

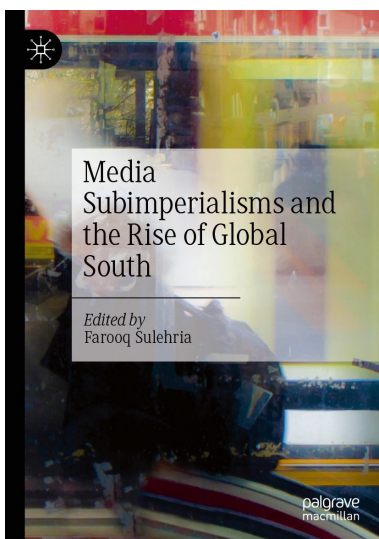
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Brics media

# BRICS media are not an alternative for anti-imperial resistance

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**On the sidelines of the conference, he also held book talks at the State University of Londrina and the Federal University of Santa Maria. The text below is based on his book talks and his intervention during an event organised by CADTM under the auspices of the First Anti-Fascist Conference. The CADTM event, titled *Are the BRICS an alternative to imperialism and neo-fascism?*, took place at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS).**

The emergence of media powerhouses in the global South, such as India, Brazil, Turkey, and South Korea, has captivated media scholars, politicians, and the general public alike. Qatar (with Al Jazeera) and South Africa also play significant roles on the international media stage. While liberal and postmodern academics based in metropolitan universities have framed the rise of these media giants as a sign of the decline of media imperialism, politicians in the global North have used this phenomenon for fear-mongering. For example, Hillary Clinton, who was the Secretary of State at the time, cautioned the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee in 2011 about Al Jazeera, stating, '*America is facing an information warfare...and we are losing that war.*'

There is no denying the fact that certain sub-imperial countries have fostered mighty media giants. *Zee* (India), *Globo* (Brazil), *Televisa* (Mexico) or *Showmax* (South Africa) immediately come to mind. Turkish *diziler* (soap operas) have captivated the Muslim world, while a global audience has embraced K-pop and K-wave films. From Bong Jo Ho's Oscar-winning *Parasite* (2019) to *Squid Game* (2019) on Netflix, South Korean media productions are captivating worldwide audiences. In 2023, 4 of Netflix's 10 most-watched non-English shows were South Korean productions. In the meantime, *Showmax* is capturing African media markets and audiences. Before evaluating the economic, political, and ideological role of sub-imperial media conglomerates, it is important to differentiate between BRICS media and media sub-imperialism.

BRICS consists of imperial (China and Russia), sub-imperial (Brazil, South Africa, and India), and strong-periphery (Egypt and Iran) countries. It is not a monolithic, homogenous category. On the contrary, sub-imperialism—hence, media sub-imperialism—is a cogent term to specifically identify and place certain nation-states in the global hierarchy of countries. The sub-imperial media are defined by three characteristics. Media sub-imperialism resist as well as collaborate with imperial media. Imperial media partially dominate media sub-imperialism, but they also emerge as the regionally dominant actors. Media sub-imperialism are partially independent (technologically, content-wise) while largely dependent on imperial media in various ways.

Economically, sub-imperial media plough up the domestic (and surrounding peripheries') media markets for the benefit of imperial media. They serve as the facilitators in the process of accumulation in the metropolitan markets. Consider, for instance, the case of India.

*Zee*, founded by media maverick Subhash Chandra, was India's first privately owned television channel, symbolising India's neo-liberal turn in the early 1990s. *Zee*, as a mannequin for neo-liberal globalisation, catalysed Rupert Murdoch's entry into India through joint ventures. Both parted ways soon afterwards, but *Zee* and *Star* (Indian arm of Murdoch's News Corp.), by the 2010s, had become two of the top five media monopolies dominating India's flourishing television markets. The other three: *Disney*, *Viacom*, and *Sony* were also Hollywood giants. The imperial conglomerates often arrived in India by way of joint ventures with Indian media houses as their junior partners. Both sides benefited. Indian players in the shorter run. Metropolitan chaebols in the long run. Consider the case of *Zee*. Accessible in 172 countries, it offered a bouquet of 39 global channels (13 in non-Indian languages). It developed a noticeable footprint in the Middle East and Africa.

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In 2021, Zee was bought over by Sony (deal legalised in 2023). Meantime, Star was sold to Disney. Now, Indian television (and, to some extent, the film industry) is an extension of Hollywood, albeit it speaks Hindi and other vernacular dialects. It is Indian in form and American in terms of political economy.

Politically, the new media conglomerates, grounded in the sub-imperial media markets, have supported authoritarian regimes in their respective countries. *Reporters Without Borders (RSF)* has issued global *Freedom Index* rankings since 2005. See below some selected case studies:

Country	Year	Ranking	Out of
South Africa			
2005	31	167	
2010	38	178	
2015	39	180	
2020	31	180	
2025	27	180	

Country	Year	Ranking	Out of
India			
2005	106	167	
2010	122	178	
2015	135	180	
2020	142	180	
2025	151	180	

Country	Year	Ranking	Out of
South Korea			
2005	34	167	
2010	42	178	
2015	60	180	
2020	42	180	
2025	61	180	

Country	Year	Ranking	Out of
Brazil			
2005	63	167	
2010	58	178	
2015	99	180	
2020	107	180	
2025	63	180	

While media freedoms have radically plummeted in India and South Korea, the graph in Brazil dipped considerably during the Bolsonaro period. However, in South Africa, it remains rather stable despite occasional downward trends.

This is understandable. In India, the country's richest man, Anil Ambani, through his Reliance Industries Limited, aggressively bought over mainstream media outlets and turned them into mouthpieces of Prime Minister Modi's *Bharatiya Janata Party/Indian People's Party (BJP)*. Critics in India mockingly call mainstream media "Godi Media" (implying lapdog media). In Turkey, ironically, Fox TV News (Rupert Murdoch again!) is considered a beacon of hope since the rest of the mainstream serves as Erdogan's spokesperson. True, *Globo* has a dubious position about Bolsonaro. *Globo* critiques many things about Bolsonaro's politics but is also supportive of other aspects. However,

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*Globo* has a clear negative position on President Lula. And by the way, neither are they coming to the Empire nor is Uncle Sam losing the propaganda war. The audience share controlled by *Al Jazeera*, China's CCTV, or Russia's RT in the US market is negligible.

Ideologically, sub-imperial media are neither counter-hegemonic in relation to media imperialism nor progressive. This argument holds true for "BRICS media" too. Thus concludes noted media scholar Lee Artz's study on transnational media from China to Turkey: "Media hegemony ... indicates that emerging media prefer the lead media as a model because the lead media had already become a norm. The emerging media adopt production values, distribution practices and social use along the lines of the hegemonic media model for two reasons. One is the hegemonic media, which pre-emptively normalises media practices for late developers. Second, one may assign it to the condition of path dependency. This is how production relations and practices of a particular system of production, distribution, and use become hegemonic/dominant and all-pervasive.' Most importantly, Prof. Artz notes that the profit motive depoliticises and sanitises media content in both South Korea and Brazil, just as it does in Hollywood. The global South media giants promote consumerism and neo-liberal individualism, similar to imperial media, while avoiding themes of class struggle.

In short, the media giants from the global South are neither an ally of the left nor an alternative to the imperial media.

PS:

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