

Hollywood

TOBY MILLER

Hollywood – shorthand for the mainstream United States film and television drama industry – has always been at the center of globalization, in three ways. First, export markets have always been crucial to it. Second, it has long drawn on creative labor from overseas, and shot movies overseas, in search of economies of production. And third, its export success has led to concerns about the exercise of cultural imperialism.

After World War I, the European film industries were decimated. The United States had been a net importer of both film stock and movies until this point, but the option was now there to sell. The state and commerce departments began a series of services to push Hollywood exports. World War II offered another shock to European industries, whereas Hollywood used the Marshall Plan of reconstruction as a tool to require recipients to open up their markets immediately to US cinema.

Since that time, a combination of the state exerting economic pressure, the ability to clear production costs domestically, and the use of the New International Division of Cultural Labor (NICL) has kept Hollywood in its position of global dominance. Externally, the US government and industry set up new cartels to market films everywhere, with special agencies created for Anglophone and Francophone Africa. Hollywood's American Motion Picture Export Company of Africa, for example, dominated cinema sales to former British colonies from the 1960s, when the continent screened about 350 films a year, perhaps half of them from the United States. All this is enabled by the US state via close to 200 publicly-funded film commissions, Pentagon money and facilities, ambassadorial services, and massive use of state funds from other nations.

US companies own between 40 and 90 percent of the movies shown in most parts of the world. Between 1977 and 1996, US copyright industries – as that country likes to call them, overwriting the term “culture” and ensuring comprehensive governmentalization and commodification – grew three times as quickly as the overall economy. Between 1980 and 1998, annual world trade in texts from the cultural industries increased from US \$95.3 billion to US \$387.9 billion. The most popular 39 films across the world in 1998 came from Hollywood, and as that happened, the condition of other major filmmaking countries was declining: the percentage of the box office taken by indigenous films was down to 10 percent in Germany, 12 percent in Britain, 26 percent in France, 12 percent in Spain, 2 percent in Canada, 4 percent in Australia and 5 percent in Brazil – all dramatic decreases, to record low levels in some cases. These figures represented a significant change from the earlier part of the decade, when European audiences for domestic films had increased. In Eastern Europe, the story was equally dramatic. Whereas the USSR had released 215 films in 1990, the number was just 82 by 1995 – half the number of films imported from the United States. Hollywood's proportion of the world market is double what it was in 1990, and the European film industry is one-ninth of its size in 1945. US companies make almost US \$11 billion by exporting film.

An analysis of films on television finds that Hollywood pictures drew the highest audiences in 27 nations across all continents in 2009. Fox International made US \$200 million in 2005 from overseas sales; five years later, it was a billion. 80 percent of programming for children outside the white-settler colonies and China comes from the United States in the twenty-first century. Nickelodeon, for example, is available in well over 150 countries. So viewers across Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and

South Africa are familiar with *SpongeBob SquarePants*. In Western Europe, the dominant TV drama series in 2007 were *CSI: Miami*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Lost*, *Without a Trace*, and *The Simpsons*. In Asia, 25 million fans were watching the three *CSI* shows. Hollywood is forever seeking to expand: in China and India, the desire is to build and own movie theaters, utilize “piracy” as a free form of advertising, then once the exhibition sector is bigger, become more serious about policing copyright. China is already a major site of runaway production. Europe remains a good place to exploit postsocialist states, which have highly-trained and cheap film technicians as well as tax breaks and compliant governments.

Hollywood’s NICL operates through a blend of comprehensive studio facilities and fetishized roles in the labor process that rely on the disaggregation of production across space. The NICL is adapted from the idea of a new international division of labor: developing markets for labor and sales, and the shift from the spatial *sensitivities* of electrics to the spatial *insensitivities* of electronics, pushed businesses beyond treating developing countries as suppliers of raw materials, to look on them as shadow-setters of the price of work, competing among themselves and with the first world for employment. As production was split across continents, the prior division of the globe into a small number of wealthy countries and a majority of underdeveloped ones was compromised. Hollywood has managed to export and even refine domestic disciplinary systems, effectively disempowering and deskilling the workers they hire offshore by monopoly practices, thereby undermining indigenous *bourgeoisies’* capacity for capital formation.

The NICL covers a variety of workers within the culture industries, whatever their part in the commodity chain. So, it includes janitors, accountants, drivers, and tourism commissioners as well as scriptwriters, best boys, and radio announcers. Cinema is now rather like the Internet-based systems of banking, marketing, and ticketing in its 24-hour-a-day use of regional hubs that

service various nations and industrial sectors, be they in otherwise less developed or highly developed nations. Advances in communications technology permit electronic off-line editing, synchronized special effects and musical scores across the world through digital networks and special effects, thereby problematizing the very need for location shooting. Instantaneous transfer of digital sounds and images is the norm, with labor fetishized through its disarticulation from texts in terms of both work and place.

Hollywood has always met with resistance via the discourse of cultural imperialism, which questions the customs and patriotic feelings exhibited by collective human subjects – the grout of national and regional culture. So Hollywood makes you a knowledgeable and loyal national subject, or a *naïf* who is ignorant of local tradition and history. Cultural belonging is the touchstone of the model, which interrogates the geopolitical origin of texts and the themes and styles they embody, with particular attention to the putatively nation-building genre of drama. Critiques of cultural imperialism are found in everyday talk, unions, international organizations, newspapers, cultural policy, diplomacy, and postindustrial service-sector planning. Many Islamic religious leaders and scholars, for example, attack secular, pro-Western elites dominating television to the exclusion of faith-based media and governance. In Nigeria, it is said that violent gangs have formed in emulation of twenty-first century US screen versions. In Jordan and Saudi Arabia, reality television is the object of *fatwas* from the Muslim Brotherhood, because it is deemed to aid globalization and Yanqui interests. Less spectacularly, protectionism around the world continues to leaven US textual power.

SEE ALSO: Cultural imperialism.

FURTHER READING

Bielby, D.D. & Harrington, C.L. (2008) *Global TV: Exporting Television and Culture in the*

- World Market*. New York University Press, New York.
- Hozic, A. (2001) *Hollyworld: Space, Power, and Fantasy in the American Economy*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.
- Miller, T. (2010) *Television Studies: The Basics*. Routledge, London.
- Miller, T., Govil, N., McMurria, J. et al. (2005) *Global Hollywood 2*. British Film Institute, London.
- Trumpbour, J. (2002) *Selling Hollywood to the World: US and European Struggles for Mastery of the Global Film Industry, 1920–1950*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.