

E-Colonialism

(Impact on Local Culture)

Suja V J

Guest Lecture

Department of History, Carmel College
Thrissur Dt, Kerala

Abstract -- Electronic Colonialism theory explains how mass media are leading to a new concept of empire. It will not be one based on military power or land acquisition but one based on controlling the mind. It is a psychological or mental empire. The global media are collectively influencing the minds, attitudes, values and languages of individuals around the globe.

Keywords — *E-colonialism, colonialism, imperialism*

I. INTRODUCTION

The 20th century witnessed a revolution in communication that transformed practically every aspects of daily life. The changes were the fruit of a remarkable cluster of scientific breakthroughs in the 40 years before the First World War. Today computers are an inherent part of the life. From work, to school, to entertainment and elsewhere the e-world is the new normal across Western nations. Just as the previous era of industrial age had profound effects on the social and geographical order-think colonization-now the communication/media enterprises are doing the same restructuring of life, work and social order. Historiography received a technological boost in the 1960s and up to the present with the advent and wide use of computers and computational software packages and its dissemination in the periodical literature and in the training in the social sciences historians.

II. E-COLONIALISM: IMPACT ON LOCAL CUTURE

Colonialism is a system of domination, exploitation and underdevelopment of one society by another. Colonialism does not preserve the pre-colonial social structure but it transforms the colony into the integral part of the world capitalist system.¹ Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese explorer, was the first European to venture to India in 1498 and set a precedent and early stage of colonization. The British quickly seized on the concept, utilizing their superior naval power to create a broadly based British Commonwealth. Spain, France, Netherlands and others quickly followed suit. British government was committed to a laissez faire policy and it was a policy of discriminatory intervention. Since 1813 when Indian trade was freed from the monopoly of the East India Company,

¹. Bipan Chandra, *Essays on Colonialism*, New Delhi, 2006, p.v.

India came to be considered as a lucrative field for British private capital investment, chiefly in railway, jute industry, tea plantation, and mining. Indian money market was dominated by the European banking houses.² This created platform of Industrial Revolution.

Colonizers sought resources at home and, in return, sent colonial administration, immigrants, and a language, educational system, religion, culture, laws and lifestyle that were not traditional in the colonized country.³ Prior World War I, when international communication consisted primarily of mail, some newspapers were crossing national borders, as was limited electronic communication, which was a mixture of wireless and telegraph system using Morse code. There was no international communication theory. It was only after the end of World War II in 1945 that there was substantial international expansion of the mass media and trans-border activities involving communication as well as cultural products. Global advertising also became a growth era.⁴

Telegraphic communications tied the whole world into a single network, allowing European to gather information and coordinate military and political decision making.⁵ The information economy relies substantially on cable, satellites, telecommunications and computer technology to analyze, transfer, store and communicate information. The electronic revolution has shrunk the worlds of finance, commerce and education. Billions of dollars or yen can be transferred at a press of a button.⁶

Throughout the history colonialism has assumed different forms and imposed over a range of civilization. The last phase and new form of colonialism is the Electronic Colonialism Theory (ECT). This theory was first started by Tom McPhail and is about the impact on the mind of repeated mass media messages, including commercials, on audiences around the world. Just as

². Sekhal Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition A History of Modern India*, New Delhi, 2009, p. 130.

³. V.S Venkatesan and Neetha Nambiar, *E-Colonialism-The New Challenge of the 21st Century*, Australia, 2003, p.1.

⁴. Thomas L McPhail, *E-colonialism Theory: How Trends are Changing the World*, 2014, p.2.

⁵. Thomas F X Noble, *Western Civilization Beyond Boundaries* fifth edition, New York, p.744.

⁶. Richard Overy, *Complete History of the World*, London, 2007, p.548.

earlier colonial institution, like Great Britain, sought out soil anywhere in the world for colonies, now multimedia giants seek to capture the eyeballs, ears and minds of millions of viewers, readers or listeners. Disney, MTV, Netflix, Comcast, Hollywood, CNN, BBC, Fox, Google, the Internet, and others-all seek to influence, not by force of arms, but by packaging media to attract large audiences for advertisers around the globe. The mass media over time will impact more individuals- primarily using the English language- to become more similar as indigenous films and artifacts become marginalized by a cultural tsunami created by high quality and mass produced media messages and systems.

Just as mercantile colonialism focused on empires seeking the toil and soil of others, frequently as colonies, so now ECT looks at how to capture the minds and, the consumer habits of others. ECT focuses on how global media systems, including advertising, influence how people look, think, and act. The aim of ECT is to account for how the mass media influences the mind. Just as the era of the industrial revolution focused on manual labor, raw materials, and then finished products, so also the digitally based information revolution now seeks to focus on the role and consequences concerning the mind, global consumer behavior, and the structural changes across many aspects of life.⁷

Consider how culture is conveyed in a multimedia world. Historically books, grandparents, and tribal elders played a central role in recreating, transmitting, and transferring culture. They relied on oral communication along with family, community, or tribal connections. Culture is basically an attitude; it is also learned. It is the learning of shared language and perceptions that are incorporated in the mind through education, repetition, ritual, family, history, media, or mimicking. In terms of the media's expanding role here are a few examples. Examples of media systems that attract heavy users are Hollywood movies, MTV, ESPN, soap operas, CNN, the Internet, and video games. These systems tend to be the output of global communication giants, such as Time Warner, Disney, Viacom, Sony, and News Corp. Collectively they have the real potential to displace or alter previous cultural values, language, lifestyles or habits, activities, and family rituals. This is particularly true for heavy users of one or two external media. Over time, E-colonialism theory states that these changes can and usually do impact friends, family, and community ties. A virtual community of new friends who share two things replace: first, a preoccupation with identical media, such as MTV, talk radio, Facebook, Twitter, or Al-Jazeera; and, second, the embedded media culture that involves new or different messages, perceptions, learning, and habits. An example of this is the new subculture of black slang. It is at the core of the new media-induced culture for this group. Rap music, movies, concerts, dress, and playgrounds repeat and reinforce this niche linguistic and dress trend. For foreign

nations this frequently represent a tidal wave of media swamping indigenous cultures.⁸

The socialization process is hijacked by the media empires rather than the colonial empires of days gone by. It is as if we have moved with modernization from a tribal state where culture was located in a fixed territory, region, or nation to a mediated state of mind where we might have more in common with someone or some group halfway around the world via social media or MTV, or ESPN, rather than in our own house, school, or neighborhood.⁹

Now with ECT a new culture has emerged that is a global phenomenon driven primarily by large multimedia conglomerates. They control, reproduce, and spread the global flow of words, images, and sounds. They seek to impact the audiences' minds without regard to geography. Their audiovisual products become sold and standardized without regard to time or space. They are marketed to international consumers who come to view their world outlook and buying habits as the logical outcome of a new media culture, as outlined and identified by ECT. For example, many Hollywood films and DVD sales now make more revenue outside the United States than at home, while MTV, Disney, Apple, Microsoft, and Google have more aggressive expansion plans outside the United States than within it. IBM is a good example. Over 70 percent of all IBM employees work and live outside the United States. For many conglomerates the US domestic market is saturated, just like across Europe, and thus offshore sales, audiences, consumers – that is, expansion – is a logical trend that is enabled and explained by the phenomenon of ECT. The leading international communication giants describe themselves as global companies and not US, European, or Japanese companies. Their corporate strategic plans all focus on expanding global markets and on developing products and services for international consumption. They position themselves as stakeholders, beneficiaries, and advocates of the global economy. They are the foot-soldiers of electronic colonialism.¹⁰

Currently, developing countries appear to dominate the Internet with the developing world left in the sidelines. This is revealed by a perfunctory search of the Internet- most websites are in English and usually sourced from the United States. For instance, half of the world's 6500 languages were expected to disappear during the twenty-first century.¹¹ If measures are not taken to locate sites in the developing world and established them as information providers, most developing countries may become 'electronic colonies' that are force-fed information generated by the developed world.¹²

Twenty first century promises to be one in which the full significance of global automation of information will be felt and with this will come the various effects of e-

⁸. Ibid., p.2-3.

⁹. Ibid.

¹⁰. Ibid

¹¹. Thomas F X Noble, op.cit., p.971.

¹². V.S Venkatesan and Neetha Nambiar, op.cit., p.1.

⁷. Thomas L McPhail, op.cit., p. 2.

colonialism. While the Internet facilities the sharing of information globally, it also threatens cultural diversity, the loss of local culture and languages and the manipulation of the less developed. The impact of e-colonialism can potentially be just as that of mercantile colonialism in the nineteenth century.

The solution does not lie in restricting the spread of information technology. The information revolution has brought numerous benefits to society and any attempts to eradicate the Internet would be counterproductive. What is required are strategies to confront the issues presented by e-colonialism by bridging the technological divide created by the information revolution through improved technological access to the developing world. The 'colonization' of the technologically poor must be impeded by improving the accessibility of Internet across and between nations to ensure that no one is left behind in the global movement towards technological advancement.

REFERENCE

- [1] Bandyopadhyay Sekhal , "From Plassey to Partition A History of Modern India", Orient BlackSwan Publishers, New Delhi, 2009.
- [2] Chandra Bipan, "Essays on Colonialism", Orient BlackSwain Publishers, New Delhi, 2006.
- [3] F.X, Noble Thomas, "Western Civilization Beyond Boundaries" 5th Ed., Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2008.
- [4] L McPhail Thomas, "E-colonialism Theory: How Trends are Changing the World", Wharton Publications, 2014.
- [5] Richard Overy, "Complete History of the World", HarperCollins Publishers, London, 2007.
- [6] Venkatesan, V S and Nambiar, Neetha, "E-Colonialism- the New Challenge in 21st Century", Idea Group Publishers, Australia, 2003.