

## Conference Paper

# The Concepts "Cultural Imperialism" and "Empireness" Between Postcolonial and Cultural Studies Approaches

**Gudova I.V.**

Ural Federal University, Yekaterinburg, Russia

### Abstract

In this article, the author asks how we can combine postcolonial and cultural studies approaches in relation to the analysis of the concepts of "cultural imperialism" and "empireness". That these terms should be included in functional academic vocabulary is an indisputable fact: postcolonial studies penetrate the humanities, including the philosophy of culture and cultural studies. The article is based on the works of D. Bachmann-Medick, O. Boyd-Barrett, and H. Munkler. Based on the theory of the latter, this paper presents an interpretation of the concept of "empireness". In conclusion, the most promising areas of research at the junction of the two methodologies are considered, namely, the study of how mass culture is utilized in building the policy of cultural imperialism.

Corresponding Author:

Gudova I.V.

Received: 12 February 2019

Accepted: 21 February 2019

Published: 3 March 2020

Publishing services provided by  
**Knowledge E**

 Gudova I.V.. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use and redistribution provided that the original author and source are credited.

Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the Man in the world of culture Conference Committee.

**Keywords:** cultural imperialism, empireness, postcolonial studies, H. Munkler

## 1. Introduction

Despite the intensive and expanding use of cross-cultural relations in academic research, the concept of "cultural imperialism", used by many 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century scholars (such as J. Galtung [1], E. Said [2] and others) – raises a large number of questions. This research subject begins to spread in Russia, for example, in the works of O. Yazovskaya [3]. Some of questions are based on the scholarly compromise of the term "imperialism", others on the seemingly strange combination of heterogeneous concepts – "culture, cultural" and "imperialism".

Sociology of culture has developed several concepts describing intercultural interactions – "acculturation", "assimilation", "inculturation", "globalization", "multiculturalism", "Americanization" – which describe the world order formed after the end of the Second World War; the notion of "cultural imperialism" is not widely used in the sociological categorical and conceptual system.

In turn, researchers from former colonies (H. Bhabha [4], G. Spivak [5], E. Said [6], Dal Y.J. [7], and others) developed a categorical and conceptual apparatus for studying the

 **OPEN ACCESS**

processes, systems, and relations that have developed in the postcolonial world order from the point of view of the ex-colonies. The emerging methodology of postcolonial research, which resulted from the work of these scholars, is becoming more and more popular. D. Bachmann-Medick notes that the postcolonial turn is happening in many sciences: theology, literary studies, translation studies, history, history of science, philosophy, art history and theater studies, ethnology, geography and gender studies [8, pp. 245-257]. The interdisciplinarity of the postcolonial approach is what makes the concepts first developed within the methodology of postcolonial and intercultural research and later within the specialized branches of knowledge, enter the arsenal of cultural studies and the philosophy of culture. The study of culture, whether in cultural studies or philosophy of culture, often provides a metatheory for these fields synthesizing knowledge of various disciplines, including those listed above.

## 2. Discussion

### 2.1. The concept of "cultural imperialism"

Today one of the new problem fields of cultural studies and the philosophy of culture is the study of cultural imperialism. In its most general definition, cultural imperialism is the dominance of a more powerful culture over another, less powerful one. Of course, these processes have been explored since the development of globalization studies. Such concepts as "hegemony" and "domination" have been already established in the academic discourse. The need to introduce the new term of "cultural imperialism" is due to the explanatory potential postcolonial methodology possesses for studying the interrelations between different national and regional cultures, allowing to switch from the point of view of the dominant Center to the Peripheral point of view, and to consider the extension of the Center's Peripheral power through culture.

A striking manifestation of the phenomenon of cultural imperialism analyzed in the relevant research is the imperial ambitions of the dominant Center, the desire to implement policies in ways developed during the existence of classical empires, even though modern states are not the empires either politically or in their military-economic status. Thus, the concept of "cultural imperialism" in this methodology works at the intersection of such research areas as political science, history, cultural studies, philosophy of culture.

It seems that the processes of assimilation and acculturation, seen through the postcolonial discourse, are tools for building the policy of cultural imperialism. These processes have delineated a new problem field for cultural studies and the philosophy

of culture, i.e. the study of imperial intention within a culture using the discourse of postcolonial methodology.

## 2.2. The concept of "empireness"

One of the main research questions is how to determine the cultural imperial intention, which allows us to speak not just about cultural domination, but about the phenomenon of cultural imperialism. In line with the proposed hypothesis, we assume that the imperial ambitions of the state allow us to call such features of state power-related behavior the "empireness". It should be noted that a single definition of the concept of "empireness" does not exist at the moment. It can be argued that this category is essential for studying the empires of the new type and the phenomenon of cultural imperialism. The proposed hypothesis is that the concept of imperialism is defined by an intention to implement imperialism of any kind, including cultural one. The concept of "empireness", as well as of imperialism, arises in relation to classical empires, but then the scope of its usage broadens. Thus, any empire, whether classical or non-classical, can become a carrier of imperialism and implement the imperialist policies.

In this case, to define the concept of "empireness", we will consider the contexts in which this concept is used by H. Munkler in his work *The Empire. The logic of world domination* [9]. On the one hand, the term "empireness" here is used to describe a kind of state structure. In his opinion, empireness is not an alternative to statehood, but, on the contrary, is a part of it, overlaying state structures [9, p. 26]. This notion is precisely what allows us to posit the existence of non-classical empires in modern society. On the other hand, the countries to which the category of "empireness" is applicable build their foreign policy not from the position of communication between equal subjects, but from the position of relations between the dominant and the dependent states [9, p. 35]. Finally, the term "empireness" is used to describe the intentions of a country to become an empire of new type, i.e. to indicate the imperial intentions of a country [9, pp. 66, 86, 89, 94]. H. Munkler notes that empireness is precisely what allows a country to change its status in foreign policy from hegemonic to imperial. Thus, according to H. Munkler, any country of the postcolonial era that possesses empireness, is shaped as a state in which the attributes of an empire are transferred to the symbolic sphere – for example, to the limits of influence. Such a country has a desire to become an empire and builds foreign policy based on the model of relations between the dominant Center and the dependent Periphery.

All three features of empireness require consideration in terms of the theory of culture. In the postcolonial era, dominance in the symbolic sphere plays an important role. As mentioned above, cultural, rather than the physical, borders of the state are increasingly more important. The dominant Center begins to influence the Periphery in the cultural field: for example, setting the world language (linguistic imperialism) or controlling information flows (communication imperialism), including scientific information (scientific imperialism). A country claiming the status of an empire strives to dominate not only in economic development and the arms race but also in the ranking of universities, the Nobel Prizes, the Olympic medals, the number of Oscars, etc. [9, p. 68].

### 2.3. Cultural imperialism and empireness in mass culture

In postcolonial studies, the United States are described as the most common example of cultural imperialism with pronounced and proven empireness. Mass culture has the primary importance in the implementation of the policy of cultural imperialism. O. Boyd-Barrett focuses on digital media, including news, films, television, music, computer and video games, software, and advertising [10, pp. 183-192] and so forth. American mass culture is one of the most globally widespread. In our view, the research of mass culture makes it possible to demonstrate that the USA is a hegemon, and perhaps even an empire of a new type. Much importance in the study of cultural imperialism (E. Said [2], H. Munkler [9], O. Boyd-Barrett [10]) is given to the USA film industry represented by films and TV shows. Thus, it is necessary to explore in detail the imperial nature of American mass culture in order to understand, why mass culture plays an important role in the implementation of the policy of cultural imperialism and, as a result, in the implementation of such processes as acculturation, assimilation, and Americanization.

## 3. Summary

The concept of “cultural imperialism” is the result of studies of the postcolonial world order by the researchers from the former colonies – that is, representing the viewpoint of the oppressed and colonized.

The concept of “empireness” describes a certain characteristic of imperial consciousness and, of imperial politics that characterize the empires of the new type.

The field of cultural studies, which serves as a meeting ground for sociologists, researchers of postcolonial relations and researchers of imperial cultures, is the field

of mass culture studies, where all these processes intersect and manifest themselves most vividly.

Thus, it can be concluded that the concepts of “cultural imperialism” and “empire-ness”, which originated within the field of post-colonial studies, have today entered the philosophical and cultural narratives and that their development is important both practically and theoretically for the further development of all academic disciplines that deal in any way with the themes of interrelations of different cultures.

## 4. Funding

This study was funded by RFBR, research project No.18-311-00273.

## References

- [1] Galtung J. A Structural Theory of Imperialism, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 8, Iss.2, pp. 81-117 <http://jpr.sagepub.com/content/8/2/81.full.pdf+html> (1971).
- [2] Said E. W. *Culture and Imperialism*, London: Random House, (1993).
- [3] Yazovskaya O. Concept of Kokutai as National Essence in the Foundation of Japan's Imperial Subjectness in Late XIX – First Half of XX Century, *Abstracts & Proceedings of SOCIOINT 2018 – 5th International Conference on Education, Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2–4 July 2018, Dubai, U.A.E, Istanbul: OCERINT Publishing, pp. 437–442, (2018).
- [4] Bhabha H. *The Location of Culture*, London, New York: Routledge, (1994).
- [5] Spivak G. *Can the Subaltern Speak? Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* London: Macmillan, (1988).
- [6] Said E. *Orientalism*, New York: Random House, (1979).
- [7] Dal Y. J. Reinterpretation of Cultural Imperialism: Emerging Domestic Market vs Continuing US Dominance, *Mass Culture and Society*, Vol. 29, Iss. 5, pp. 753–771, (2007).
- [8] Bachmann-Medick D. *Kul'turnye povoroty. Novye orientiry v naukah o kul'ture*, Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, (2017).
- [9] Munkler H. *Imperii. Logika gospodstva nad mirom: ot Drevnego Rima do USA*, Moscow: Kuchkovo pole, (2015).
- [10] Boyd-Barrett O. *Лул'turnyj imperialism, Har'kov: "Gumanitarnyj centr", (2018).*