

# Mass media and ideological globalisation\*

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Economic and political globalisation are inevitably accompanied by a kind of ideological globalisation, a transnational ideology which legitimises them. In other words, an ideology to justify, on the one hand, the minimisation of the state's role in the economy—which, in a market economy system implies a corresponding maximisation of the role of the market and private capital—and, on the other, the decrease of national sovereignty, which complements the corresponding decrease of economic sovereignty implied by economic globalisation. The core, therefore, of ideological globalisation consists of two basic “dogmas”: the dogma of limited economic sovereignty and the dogma of limited national sovereignty.

According to the former dogma, capitalist neoliberal globalisation imposed by the international economic organisations (International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organisation) on all their members—by directly or indirectly forcing them to ‘liberate’ their commodity, capital and labour markets—is, supposedly, to the benefit of all, as it leads to more efficient growth, cheaper goods and services etc. However, the ‘liberation’ of markets in conditions of economic inequality also implies an even greater concentration of economic power at the hands of a few and at the expense of most. It, therefore, implies an even greater concentration of income and wealth, endangering the economic survival, if not the very physical survival, of billions of people all over the world. Still, this is just considered the ‘collateral damage’ of globalisation!

Similarly, according to the latter dogma, there are certain universal values which should have priority over national sovereignty. Thus, when, in the transnational elite's perception, universal values like that of ‘democracy’ (as defined by the same elite—no relation to the classical conception of it!) are violated, then, the international organisations (UN Security Council, NATO etc) which express the will of the ‘international community’—read the transnational elite—or, if necessary the transnational elite itself headed by the US elite, should impose them with every available means, irrespective of national sovereignty considerations. In reality, of course, the wars recently launched by the transnational elite (Iraq, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia) had very little to do with this dogma since the elite's aim was the full integration of the corresponding areas into the New World Order, as defined by capitalist neoliberal globalisation and its political complement in the form of representative ‘democracy’. However, even though these wars have also implied the elimination of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, Afghans and Yugoslavs, this is considered another type of ‘collateral damage’ which need not concern us (“We don't do body counts” declare the generals of US Central Command)!

It should be noted at this point that this transnational ideology is adopted not only by neoliberals and social-liberals (the ex-social democrats) but also by the reformist Left, which simply adds a few ideological spices to it for internal consumption, e.g. that its real

aim is a new synthesis of the present globalisation with certain state controls for the effective protection of labour and the environment. However, as recent historical experience has shown (Mitterrand, Lafontaine etc), such a synthesis is utterly utopian in conditions of open and liberated markets.

Globalisation naturally involves the mass media as well (particularly TV) which, after their 'liberalisation' from state control, fell under the even worse control of the market. The inevitable consequence was the huge concentration of the mass media at the hands of a few giant corporations<sup>[1]</sup> —in the USA, for instance, ten enormous corporations dominate the news business.<sup>[2]</sup> Still, this is considered yet another type of 'collateral damage' resulting from globalisation! Today, as Serge Halimi<sup>[3]</sup> points out, self-censorship serving the interests of individual and corporate media owners —and the self-promotion of intellectuals— has replaced governmental censorship in TV. However, it is well known that this particular medium is nowadays the only source of information for the vast majority of the population. The way, therefore, in which news stories are selected and presented —carefully designed to reflect the agenda of capitalist economic, political and cultural globalisation<sup>[4]</sup>— plays a decisive role in the formation of 'public opinion'.

It is not, therefore, surprising that, as a recent study by the Glasgow University Media Group<sup>[5]</sup> has established, the quality of what British viewers see and hear on the Palestinian conflict, for instance, is so confused and partial that it is impossible to have a sensible public debate about the reasons for the conflict or how it might be resolved. In other words, the British media (considered the best of its kind) feed the population with news stories that disorientate and confuse it. Thus, many viewers believed that the Palestinians were occupying the occupied territories, or that it was basically a border dispute between two countries who were trying to grab a piece of land which separated them, while the great bulk of those interviewed had no idea where the Palestinian refugees had come from — some suggested Afghanistan, Iraq or Kosovo! This is hardly surprising if one takes into account the fact that senior journalists were instructed not to give explanations —as they have told researchers— something that would automatically have mobilised the very strong and extremely well organised Zionist lobbies in the US and Britain, which would not have hesitated to use tactics like sending hate mail to the journalists involved in case their reports were deemed to be critical in any way of Zionist Israel, apart from the direct and indirect pressures on the media themselves.<sup>[6]</sup> Instead, the focus was to be on live action — a tactic guaranteed to operate in favour of the Zionist side, given that it rules out any discussion of the origins of the conflict and of the controversial aspects of the occupation. And of course, this is not just due to the fact that this is the way the medium works, as apologists argue, because it has to be assessed together with a series of other tactics used to the same effect: Zionists being interviewed or reported about more than twice as much as Palestinians; Palestinians mostly being seen to initiate trouble and the Zionists being shown to be simply "responding"; the use of words such as "mass murder", "atrocities", and "brutal murder" to describe the deaths of Zionists but not of Palestinians; much greater coverage of the deaths of the former than of the latter etc.

A similar role is played by the selected presenters of discussion programmes on news stories, ideas and so on. The fact that the presenters of such programmes (often self-promoting 'intellectuals'), as well as their guests, are supposedly free to express their opinion does not, of course, change the nature of these programmes as ideological organs of the New World Order, even if sometimes they invite as guests selected analysts of the

antisystemic Left (so that the ‘objectivity’ standards are maintained), always taking care that these ‘abnormal’ voices constitute an extreme minority of the participants, so that they can be comfortably drowned out by the pro-establishment ones. In other words, it is enough for the TV channels to select ‘rightly thinking’ presenters in order for the role of these programmes as ideological organs of the New order to be secured. This is why the presenters of such programmes, as a rule, come from the ideological space of neoliberalism, social-liberalism or the reformist Left and, as such, do not challenge the system of the market economy itself and its political complement. Thus, a kind of pseudo-‘debate’ is established in the media, in which every ‘thesis’ is supposedly presented together with its ‘antithesis’ —but which, in fact, simply questions some policies or implications of globalisation but never the system itself which produces and reproduces it— so that a painless (for the system) kind of ‘synthesis’ is created in the end ...

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\* The above text is based on a translation of an article which was first published in the fortnightly column of Takis Fotopoulos in the mass circulation Athens daily *Eleftherotypia* on 15/10/05

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- [1] See e.g. Ignacio Ramonet, ‘Set the media free’, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, (Oct. 2003).
  - [2] Eric Klinenberg, ‘New movement challenges American journalism’, *Le Monde diplomatique* (Apr. 2004).
  - [3] Serge Halimi, ‘France: his master's voice’, *Le Monde Diplomatique* (Aug. 2001)
  - [4] See Takis Fotopoulos, ‘[Mass Media, Culture, and Democracy](#)’, *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (March 1999).
  - [5] See Greg Philo & Mike Berry, *Bad News From Israel* (Pluto, 2004)
  - [6] See also Greg Philo, ‘Missing in action’, *The Guardian* (16/4/2002) and ‘What you get in 20 seconds’, *The Guardian* (14/7/2004).