption against regulation" etc.

In key respects, these developments may be characterised as a predominant tendency to reject the kinds of holistic, sociological (political-economic, "structural") and production-orientated approach which animated the MacBride Report. I will

argue that these recent tendencies are now challenged by developments explored in following sections. I suggest that aspects of the MacBride Report's orientation and its (at least implicit) agenda of concerns have a very direct relevance to the contemporary international communication studies.

I will move on to identify and describe how there are new theoretical turns and conceptual developments in neighbouring fields that closely resonate with prevailing ideas that helped inform the MacBride Report. These also pose significant challenges as to the adequacy of some current orthodoxies in the communication and media studies fields. I suggest that such developments cannot be ignored by a contemporary communication studies that claims any relevance to pressing political and social issues in an increasingly interdependent world. Indeed, I suggest that these simultaneously offer conceptual resources for a renewal of the political economy of international communication. Furthermore, these developments offer real opportunities or potentials for a such a renewed and reinvigorated political economy of communication to make significant contributions to the wider fields of contemporary international relations studies more generally. This is especially so in light of the increasing roles and implications communication and "information" functions/services and the alleged tendencies/shifts towards an "information" or "knowledge" society.

One key development that I want highlight in this paper comprises the recent but rapid growth [or revival] of interest in the concept of "imperialism" within neighbouring fields of study. I go on to argue that this has a direct relevance in advancing our understanding of key developments in the fields of international communications and international relations more generally. Whilst imperialism has become something of a neglected (if not quite taboo) term in communication studies in recent times, I suggest that re-engagement with this concept can serve to advance our understandings of key issues and questions, including:

- What's specific about the contemporary forms and modes of intensified, spatially-extended socio-economic relations and how do they differ from earlier forms of "globalisation" ?
- How best to conceptualise the operations of political-economic and military power and hegemony in the contemporary international system – international relations more broadly – not least when various "information" or knowledge services, including communication and media cultural services, play increasingly important roles and functions ;
- How do we conceptualise the unfolding shifts in the respective roles, features and operations of the political or state-based, and private sector (market/economic) based powers and processes in the international system today.

"The New Imperialism": From Cultural Turns to Imperialism's Return

Several conflicting conceptions of imperialism played a central role in the international debates and political conflicts over the NIEO and NWICO during the 1970s –which in turn partly influenced the appointment and scope of the international commission on international communication led by MacBride. These included dependency theories, world systems theories and various "structural" theories of imperialism.

It is relevant to note here that, at that time, any reference to (or consideration of) US imperialism was a "taboo topic" (an object of self-censorship) in the official domestic discourses concerned with political, military or economic affairs in the USA. This applied equally to the right and liberal wings/categories of established/official political discourse in the USA. However, notions of US imperialism had long been explicitly recognised and invoked by the traditional and new left. Indeed, several critical US-based theorists made significant contributions to the international political-economy literature on contemporary imperialism in the post-war era (e.g. Baran and Sweezy 1966; Magdoff 2003)

But all that has changed since the late 1990s and especially since 2000 when the so-called "neo-conservatives" moved into the centres of state power and began to implement the "Project for a New American Century." This led not merely to many significant shifts in the form and content of US foreign and domestic policies. It has also led to a situation where explicit discussion of the question of US imperialism now takes a radically new, centre stage role in domestic political discourse in the USA—and, to some extent, internationally.

The neo-conservative shift has fostered the overt recognition, and sometimes explicit celebration, of the (hitherto hidden or denied) reality of US empire and "imperialism" by those on the political right as well as those of a liberal persuasion. Harvey suggests that we are witnessing not only a belated acknowledgement of what had long been the case, but it may also imply that "imperialism might now be taking on a rather different allure" (Harvey 2003, 7). The manifest and immediate discursive effects have included the turning of "questions of empire and imperialism into open topics of debate across the political spectrum" and the raising of more challenging questions as to "what, if anything, is new about all of this" (Harvey 2003, 6). The most significant military and political or "imperialist" effects has been the US led invasion and war in Iraq, with Britain's "New Labour" government playing a pro-active second-fiddle role, and with a few other countries in the "coalition of the willing" playing a supporting role.

The past few years have seen a spate of published contributions specifically focused on the characteristics, operations and implications of contemporary US-led "Empire" (Hardt and Negri 2000) and "imperialism" (e.g. Ignatieff 2002; Harvey 2003; Arrighi 2005a; 2005b). Some of these works have received extensive coverage in the mass media. The new wave of interest in such matters has also seen the re-publication of texts and contributions on political-economic and military aspects of imperialism produced in the decades immediately following WW2 (e.g. Magdoff 2003).

Thus, after decades spent denying the existence of US empire, influential segments of the political elite in the United States have *"now adopted a position that glories in the 'American imperium', with its 'imperial military' and 'imperial protectorates'"* according to Foster, who suggests that this shift in external posture first occurred at the end of the 1990s (Foster 2003, 10).

In sum, "imperialism" is "news" again. Several of the recent books have received extensive media coverage in the USA and elsewhere. Imperialism is also back in fashion at least in the investigations of international political, economic, military, geographical and indeed cultural relations now taking place in disciplinary fields not too distant from communication studies.

Indeed, we may further note here that the general renewal interest in the concept and operations of imperialism has included published work specifically focused on the once taboo topic of "cultural imperialism" (e.g. Rothkopf 1997). Yet, the prevailing wisdom in communication studies in recent times has converged around the idea that, as the title of one textbook suggests, the world had now somehow moved *Beyond Cultural Imperialism* (Golding and Harris 1997).

Communication Studies, "Imperialism" and the MacBride Report

At the time of the NIEO and NWICO debates, communication and media studies still comprised a relatively young, if rapidly growing, new field in US universities, and even more so in Europe. The dominant theories and concepts related to international communication in this new field of specialist "knowledge" tended to reproduce and reinforce the taboo status of any explicit discursive engagement with or consideration of imperialism in the USA. The dominant models of international communication in this new field included many conceptual innovations, but the works of the "leading scholars" were generally framed and marked by a "significant silence" as to the existence, role or implications of US imperialist power in the post-war world. When they did choose to so engage, it was usually to criticise or deny such notions. Of course, given the specific characteristics of the academic/knowledge production domain, there were out-standing exceptions to these dominant discursive trends. A minority strand of left-leaning US-based academics, most prominently Herb Schiller and Noam Chomsky, drew on dependency and other theories to challenge the dominant taboos by constructing cogent theories of the operations of US imperialist power in the international communication system.

Here we can but briefly note that such "significant silences" are not unique to this field or the question of US imperialism of course, as they merely reflect the social situatedness (context or embeddedness) of knowledge production in all academic areas. But there appear to be a number of peculiar ironies attaching to this particular example. For one, communication scholars like other cultural and social theorists frequently address the role of contextual factors in shaping or framing the production of scientific knowledge and technological artefacts, as well as the production of mass media texts. Yet, they less frequently apply such insights or concepts reflexively to their own "local" objects of knowledge/fields of production (e.g. the field of communication studies, or the sub-field of international communication in particular). Secondly, the implications of such lacunae are doubly amplified when one considers the hegemonic role of US-based authors and textual productions in defining and framing what often presents itself as "universal" theories or models of communication studies (or even "science"). Indeed, one may furthermore point out that the value or salience of the very distinction between "international" and other categories of communication practices or studies is itself heavily conditioned by context – basically this distinction proves much less meaningful in the context of the many smaller and less powerful countries than is the case of countries such as USA or UK.

Outside the mainstream, the work of radical theorists such as Herb Schiller and Johann Galtung became closely associated with the concept of "cultural imperialism" from the late 1960s to late 1970s. The concept enjoyed a certain popularity in the more politically radical and critical strands of the communication studies field

up to the 1980s and the rise of the postmodern and globalisation paradigms. Indeed, subsequently the concepts of cultural and media "imperialism" have been closely and widely associated with the NWICO debates of the 1970s – and by extension to the MacBride Report.

Yet, in fact, the MacBride Report refrains from using terms like "cultural imperialism," preferring instead to refer to "imbalances" in the structures and flows of communication, media or culture.

The Report does so even whilst addressing and describing the structural linkages between inequalities of wealth and power and their impacts on unequal or "imbalanced" flows of communication in ways that evoke or connotate the analyses of the dependency and structural theorists of imperialism at that time. When read in terms of its brief, context and its essentially "diplomatic" and political role within the highly charged debates of the time, the MacBride Report's semantic dancing around such freighted terms is hardly surprising (not least given the taboo status of the very word "imperialism" to powerful corporate and political interests in the USA and elsewhere) and in mainstream academic discourse.

In brief, we may note that the Report explicitly addresses how the ending of colonialism and achievement of political independence may not mean the end of various forms of dependence. Political , economic, technological, military, cultural and other factors may serve to strengthen the position and power of some countries but perpetuate dependence in other countries. For example, the Report acknowledges that political independence may be "restricted, and even undermined, by economic dependence, and especially by the nature of relationships and the international division of labour between developed and developing countries" (MacBride Report 1980, 34). The Report goes on to suggest:

> *Moreover, it has become increasingly clear that the effects of intellectual and cultural dependence are as serious as those of political subjection or economic dependence. There can be no genuine, effective independence without the communication resources needed to safeguard it* (MacBride Report 1980, 34).

But, as we've indicated, notions of imperialism, including cultural imperialism, are now back in fashion – in a context where the wider world political and economic system (and the UN system) are undergoing a period of intensive restructuring. It is somewhat ironic that the term has now become so marginalized in mainstream communication studies, whilst even former senior US government officials and directors of foreign policy think-tanks can invoke, and even sing the praises of, the once-taboo terms (e. g. Rothkopf, 1997). Such ironies suggest that it is well past time for communication studies scholars to re-engage with the contemporary theories and operations of imperialism. This is not least because the conceptual apparatus underpinning much of the recent "globalization" literature is marked by many weaknesses and flaws, especially when it comes to understanding the specific dimensions and forms of structural power and inequalities in the international system (Rosenberg 2000).

Varieties of Imperialism and Aspects of Recent Theories

Recent contributions note how the classic theorists (such as Hobson and Lenin) clearly recognised that imperialism can take many forms, of which invasions, wars, territorial possession or direct rule comprise but some of the options and possible

forms (e.g. Lenin 1911, 14). Indeed, the long history of imperialism reveals itself to comprise a veritable "motley crew" with respect to their predominant (if sometimes rival) modes and forms of operation (Harvey 2003, 5). Recent authors tend to emphasise how there is "considerable room for manoeuvre" as to how empire may be "construed, administered and actively constructed" (Harvey 2003, 5).

Some recent contributors to the literature have endorsed Arendt's notion of "accumulation by dispossession" and her argument that imperialism must be considered "the first stage in the political rule of the bourgeoisie rather than the last stage of capitalism" (Arendt 1951, 138). These include Harvey (2003) and Arrighi (2005a, 2005b). Arrighi advances a theory of imperialism that he claims to be more historically rooted and expansive than that of Harvey, as he traces imperialism's origins to the early-modern Italian city states rather than the nineteenth century. Arrighi describes "systemic cycles of accumulation" whereby the long-run history of capitalism has been marked by recurrent, system-wide financial expansions that have become increasingly international in scope. Each successive round or cycle has been marked not only by intercapitalist competition, but also "interstate rivalries, accumulation by dispossession, and production of space on an ever-increasing scale" (Arrighi 2005b, 90). In combination, these revolutionized the geography and mode of operation of world capitalism, and its relationship to imperialistic practices in distinct ways in each successive period.

Arrighi's model considers the various states and other organisations that have operated as "containers of power" to house the "headquarters" of the leading capitalist agencies over the successive cycles of accumulation. It depicts a progression from city-state and cosmopolitan business diaspora (e.g. the Genoese) to proto-national state (the United Provinces) with its joint-stock chartered companies to a multinational state (the United Kingdom) and its globe-encircling tributary empire. The latter was followed by a continent-sized national state (the USA) with a world-encompassing system of transnational corporations, military bases and institutions of world governance.

Arrighi suggests that "none of the agencies that have promoted the formation and expansion of world capitalism correspond to the mythical national state of political and social theory"; rather, Genoa and the United Provinces "were something less," whilst the United Kingdom and the United States comprised "something more than national states" (Arrighi 2005b). He emphasises the early and expansive scope of "the networks of accumulation and power" which enabled these agencies to play such a leading role in the formation and expansion of world capitalism. From the very early stages, these were not "contained" within the metropolitan territories "that defined their proto-national, multinational, or national identities." Rather, "long-distance trade, high finance, and related imperialistic practices (that is, war-making and empire-building activities) were even more essential sources of profit for the early than for the later agencies" (Arrighi 2005b, 91).

Recent models of imperialism have somewhat different foci and cover different time frames. However, Harvey and Arrighi tend to emphasise how a series of spatial fixes of increasing scale and scope facilitated the resolution of crisis points. Both offer fresh and interesting insights into the role of finance and wars in the long-run evolution of (modern) international relations more generally and the modes and patterns of capitalist "development" and state power in the major Western economies.

For example, Arrighi draws on Marx and Braudel's accounts of leading capitalist centres (Venice, Holland, England, United States) to describe how a series of spatial fixes of increasing scale and scope created the conditions for the resolution of each preceding overaccumulation crisis and the construction of a new phase of material expansion (Arrighi 2005b). Here, Arrighi further stresses that "we should now add that wars played a crucial role" in at least two instances (the transitions from Holland to Britain and from Britain to the United States); whilst "the reallocation of surplus capital from mature to emerging centres began long before the escalation of interstate conflicts", the wars reversed the balance of creditor-debtor relations (Arrighi 2005b, 90).

The early transfers of surplus capital from mature centres established claims on the assets and future incomes of the emerging centres and for a time the mature centres gained flows of interest, profits and rents that equalled or surpassed the original investment. Thus, the position of the incumbent centres in the world of high finance were strengthened for a time. However, "once wars escalated, the creditor-debtor relation that linked the mature to the emerging centres was forcibly reversed" and the reallocation to the emerging centres became both more substantial and permanent (Arrighi 2005b, 90). Indeed, Arrighi suggests that the precise mechanisms of the reversal varied considerably from transition to transition, yet in all cases, "wars were essential ingredients in the change of guard at the commanding heights of world capitalism" (2005b, 90).

Much like Arendt's earlier analyses, such theories suggest that "imperialistic practices" were a critical source of profit in the early stages of capitalist expansion. At the same time they suggest that the policies and actions of the later agencies have been no less imperialistic than those of the earlier ones: "they have become more rather than less so, because of an increasing interpenetration of the capitalist and territorialist strategies of power" (Arrighi 2005b, 92). Arrighi argues that this tendency is evident from comparisons of the historical geography of the successive systemic cycles of accumulation.

David Harvey examines features of the contemporary operations of US-led imperial power within a model that is attentive to the fusions of and tensions between two rather different dimensions or logics of imperialism: "territorial" and "capitalist." The first concerns "the politics of state and empire," which stresses the political, diplomatic and military strategies invoked and used by a state (or some collection of states operating as a "power bloc") in a struggle to assert its interests, goals or hegemony in the world at large (Harvey 2003, 26). Here imperialism comprises a distinctively political project on the part of actors whose power is based in command over territory and a capacity to mobilise its resources towards political, economic and military ends. The second concerns "the molecular processes of capital accumulation in space and time" where imperialism comprises a diffuse political-economic process and where command over and use of capital takes primacy (Harvey 2003, 26). The latter is focused on the ways in which economic power flows across and through continuous space, "towards or away from territorial entities," through "the daily practices of production, trade, commerce, capital flows, money transfers, labour migration, technology transfer … flows of information, cultural impulses and the like" (Harvey 2003, 27).

Harvey emphasise the differences between these two dimensions or logics of imperialism in late modern capitalist societies. Harvey's model also addresses the

continuing roles and evolving forms of "the mechanisms of primitive accumulation" and of "accumulation by dispossession" (e.g. Harvey 2003, 144-49). These include forms of population displacement, biopiracy, new "enclosures" of land, knowledge, information and other resources related to the "global environmental commons." Harvey's account also indicates why and how the old imperialist motivator of control over strategic resources – in this case oil – has played a major role in the military imperialism of the US-led "coalition of the willing" in Iraq.

This brief review indicates how this literature offers subtle but holistic political economy concepts concerning the specificities of the current structures and operations of supra-national processes which go well beyond the limited formulations found in most recent "globalisation" theory (Rosenberg 2000).

The UN, USA and the Operations of Imperialism Post-WW2

So far we have noted that the "words empire and imperialism are back in fashion" (Arrighi 2005a, 23) and indicated some of the alternative conceptual apparatus afforded by the new imperialism literature. But this literature also provides historically grounded accounts of the different phases and forms of global power, hegemony and governance which challenge those associated with the 1990s buzzword of "globalization" (Arrighi 2005a, 23). It addresses the differential roles and forms of the "capitalist" and of "territorial" dimensions of imperialism, the latter including the shifting alliances and tensions between the USA and other subsidiary powers or regional blocs (in Europe and Asia, for example) as well as the UN system of formal multilateral governance.

For example, Arrighi (2005b, 105) describes how the formation and framing of the UN institutions at the end of WW2 was strongly shaped by the preceding thirty years period of world wars, revolutions, counterrevolutions and "the most serious economic breakdown in capitalist history." But the original concept and design of the UN was also heavily shaped by the US as the new superpower of the capitalist "West" and the political strategies developed under President F.D. Roosevelt which assumed that worldwide chaos could be overcome only through a fundamental reorganization of world politics.

In principle and in its original conception or design, the UN amounted to a "revolutionary" model in the history of international relations, in two respects at least. For the first time in world history, there was something resembling an embryonic or tentative institutionalization of the idea of world government (Arrighi 2005b, 106). Second, but no less important, the UN plan was also sparked by the political economy model of Keynesianism that emerged as a new orthodoxy in countries like Britain during the war years and which became manifest in the "New Deal" in the US context. This model was centred on the idea of the mixed economy, defining "full employment" as priority policy goal, and so it accorded big government a new legitimacy in social, welfare, education as well as economic affairs (Arrighi 2005b; Preston 2001).

Clearly, the design and implementation of the UN system of supra-national organisations have been central not only in framing, shaping and legitimating the subsequent international system of political and economic relations, including its modes and phases of (military) coercion, consensus and peace making/keeping. The UN system, and its subsidiary bodies like UNESCO, have also been central to the framing and construction of the subsequent (and hitherto, prevailing) world

communication and information order, including the related new international regimes for human rights, conceptualisations of "communication" rights, responsibilities and ethics and the like. Indeed, the MacBride Report may be defined as but one [albeit exceptional] moment or stage in that history and set of processes. Given that this same UN system (and the wider world political economic system) is currently undergoing a period of intensive restructuring, it is both essential and instructive to locate and re-read the MacBride Report in this wider frame and context.

But, of course, the original idealism and principles of respectful multilateralism informing the design of the UN system of governance were never respected or implemented "in practice." The business interests and political elites refused to fund or support any new system of world governance within which "the US government would have to compromise with the views and interests of friends and foes alike" (Arrighi 2005b, 107). The "threat" in Korea gave Truman what he needed to "scare the hell out of the American people" (ibid), and so manifested another phase of the paranoid style that often characterises the US elites' mode of political rule (Harvey 2003).

Harvey (2003) describes how the now hegemonic US state's foreign strategies in the early postwar decades were a mix of coercion and consent, of multilateralism and unilateralism, including multiple military interventions to displace governments deemed unfriendly to US interests. In Magdoff's account, the organisation of the US-led imperialist system after WW2 was effected through the international agencies established toward the end of the war and the system was consolidated through the activities of various supra-national agencies, several economic and military aid programmes financed and controlled from Washington, as well as a major network of military bases widely spread over the globe (Magdoff 2003, 47). The massive rearmament that followed during and after the Korean war also provided a major boost to the US and world economies (Baran and Sweezy 1966; Arrighi 2005b).

The US imperialism project in the early postwar decades also had another organisational dimension, albeit a more invisible one, not least as recorded in the annals of mainstream communication science. This concerns the multiple front organisations, secret propagandistic initiatives and plain old bribery schemes that were used to encourage and "secure" the loyalty of influential culture workers, politicians, artists and other symbolic analysts. The targets or subjects of these cultural and political fronts of the imperial machine included an impressive array of prominent journalists, authors, artists, academics and their professional associations, as well as politicians (Saunders 1999).

The US-led postwar system achieved a remarkable period of economic growth in the advanced industrial economies. But after a quarter century of sustained economic growth and full employment in the core countries, the accumulation regime that had powered "the great postwar boom" ran out of steam in the mid-1970s. In the ensuing crisis, the economic and political elite's search for a viable new regime took a decisive turn just around the same time as the MacBride Report was published. The Keynesian model of state governance and regulation was abandoned (or at least its progressive, "New Deal" aspects) in favour of the born-again orthodoxies of neo-liberalism – of which intensified forms of "globalization" and

new regimes of privatisation and enclosure of communication and information comprised but one aspect (Preston 2001).

Turning Point: The Neo-Conservative Project in the USA

For most of the 1990s, an "empire elite" model prevailed under the neo-liberal Clinton administration. Soft power was generally preferred to hard, politics was largely conducted in multilateral rather than unilateral terms, and "the rest of the world was treated with considerable multicultural tolerance" (Harvey 2003, 6). But the unfolding tides of change were given a new impetus after GW Bush became US President. In his slipstream, the "neo-conservatives" moved into the centres of state power and began to implement the "Project for a New American Century" marked by an enhanced resort to explicit exercise of imperial power.

As noted, we now witness a significant shift towards the overt recognition of the (hitherto hidden or denied) reality US empire and "imperialism" by those on the political right as well as those of a liberal persuasion. For Harvey, this also indicates that "imperialism might now be taking on a rather different allure" (Harvey 2003, 7). As questions of empire and imperialism become open topics of debate across the political spectrum, this poses challenging questions as to "what, if anything, is new about all of this" (Harvey 2003, 6).

This new-found "openness" on the part of the ruling elites concerning the realities and operations of the USA's (or US-led) imperialism emerged in the late 1990s. Thus, its origins may be traced not only to the demise of the USSR as competing superpower a decade earlier. An important component appears to have been a growing perception amongst the US political elites that other capitalist powers, specifically Europe and Japan, were also becoming relatively less powerful as potential economic rivals to the USA. Thus one important factor in the ending of the US elite's "taboo" surrounding any explicit embrace of "imperialism" in US political economy discourse, has been the perception that other powers are marked by slower economic growth and industrial dynamism compared to the USA. Another is the perception that Europe comprises a weak political and military rival to the USA, for example that it appeared to be unable to act militarily even in its own region without the participation of the USA (Foster 2003, 10).

"A Bang or a Whimper"? US Hegemony on the Wane?

But the belief that the USA has been becoming increasingly powerful and dominant in economic domains over recent times is open to empirical challenge.

First, we must note that there are important question marks hanging over the USA's real economic power and performance in an international context in the early years of the 21st century. Despite all the excited analyses and attention to an emerging "new economy" and a new ICT-based "productivity paradigm" in the USA from the late 1990s, there are many economic analyses which cast a much more pessimistic light on the country's economic performance (e.g. Brenner 2002). The relevant indicators include a decline in the relative international weight or status of the US economy in the early 21st century relative to earlier decades, as well as the large and growing US trade and fiscal deficits about which even the IMF has expressed coded concerns in recent times.

In sum, the evidence points to unfolding (long-run) shifts in the fundamental geo-political and economic templates of the international system to the detriment

of the USA – even if such shifts are (typically) marked by significant variations and imbalances across economic sectors.

The USA's economic position and power appears to remain stronger in specific sectors compared to others. This includes financial services, both directly (e.g. via US-based financial organisations and the role of the dollar as international currency) and via its influential role in international financial institutions. And, of course, it also includes many "information" and communication services. Whether and how the USA's role and position in such service sectors may compensate for declining status in other sectors is a pressing issue on the new imperialism research agenda. It is also one where the political economy of communication research is well positioned to make a major contribution.

One big question here concerns China's emerging and future role as a major player in the Asia region if not in the international economy. Some now define China's growing and potential role as having many parallels with the USA's ascent during the world wars of the first half of the twentieth century. Not surprisingly, there is as much uncertainty and debate as there is concern about whether any meaningful "victory" can be garnered from the US/UK invasion of Iraq or the "war on terrorism" and, indeed, if such can be translated into a new and sustainable global spatial fix or what such a fix might look like (Harvey 2003; Arrighi 2005b).

Turning to non-material aspects such as the status and legitimacy of the USA's international "leadership" role , and the "the politics of recognition," there are many signs that the USA's power and position is now much less dominant than in the past. Indeed the neo-conservative strategies of recent years have much-dinted the USA's accumulation of "soft" or symbolic capital resources in these regards.

A key question for the rest of the world is whether the US elites will adjust to the country's new position via a bang or a whimper. Some analysts detect many dangers in these deep geo-political shifts, not least given the neo-conservative thrust and direction of United States policies in recent years. Harvey, for example, raises a couple of "worst-case" scenarios that may be far-fetched or pessimistic in the extreme, but not implausible. One involves acts of provocation that could spark a conflict with China on a regional and possibly global scale. Another is that United States and Europe might join forces in the kind of "ultra-imperialistic" project which Harvey views as one realistic alternative to "the raw militaristic imperialism" of US neo-conservatives. Arrighi (2005b), who does not rule out the latter possibility, suggests, that both alternatives look less likely today than they did two years ago.

Hence, I flag here that there is a real "risk" that the new explicitness concerning the reality and operations of US imperialism has been accompanied ("balanced") by a new set of taboos or "denials" – concerning the long-run tendencies towards decline in the USA's relative economic power in an international context. Such denials in the body politic are freighted with highly explosive, violent and destructive potentials, especially if the denials operate to mask or obscure shifts in the deep-seated geo-economic dimensions or templates of power and position in the global system.

At Home as Abroad: Imperialism and the "War on Terror"

Classsic theorists of imperialism (such as Hobson and Lenin) and later theorists such as Arendt offer many useful conceptual steers for developing a more rigorous

social and communication theories to address and engage with the challenges of our new times in the early 21st century. For example, it is notable that all share a common emphasis on the close interlinkages between external (imperialist) and domestic or internal political developments. More recent theorists of imperialism illustrate how this aspect can be fruitfully applied to the internal and foreign political developments.

Both Harvey (2003) and Arrighi (2005b) emphasise and demonstrate how this orientation provides important insights for the analysis of contemporary political, economic and military developments. For example, Harvey describes how "this relation between the internal and external conditions of political power has played a significant, if largely hidden, role in the dynamics that have fuelled the conflict with Iraq," not least as they coincided with end of the Cold War (Harvey 2003, 17).

Furthermore, I suggest that this particular orientation has a very direct relevance for contemporary social and communication scholars when seeking to better grasp and engage with significant political, economic and military developments in recent years – and their implications for both national and international communication theory and research.

For example, the unfolding political/policy environment (especially since the September 2001 attacks in New York) has had major, and negative, impacts on the prospects for active, critical and engaged modes of political communication and related citizenship rights in many countries. The "war on terror" and emphasis on "security" have significantly eroded various citizenship and human rights, including those related to the treatment or definitions of prisoners of war. They have reinforced trends towards "information surveillance and intrusive monitoring of citizens" access to information' in multiple ways (Mansell and Nordenstreng 2005, 11). Despite many moments and modes of resistance, the general drift has been towards measures by the public and private sectors that are antithetical to existing human rights legislation. Of course Governments robustly claim these measures are motivated by the interests and active demands of citizens, even as "independent analysis of citizen perspectives on issues of privacy protection and related issues tends to tell a different story" (Mansell and Nordenstreng 2005, 11).

We have witnessed a massive array of new national security-related legislation being introduced in many countries since 2001. It seems that in the ongoing militarisation of international relations and rigorous pursuit of the "war on terror," truth is not the only casualty. Long-established (modern) notions of "information rights" and "communication rights" have come under severe attack. These policy shifts have been criticised and debated by many social movements and mini-public spheres (via the Internet and more traditional media and platforms). But the oppositional forces remain somewhat fragmented and relatively marginalized relative to the changing contours of the debates as re-framed by the dominant elites. Furthermore, the framing principles and grounds of debate over communication rights are now more uncertain and highly contested "even among civil society actors" not to mention much of the academic research community (Mansell and Nordenstreng 2005, 11).

Some Implications for "International Communication" Studies

I believe that the discussion presented above poses some specific implications for the communication studies field.

The 25 year period since the MacBride Report was published has witnessed multiple deep changes in the international political economic (including, military) system/order. For example, the USA's more assertive unilateralism and imperialism since the late 1990s is clearly marked by:

- A heightened propensity for war and aggressive moves against other countries. But we must remember that the existence of imperialism cannot be derived (solely or mainly from the fact or threat of wars, as "on the contrary, the existence of wars is explained in terms of imperialism" (Foster 2003, 11).
- A highly aggressive and selective approach to the observance and application of the established regimes of multi-lateral governance in areas such as human rights, citizenship rights, the rules of war and treatment of prisoners, protection of privacy;
- This rampant unilateralism and militarism has succeeded in greatly diminishing the store of legitimacy and respect that the USA commands for its international leadership role amongst powerful sections of civil society in other countries;
- The new US imperialism and unilateralism is now also marked by a much-expanded and assertive use of propagandistic, PR and surveillance modes of international communication;
- This new US imperialism includes expanded budgets for propaganda initiatives targeting key cultural producers and symbolic analysts and their professional associations (a revival of tactics used during "the culture wars" of the early cold war period, but now such resources and "love-bombing" devices are mobilised in an effort to redress the demise in international legitimacy)

These shifts, especially the "new imperialism" and a more assertive US unilateralism since the late 1990s, in turn imply significant changes in the very structures, functioning and principles (policy/regulatory regimes) that framed the international communication order in previous decades—not to mention the domestic communication order in the US "homeland." For example, these major shifts pose fundamentally new questions about how to conceptualise the contemporary operations and governing principles of international communication, including their linkages to changes in the forms of international political, economic, cultural and military power and associated conflicts. They severely challenge, if not undermine, key aspects of whole edifice of universal (and multi-lateral) "human rights" regimes and associated "communication rights" that has been painfully and slowly constructed over the previous century, and especially since the formation of the UN system.

The advent of the new USA-led imperialism, including the features and operations described above, all pose significant challenges for the communication studies field – especially, but not exclusively, international communication studies. For example, these developments appear to me to require or suggest:

- Expanded efforts to re-conceptualise the roles and features of political, economic, military and cultural/symbolic power (including communication power) and the relations between these different domains or faces of power in light of the new imperialism and unilateralism described above;
- A fundamental review of the validity, basis and limits of the presumed boundaries between "international communication studies" on the one hand and plain old (presumably national or "homeland") communication studies on

the other, and of their differential applications in various settings;

- Major research efforts to address the implications of the new imperialism and unilateralism for the principles and practice of communication rights, information exchange/dialogue and cultural and human rights in the international context;
- An urgent effort to reflexively and explicitly address the mega-inequalities in the very structures and practices of what passes for "communication studies," especially when viewed in an international frame. This includes critical interrogation of the social situatedness of professional practice (knowledge production) in the communication studies fields, and the massive inequalities that pervade the distribution of knowledge products in this "scientific" field (inequalities that, in some respects, equal those found in the services sectors that comprise the field's objects of study);
- There is a pressing need for scholars to strengthen links with progressive social movements inside and outside the USA in the struggle to reassert the principles of multilateralism and dialogue in international politics and communication practices;
- This further implies a search for more rigorous internal standards or ethics which serve to better sensitise academic research, writing and editorial practices in this field as to the legitimacy of claims to "universal" status or reach, and more fully reflect and respect the diversity of the world's social values and cultural experiences, values, narratives, and "stories."

Finally, I suggest that these developments offer real opportunities for a reinvigorated political economy of communication to make significant contributions to the wider fields of contemporary international relations studies more generally. This is especially so in light of the increasing roles and implications diverse communication services and "information" functions and the alleged tendencies/shifts towards an "information" or "knowledge" society.

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